

The Late Archbishop of Dublin

1841

By Michael Curran, Irish College,
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Early on April 9, amid national grief, died William Joseph Walsh, Archbishop of Dublin, in his eighty-first year. On the 14th all Ireland came to lay him to rest after a half-century's service to God and to two generations of his people in the last home of her great dead—with the defender of Tone; under the shadow of the monument of the Liberator; among the graves of the leaders who had spent themselves for the Motherland.

He had known them all, save one. As a child he had received the blessing of O'Connell. His boyish heart had been with the Young Irelanders and to his old age he never forgot their ideals. The Fenian movement saw him a seminarist, and though he could by no means see eye to eye with its chiefs, he did not share Cardinal Cullen's hostility. The leaders of the subsequent movement had the support of his strenuous manhood. When the Home Rule movement failed, its successor found him to the end ready to give more than a sympathetic trial, to pay tribute to the sacrifice of its martyrs, and to give the benefit of his counsel and experience.

Doubtless, some of the returning mourners recalled the demonstration when the Archbishop arrived from Rome to take possession of his See; a welcome unseen before, unequalled since, which expressed the release of a people from the net flung round them by the Whig remnants of the Pale ascendancy against which Archbishop Croke had been gallantly struggling and their awakening from a nightmare of thirty-six years. His predecessor, Cardinal MacCabe, a truly apostolic priest and efficient Vicar-General, was not fitted, as he sadly confessed himself, for the See of Dublin in troubled days, and Cardinal Cullen never intended him as his assistant, much less as his successor. He honestly aimed at doing what he thought Cullen would have done. On the other hand, his successor, an intimate of Cullen, always maintained that if MacCabe only thought and acted for himself he would have acted rightly, but the unfortunate outcome of his good intention was that he did what Cullen would never have done.

Without his predecessor's ability or personality and knowing nothing of politics, he reverted to Troy and Murray's servile attitude of dependence on the state, instead of continuing Cullen's independence. Cullen's role has never been justly appreciated and his policy has been misrepresented. He was a lonely and austere figure with the reformer's task laid on his shoulders. His personality was in strong contrast with Croke's and MacHale's. Absent thirty years from Ireland, he worked with no time-spirit as ally, and his isolation grew marked as the democratic tides, from which he was always averse, mounted and swung past him. Many Irish politicians, like the Greeks, are men of letters as well, and they have perpetuated in the people's mind his frigidity towards them. To-day's generation of Irishmen is better fitted to consider and judge his record in church organisation, in education, and his steady repudiation of government interference. They will regard that isolation not without respect. Cullen was an ultramontane Sinn Feiner. He concentrated on Catholic and native effort. Dr. Walsh was convinced that had Cullen lived, he would have been with the Home Rulers. His sympathies were with the poor. Writing to Lord Shrewsbury, Clarendon, the Lord-Lieutenant, found "rank communism" in his synodical address, "in which he did not stop at condemning the (Queen's) Colleges, but sought to set class against class and to represent every poor man as a martyr and every rich man as a tyrant." But he was no democrat. He put his faith neither in English princes nor in the people. His early Roman experience determined his political vision: a nationalist was a Garibaldi, a democrat, a carbonaro. But he had also watched the English Government subsidise revolt abroad and seen

Lord John Russell give recognition to rebels in the Southern States and to Catholics in Poland while attacking both the Church and liberty in Ireland. Educated in Rome in a triumphant atmosphere, he brooked no taunt of Catholic inferiority. As Apostolic Delegate, he restored the Catholic Church in Ireland in all its integrity to its rightful position as the Church of a Nation. At Thurles he heralded a new ecclesiastical era and restored Catholic worship and discipline to its normal state. Cutting himself off from all state and social entanglements, he repudiated the Queen's Colleges countenanced by his predecessors, and opened a Catholic University. He measured the ascendancy with steady eyes and noted face of brass and feet of clay. He fiercely and successfully assailed the Protestant Establishment and endeavoured to overthrow or radically alter the national educational system. On the land question he was thoroughly sound, and Dr. Walsh was fond of pointing out how the resolutions of the Irish bishops under Cullen's chairmanship, first decried as extravagant, were one by one adopted by English statesmen.

But there was little of Cullen's intransigence in MacCabe, and less of his pertinacious attack. MacCabe was, unfortunately, under the influence of that Whig society which colored and crippled the Catholic movement from emancipation days. His advisers were laymen like the O'Hagans, ecclesiastics like Dean Neville and his own reactionary Vicars General. Playing on his devotion to Cullen, they advised him to "do what Cardinal Cullen would have done." But Croke and Walsh, not MacCabe, were the true exponents of Cullen's later policy, and MacCabe's perversion of it wrought dissension among the bishops, confusion in Rome, and at the time of his death a crisis among the people which verged on schism.

The storm over the succession is now well known. The popular President of Maynooth, the tenant's champion, was elected Vicar Capitular by the Chapter by 12 out of 20 votes, and *dignissimus* on the terna by 46 parish priests out of 63. The Irish bishops in Rome made every effort to secure Walsh's appointment, as did Manning and Vaughan in England. As time ran by without appointment, popular anxiety became tense and indignant when it was learned that the English Government, Irish Whigs and English Catholics were seeking the appointment of Dr. Moran or Dr. Donnelly. Mr. Leslie's biography of Manning publishes all that seems available to expose the Government intrigue, and it remains to elucidate the Archbishop's own attitude and a little known intrigue of an earlier date, throwing new light on Cullen's relations with MacCabe.

The English Government, or at least Spencer and Granville, set to work before MacCabe's death. In June, 1883, his health had compelled him to ask confidentially for a helper.

Propaganda proposed a coadjutor with the right of succession. The Cardinal demurred; such an appointment would involve an election and already, said the Cardinal, names were freely mentioned, "holy and learned, but simply out of harmony with my views and opinions . . . and in a contingency which may arise, I would ask the Holy See to retire and prepare myself for death, which cannot be far from me." Why, asked the Cardinal, could not his Holiness do for him what he had done for Cardinal Cullen? Then for the first time he learned from Dr. Kirby the circumstances of his own appointment—that Cullen, who was in delicate health on the Alban Hills, had never asked for him (or for any assistant) and had neither been consulted or informed of the matter which was arranged by Propaganda. Cullen, who entertained quite other intentions, found himself faced with a *fait accompli* which he accepted in silent displeasure. MacCabe frankly