

POPE AND MAGUIRE

THE state of Ireland a hundred years ago was sad. Acute, and widespread poverty, hunger, rags, hovels met the eyes of travellers at every turn in every town, village and roadside. The Irish knew the causes. Visitors and those who there sat in the seats of the mighty knew that all evils in Ireland and elsewhere came from one, and only one source, the Catholic Church.

Hence with an overpowering zeal the State-paid Church in Ireland, with its followers, judges, lord lieutenants, army officers, landlords, land agents, squires, government officials, and parsons, banded themselves together to cure permanently Ireland's woes, to extirpate the Catholic Faith, to convert to Protestantism of any shade all the Irish from Cork to Derry. It was rather a big programme, a big campaign, and had proved for centuries a failure disastrous. New methods were adopted. The sword had failed, eviction had failed, well engineered poverty and crime had failed. An appeal to the souls of the poor misguided Papishes, a big campaign of Bible distribution, of blasphemy by well-trained bigot parsons, by tracts deriding the Mass, Confession, the Pope, Mary, the Mother of God. Every market and fair had its street preachers, with their select blasphemy, lies, filthy stories about convents. In Westmoreland Street, Dublin, in a window of a leading shop was a picture in two parts, a hideous Indian idol, and a mouse gnawing a Host, and beneath were the words, 'Two Idols.' People were pestered by insulting remarks on Catholic doctrine, with tracts galore, and were pained by the reports of the sermons, the speeches, the boastings of the thousands and thou-

Blackfriars

sands of converts flocking daily to the services in Protestant churches, renouncing Rome, embracing the Bible, reading it hourly and blessing God for the light of the Gospel denied them by the accursed church of Rome, the harlot of the Seven Hills.

The Irish were and are an innocent, lamb-like, easily led race, ignorant too! They must prove an easy prey to the wolves in broadcloth, the parsons who raged and ranted at the priesthood, at O'Connell, at Maynooth. And the head wolf, the leading ranter, the star artist who travelled all over the land attending meetings of 'the saved,' the Biblical societies, the soupers, was the Rev. Richard Pope, M.A. One unlucky day in November, 1826, this dapper man, full of bigoted zeal and unholy hate, journeyed to a county which touches the Atlantic Ocean, Leitrim. And in its chief town, Carrick-on-Shannon, delivered his usual tirade against Popery to an admiring audience—small, for the town is in the most Catholic province, Connaught. In the town, selecting a schoolmaster, happened to be a parish priest, and he went to see and hear the prince of babbling bigots, Pope. On the great big Irish jaunting car on which he paid for a seat, Father Tom Maguire, P.P., remarked to a fellow traveller that he did not fear the parson, that his arguments were stupid, shallow, his lies were patent, and that his words could be refuted by him, a poor country priest, with a poor training, poor knowledge and no library.

His words reached the ears of the Rev. Richard Pope and that holy man—as holy men often do—lost his temper, lashed out in the Press in very ill-mannered letters and challenged Father Tom to meet him in a public discussion on the doctrines, morals, practices of his beastly church, the accursed church of Rome. After further letters the discussion was arranged.

Pope and Maguire

Delight filled the hearts of the Irish laity. The ranters had said over and over again that the silence of the clergy showed their weakness, the hopeless futility of a defence, their ignorance, the cowardice fearing exposures of their absurd and lying doctrines by which they deluded the innocent, unreasoning, senseless, lamb-like gulls, the mere Irish. The higher clergy were pained, knowing that such platform discussions plied in such a tense atmosphere, led to bitterness, fierce blows and bloody noses, and helped not the Catholic cause and never enlightened any Protestant or cured him of his bias. The junior clergy dreaded an ignominious defeat for the priest. 'Who is this Father Tom Maguire?' they asked. They heard that from a hedge classical school in Co. Cavan he went to Maynooth for five years, and that in its schools he was respectable, with no pre-eminence in prize lists—the good ordinary man. How dare he meet a star artist, a Trinity College prize man, a practised debater, a seasoned orator before select audiences of old maidens, militia colonels, parsons, apostate priests, illiterate graduates of the Trinity College, Dublin, founded by Queen Elizabeth for the spreading of her religion amongst the naughty 'Papishes' of Ireland. In Dublin, thinking men wished Father Tom, God-speed. The exposition of the Catholic doctrine was very, very badly needed to strengthen the faith of 'Papishes,' and the refutation of the foul libels and slanders on Catholics was far too long delayed.

So, rules were drafted for the battle of words. They are too long to quote here in full. Two chairmen, one a Catholic and one a Protestant, were to preside at each session, commencing at eleven and ending at three o'clock daily. The discussion was to be limited to three points by each party. Mr. Pope's 'points' were Infallibility, Purgatory, Transubstantiation.

Blackfriars

Mr. Maguire's—the Biblicals refused him the title of 'Father'—were the divine right of private judgment, the justification of the Reformation, the Protestant churches do not possess unity. The speeches and replies to be limited to half an hour, and each point to occupy but one day at the outset. No new point to be touched upon by either party until the point under discussion is *fully* and *finally* closed. Two door-keepers, one Protestant and one Catholic, to be appointed. Tickets for each session, five shillings. No indication to be admitted of approbation or disapprobation. No part of the auditory to interfere in any way whatever with the Rev. Gentlemen or with the subject-matter of the discussion. The parties not to exceed four speeches each during any one day, merely calling on the opposite party for proofs not to be considered as a speech.

The gage of battle was set, the audience of saints—all Protestant—and Papist sinners crowded into the big hall of the Dublin Institution to see and hear the gladiators fight, to turn down their thumbs towards the vanquished. Hatred, grim and solemn, showed on the faces of the saints, and certainty of the triumph of their Richard lighted their serious eyes. The Papists, seeing the scores of truncheoned guards, knew the hostility, the deep-rooted prejudices and bias against their religion, and sat anxious. Not all persons loved the coming fray and said so. Not all Catholic bishops and priests loved to have their outraged faith vindicated and defended by this unknown mountaineer priest. A bad defence, a poor defence, no defence, defeat, disgrace. They prayed at their altars for peace and success, and on the hearths, the cabin floors of Ireland, ever faithful Ireland, prayed the broken-hearted millions for their stalwart Father Tom.

Pope and Maguire

To the private entrance came the gladiators and their chairmen, Admiral Oliver for Mr. Pope and Daniel O'Connell for Father Maguire. O'Connell greeted Mr. Pope, whom he saw for the first time, but whose outpourings he knew well. Pope refused to reply. O'Connell was a judge of men; at once he saw that Mr. Pope carried a big supply of the first capital or deadly sin, known to us all from our Catechism—Pride. Turning to Father Tom and speaking Gaelic, he gave him the talisman of his own big success in legal tourneys. It won for the priest the great battle, the greatest word battle of the century, the Waterloo of poor Mr. Pope and his tribe. They had fought at Derry, Sligo, Ballinasloe, Carlow, and left these fields in dismay, but from Dublin they left a disgraced rabble.

Mr. Pope was not a trained disputant, nor was Father Tom. Mr. Pope could not take up a syllogism, but was expert in his use of fallacies, irregular arguments. He had his mind well stored with the old objections from the Calvinist and Tudor divines; he quoted Augustine, Chrysostom, Jerome. Trinity College prompted Pope, supplied and arranged his arguments. Father Maguire was aided by Maynooth professors in his arrangements, replies, quotations. He had one big advantage over Pope. Pope had spoken so often on scores of platforms in Ireland that his mentality, methods, pet arguments were known to everyone.

Pope was not a man of strong constitution, a tendency to asthma became, in the heat and stuffy hall of dispute, an attack of some acuteness. His wheeze did not improve his temper; and this was the hint given to Father Tom by Dan O'Connell, who knew men's strength and weakness so well. 'Make him angry.' Bad temper made the Rev. Richard Pope, the Protestant lion rampant, narrate a story of a mouse

Blackfriars

and the Eucharist. The mouse's tale was the undoing of the lion. Father Tom began in the in-fighting, of which he, an Irish peasant, was a master. Pope, the lion with the wheeze, wheezed, roared, lost his head, his temper, and his breath.

An eye-witness, Mr. R. L. Shiel, the eminent barrister orator, friend of O'Connell, in a speech tells how the Pope-Maguire battle appeared to him, an educated listener.

'I confess that I look on the recent controversy which has agitated this city as likely to be injurious to the cause of genuine religion, for it has made its most sacred mysteries a subject of theological chit-chat. I do not mean to cast the least blame upon Mr. Maguire, who was dragged into the combat by his opponent; on the contrary, I think that Mr. Maguire acquitted himself in a manner which reflects the greatest credit upon him; and although hitherto unknown and wholly unpractised in public speaking, he entered the lists with the great prize-fighter in polemics without dismay, and deriving a genuine eloquence from the consciousness that he spoke the truth, evinced a decided superiority over his antagonist. He was never once betrayed into anger—while his opponent, by his contumelious charges, indicated the depth to which his pride had been wounded. . . .'

What a contrast did the poor priest, the logician of the mountains, present to this modern apostle. With the flush of rural health upon his cheek—with the benevolent impression of honest good nature upon his face—with all the evidence of sincerity impressed upon him—he replied with mildness to the charges brought against his truth and honour, and exhibited the true spirit of a Christian by holding forth a tender of amity and begging that they should 'part in peace.' Before the final speeches Pope's following in the hall had grown smaller and smaller. Dr. Magee,

Pope and Maguire

the Protestant Archbishop, and his parsons fled from the stage when Fr. Maguire dealt with the established Church, its sons and salaries. The latter was a painful arrow. Mr. Shiel adds: 'Mr. Pope ought to be tolerably well satisfied with his recent experiment that he cannot obtain any very considerable renown in engaging in controversial contentions with priests.'

At the end of the six days' word battle, the warriors shook hands, and rested. Father Maguire became a hero, 'a savor of the religion of his country.' He was invited to preach in several places in Ireland, in Liverpool and in Glasgow. His presence drew crowds. Yet he remained a humble, simple mountain priest. He respected Mr. Pope, deemed him a gentleman, and praised him as a worthy and honoured opponent.

The Rev. Richard Pope began by scorning Father Maguire; scorn grew to hatred, and hatred led to the persecution of Father Maguire, by base lies, slander, perjury, newspaper attacks and lawsuits on his character as a citizen and a priest. Father Maguire could never believe that Mr. Pope was behind the attacks, was the person who collected funds and arranged the agitation and the case.

Pope's fame declined after the Pope-Maguire effort. His defeat was acknowledged by 'the saved.' Father Maguire refused many offers to public battle. But when he entered the lists against Gregg, he was the skilled warrior, no longer bashful, timid, awkward in attack, but all too powerful in defence, rather merciless in his tactics with a weak foe. The Gregg controversy is in matter and form far superior to the Pope and Maguire. Few in Ireland to-day have heard of the Gregg battle, but hundreds of Catholic homes and thousands of Catholic hearts bless that hero of a long gone day—Father Tom Maguire.

E. J. QUIGLEY.