

Forgotten by History: the Life and Times of John Lanigan, D.D., D.C.L., D.S.S., Priest, Professor and Historian

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The Long Silence

The long silence surrounding the life and times of John Lanigan was broken in April 1986 when Cashel teacher Seamus King presented the salient biographical data in *The Tipperary Star* together with a plea that the gifted priest historian be given his rightful place in the sun. His main resource was W.J. Fitzpatrick's *Irish Wits and Worthies*.¹ Next came a valuable and carefully researched article from the pen of Tipperary historian Willie Hayes and published in the *Holycross-Ballycahill Yearbook* (1998) under the title 'Dr. John Lanigan and Beakstown'. Fitzpatrick's book has been an essential resource in the composition of this current essay. In his research he had the benefit of the memories of Anne Kennedy, Lanigan's youngest sister, Dean Meyler of Dublin and numerous friends and contemporaries of Lanigan. The *Dictionary of National Biography* has provided the present writer with further invaluable source material, and Lanigan has a lengthy and honoured entry in it. Additional material in the compilation of this present effort has been garnered from the archives of the dioceses of Cashel and of Cork, the Skehan and Renehan Papers.

In telling the first part of the Lanigan story, his brilliant academic career as a student in the Hare Academy in Cashel, as a seminarian in the Irish College in Rome and as professor in Pavia, Europe's oldest and most prestigious university, the historical muse wrote with a pen dipped in burnished gold, but in telling the second part of the saga the muse dipped her pen in the tearful and bitter chalice of prolonged ill treatment and mental anguish.

The Early Years

John Lanigan's parents lived on the main street in Cashel, just two doors from the Church of Ireland archbishop's palace. His father, Thomas, was a schoolmaster, originally from Dundrum, and his mother was Mary Anne Dorkan from Beakstown in the parish of Holycross. Of the fifteen children born to the marriage, John, the eldest, was the only one not to be born and baptised in the City of the Kings. It was a common practice then for a mother to return to her own parents' home for the birth of her first child, and it was there that John was born on the 27th of December, 1758, in the Dorkan family homestead. He was baptised there the following day by Rev. John Dorney, parish priest of Holycross, it being common practice then for baptisms to be performed in the homes of the people rather than in chapels.

John grew up in Cashel and received his early education there from his father who later placed him in a secondary school in Chapel Lane, Cashel, run by Patrick Hare, a former Franciscan who had apostatised to the Established Church. Here he excelled in the Classics, becoming proficient in Latin, Greek and even Hebrew before he reached the age of sixteen. An amusing incident from his school days is recorded by Fitzpatrick. When the headmaster's wife presented Patrick Hare with their first born the proud father brought the child into the

schoolroom. 'Young gentlemen' said he, 'I have to introduce you to a new scholar, but I'm sorry to say he has not yet got a name'. 'Call the young Hare *leveret*!' exclaimed Lanigan. This daring shaft of humour, far from miffing Hare, led him to appoint Lanigan usher of the Academy, a flagrant violation of the then current penal code, and earned for Lanigan from his peers the alliterative sobriquet, 'Leveret Lanigan'.

At this stage Lanigan's sights were firmly set on the priesthood. He made an approach to Archbishop James Butler II and was received with great kindness by the prelate. And so at the age of sixteen he was sent to the Irish College in Rome by Dr Butler, who also wrote to Aloysius Cuccagni, Rector of the Irish College, recommending John for a burse in the college. He was given pocket money for the journey plus his ferry fare from Cork to London, London to Calais and Calais to Rome. On the boat he was joined by a stranger who remarked on the pleasant coincidence that he too was going to Calais. When the boat arrived in London John awoke to find that the stranger had disappeared with all of his money. Left without a penny he could not proceed further until a kind priest, hearing of his plight, afforded him refuge in his house while Lanigan awaited a remittance from home to enable him to continue his journey to Rome.

Irish College, Rome

His progress in theological and philosophical studies in Rome was brilliant and rapid, so much so that the canonical age for ordination was dispensed with in his case. To priestly orders were speedily added other accolades, a doctorate in Canon Law from Sapienza and a double doctorate from the University of Pavia in Divinity and Jurisprudence. His meteoric rise in the rarefied halls of academe naturally gave rise to jealousy amongst some of his peers who were only waiting for an opportunity to smear his reputation, but he had a staunch friend and ally in one of his classmates, Robert Hugh Hamill, who would later become vicar general and dean of Dublin.

Golden Days

Further honours and accolades came his way in 1788 when the University of Pavia in Austrian Italy offered him the Professorship of theology, scripture and Hebrew. In April of that year Lanigan wrote to Archbishop Butler to know whether he should go home to Cashel or take up the Professorship in Pavia. Then in August of the same year came a letter with another tempting offer and from the most unlikely of sources. In it Francis Moylan, Bishop of Cork, applied to Lanigan to take charge of his Ecclesiastical Academy in Brunswick St. (now Washington St.) in Cork. Lanigan replied to Bishop Moylan stating that he was willing to accept the Cork proposition under certain conditions. His first condition was that the Cork Academy would be primarily an ecclesiastical institute designed to prepare aspirants for the priesthood and that all jurisdiction pertinent to the presidency of it would be afforded to him.² Needless to say neither of these conditions was acceptable to Bishop Moylan. What he had in mind was a minor seminary along the lines of Coláiste Barra, Farranferris (which didn't open its doors to students until 1878, sixty three years after the death of Francis Moylan). As for the condition about the president's jurisdiction, this certainly did not endear him to Bishop Moylan as he would soon learn to his cost.

Meanwhile Archbishop James Butler had written to Lanigan advising him to take up the Professorship in Pavia University. As already stated, Pavia was Europe's oldest and most prestigious University with a charter dating back to Charlemagne. When Lanigan took over as professor of theology, scripture and Hebrew he became the brightest jewel in the crown of the

university. Staff, students and indeed the people of Pavia took 'the boy professor' to their hearts.

First Publication

It was in Pavia that he published his first *magnum opus*, a prolegomena to the holy scriptures.³ It was a volume of 582 pages and on its title page he styled himself as *Joannes Lanigan Cassiliensis Hiberni*. This book was a totally new approach to the scriptures. Hitherto in the seminaries scripture was a Cinderella subject whose main function was to supply 'proof texts' to moral and dogmatic theology. Lanigan's approach was Christocentric: the Old Testament was written because Christ was coming, the New Testament because he came. It was as simple as that. This book was the *vade mecum* of Archbishop Patrick Leahy, no mean scripture scholar himself. Lanigan's first biographer, Fitzpatrick, discussed the *Institutionum* with Archbishop Leahy and noted Leahy's copious notes and references to the text.

Lanigan was gifted by nature with a love for and a skill at languages. His knowledge of the biblical tongues of Hebrew, Greek and Latin laid a sure foundation for his lectures and commentaries on the scriptures. Besides this firm grounding in these, he could also speak and write with fluency in German, French, English, Spanish and Irish and his eloquence in Italian surpassed that of many well-educated natives. M.J. Brennan, O.S.F., in his *Ecclesiastical History* states that on one occasion the Emperor Joseph II graced Lanigan's lectures by his presence. The doctor delivered a Latin oration which was received with unbounded applause, the emperor at the same time observing that so young a man and so enlightened a professor reflected new lustre on the Irish nation and reminded him of the ancient literary glory of that people.⁴ In the wake of the imperial visit the municipality of Pavia conferred its highest honour on Lanigan by making him a freeman of the ancient city of Pavia.

The Letter from Pavia

1795 was a crucial year in the Lanigan saga. It was the year when Maynooth College was founded, when revolutionary developments in Europe had closed the continental Seminaries. During the 17th and 18th centuries the Catholic Church had developed a network of these seminaries. With their closure a very large replacement programme was needed. It suited the British government to help and the foundation of the Royal College of Maynooth was made possible by an Act of Parliament in 1795. This Act further entailed an oath of loyalty to the king by staff and students. Ominously in the September of that year the Orange Order was established of which Madden wrote that 'its ferocious spirit was quite as murderous as that of any faction of ruthless Jacobins at the beck of Robespierre and Danton'.⁵ Thus the backdrop to negotiations between bishops and government for a national seminary.

1795 was also the year when Lanigan decided that his future lay in the new national seminary in Ireland. This is borne out by the letter he wrote from Pavia University in Austrian Italy and dated 20th July 1795, to Archbishop Thomas Bray of Cashel in his capacity as a trustee of the new college. This previously-unpublished letter was in Dr. Bray's possession when Lanigan visited him in 1797 and it has been reposing in the archives in Archbishop's House, Thurles for more than 200 years:

My Lord,

... I beg leave to tell your Grace, that, as a College is to be erected in Ireland for the education of Catholic Clergy, I'd be glad to contribute to its advantage for as much as my abilities may allow. As I am a member of a celebrated University and have spent many years in teaching

divers branches of learning and in directing youth towards the acquisition of knowledge, I believe I could be of some service for the advancement of Ecclesiastical learning in my country had I an employment there adequate to this purpose.

Having heard with particular satisfaction that your Grace is one of the principal Trustees of the new College, I therefore offer Your Grace whatever assistance may be in my power for the direction and utility of this establishment. My view in making this proposal is not of a selfish or interested kind, for, as Your Grace knows already I am honourably and comfortably settled at Pavia, but proceeds from the desire I entertain of serving the Church in Ireland in such a manner as I hope I am not unqualified for. I cannot foresee on what principles and regulations the new college will be founded but I am persuaded that should Your Grace and colleagues be pleased to assign me a place in it, your honourable Board would take into consideration the sacrifice I'd make in renouncing my Chair and other employments in this country. With regard to this matter and to the mode of my being settled properly my confidence would be placed principally in Your Grace's mediation and influence, whereas I am an immediate subject of yours and have the honour to be personally known to Your Grace.

I hope I'll have the pleasure of paying my devoirs to your Grace in Ireland whither I intend to take a tour as soon as conveniently possible ...[unless] this dreadful war oblige me to defer [it]...I hope Your Grace enjoys good health, and pray to grant you the continuation of it and of every happiness while offering anew my person and service to Your Grace's orders and imploring Your Grace's benediction,

I am, My Lord
Your Grace's
Most Obliged, Obedient, Humble
Servant and Subject,
John Lanigan

Pavia

July 20th 1795

Thus Lanigan was prepared to give up his role as a professor in Europe's most celebrated university in order to be of service to the new national seminary in Maynooth. His fealty to his archbishop and Cashel shines through his letter to Bray.

This Dreadful War

Lanigan's letter to Archbishop Bray strikes an ominous note when in it he refers to this 'dreadful war'. After the revolution, France found itself with an army of 800,000 men and little money to pay them, so the Directory in Paris fell back on an old dream of Charles IV, the conquest of Italy with all its accruing treasures. It decided to strike at Austria in Italy and at England in Ireland, choosing its two top generals in the campaign: Bonaparte in Italy and Hoche in Ireland. On December 22nd 1796 a fleet of forty-three ships carrying 15,000 soldiers and ample arms, one of which carried Wolfe Tone, arrived in Bantry Bay. But a strong easterly gale, which lasted a week, made landing impossible so ship after ship returned to France. These were anxious times for the Castle-favoured Francis Moylan, Bishop of Cork, as the French fleet lay off shore in his diocese, so much so that he issued a special pastoral to be read in all churches on Christmas Day.

The Christmas message, devoid of peace and goodwill, reminded his flock of the excesses of the French Revolution and denounced the French as murderers who had come to rob, plunder and destroy. This was the same Francis Moylan who was destined to become the nemesis in the life of John Lanigan.

Round about the same time, Lanigan was roused from his slumbers in the peaceful surrounds of Pavia to be told that Napoleon and his army were in nearby Milan but not to chant a *Te Deum* in the great cathedral. Bonaparte was not a believing Catholic but rather a deist and a political Catholic. The tradition of Philip the Fair was more natural to him than that of St. Louis or Ste.

had I met with a proper opportunity. But I shall either with God's assistance bring it myself, or, if this dreadful war oblige me to defer my tour to Ireland, send it by the first channel I shall find to this purpose. I hope Your Grace enjoys good health, and pray God to grant You the continuation of it and of every happiness, while offering anew my person and service to Your Grace's orders, and imploring Your Grace's benediction

I am, My Lord

Your Grace's

Most obliged, obedient, humble
Servant and Subject

John Lanigan

Pavia, July 20, 1795-

John Lanigan's letter to Archbishop Bray.

Jeanne d'Arc. By a lightning campaign Italy was conquered within a month and the Italians, happy at seeing the Austrian occupation forces driven out, greeted the French forces as liberators. Bonaparte, succeeding where the kings of France had failed, was soon, through the victories of Arcole and Rivoli, to conquer the peninsula. His sights were now firmly fixed on Pavia and his intent was to destroy the university. Lanigan had to get out, leaving behind him in his haste many valuable books, manuscripts and even money. Lucky to get a ship in Genoa, he travelled home in the company of a number of Irish priests, one of them Dr. William Howley, a native of Killenaule, Co. Tipperary and a friend from Pavia days. The trip home was not without its drama. The ship had to cope with a violent storm before seeking refuge in Madeira but eventually cast anchor at St. Patrick's Bridge in Cork.

Driven from his proud position in Pavia, Lanigan arrived home a destitute wanderer.⁶ He made his way to the Palace of Bishop Moylan only to be accused of being a Jansenist and turned away from the episcopal doorstep. Next he turned to his former classmate in Rome, Florence McCarthy, parish priest of St. Finbarr's, vicar general and later to become coadjutor Bishop of Cork only to meet with a similar reception and an equally unjust and false accusation of being a Jansenist. Cold, hungry, penniless and rejected he was compelled to walk to Cashel.

The Jansenist Smear

We leave Lanigan trudging his weary way from Cork to Cashel as we take up the Jansenist charges levelled against him by the two Cork bishops. Whilst attached to the University of Pavia he had become friendly with the administrator of the college, a man with the musical name of Tamburini, who brought the first note of disharmony into Lanigan's hitherto tranquil life, a discord which would haunt him to the end of his days. One day during the summer of 1786 Tamburini intimated to Lanigan that an important synod was about to be held in Pistoia under the auspices of the Grand Duke of Tuscany and presided over by the distinguished bishop of the diocese, Scipio Ricci, nephew of Lawrence Ricci, the General of the Jesuits. Tamburini added that he himself would be assisting at its deliberations and using many arguments he tried to induce Lanigan to accompany him. But the youthful Tipperary priest was having none of it and even though the first session was attended by 234 priests, three archbishops and fourteen bishops Lanigan saw it as a break away from the centre of unity, Rome, and he flatly refused to attend or have anything to do with it. His fears were more than justified, the clangour of conflicting views vibrated and Tamburini with his musical name failed to impart harmony to the scene.

The assembly ended in total confusion, and numerous walk outs as an uprising by Bishop Ricci's own flock who, stung by the war he waged against their beliefs, descended on his cathedral, burned his throne, invaded his palace and carried off the books and papers they believed to be bad. In 1805 he signed a formula of entire adhesion to the bulls from which he had previously dissented, *Unigenitus*, issued by Clement XI (1713), which denounced the hundred and one principles of Jansenism and, above all, *Auctorem Fidei*, issued by Pius VI on 28th August 1794 condemning the proceedings of the recent Synod of Pistoia. Thus this proud prelate was reconciled to the Holy See. Even Tamburini had to eat humble pie. He returned to Pavia where the Empress Maria Theresa nominated him professor of theology and here he remained, the soul of rectitude and orthodoxy, until his death, 14th March 1827, a few months before the demise of his friend Lanigan. Although he stood aloof from Pistoia and its deliberations a suspicion still persisted in ecclesiastical society that Lanigan was tinged by its tainted atmosphere.

Jansenism – What Was It?

In a nutshell, Jansenism was the French face of the Reformation with this difference, that even after being condemned by Rome its followers, in the main, remained Catholic. It takes its name from Otto Jansen (1585-1638), a Dutch theologian who studied at Louvain and Paris becoming a Professor at Louvain and later Bishop of Ypres where he died in 1638 after completing his four volume work *Augustinus*. This book sought to prove that his reform movement's teachings on grace, free will and predestination were precisely those of St Augustine. The ideas in Jansen's book were reminiscent of Calvin's. They were attacked by the Jesuits, condemned by Rome and defended in France by the brilliant Blaise Pascal in his masterpiece *The Provincial Letters*. The controversy was to rage in France for over a century.

Even Ireland did not escape the cold breath of Jansenism. The influx of French professors fleeing the Revolution gave the fledgling seminary of Maynooth the reputation of being 'French, Jansenistic and Gallican' which manifested itself in excessive rigorism, grinding penances and the bleak teaching on the difficulty of salvation, the narrowness of the celestial door and the fewness of those destined to be saved.⁷ Its excessive moral demands led to discouragement and the abandonment of frequent communion.

Was Lanigan a Jansenist? His biographer W.J. Fitzpatrick gives an emphatic 'no' in reply to this question and quotes the following statement from Dr. Martin Hugh Hamill, vicar general of the Archdiocese of Dublin: 'I have always possessed, perhaps undeservedly his entire confidence; there is not an incident in his life which is not as familiar to me as the retrospect of my own; and I unhesitatingly assert that John Lanigan is free of the errors with which his enemies charge him. No one knew Tamburini better than I did, and I heard Tamburini distinctly say that Lanigan, although offered the office of theologian at the Pistoia Council declined point blank the invitation.'⁸ The spectre of Jansenism is not even mentioned today, but the worst was yet to come in the shameful hounding of Lanigan by Francis Moylan, Bishop of Cork, and Thomas Hussey, first President of Maynooth College and later Bishop of Waterford. They could not produce a shred of evidence in either his lectures or his writings to justify the smear of Jansenism with which they labelled him. His friendship with Tamburini was the damning factor. It took Hussey three years after the Maynooth debacle (about which more anon) to fire his salvo. Hussey wrote to Archbishop Troy of Dublin, in whose diocese Lanigan had taken up residence, seeking to exculpate the College for its ungracious attitude to Lanigan and submitted 'that as the learned Doctor had lived sometime in a tainted atmosphere it became the duty of the Maynooth authorities to ascertain whether he came home uninjured before they entrusted to him the guidance and instruction of the future priests and bishops of Ireland'. What are we to deduce from this statement? That Lanigan's crime is no longer his friendship with Tamburini but rather his living in the sad, sinful and tainted atmosphere of Jansenism?

Archbishop Troy's response to Hussey's document was that of Gallio, the Roman governor of Greece when the Jews brought Paul before him with false accusations. We are told (*Acts 18:17*) that Gallio paid no attention to this. He threw the case out of court. As a matter of fact the Archbishop went a step further than Gallio. He gave instructions to his domestic staff to set an additional knife and fork at his Sunday dinner table — for John Lanigan!!⁹

Two Implacable Enemies

Again we leave Lanigan trudging his weary way from Cork to Cashel as we pause to take a look at the two men who were to be his implacable enemies: Francis Moylan, Bishop of Cork and Thomas Hussey, first President of Maynooth and later, through the good offices of Francis

Moylan, Bishop of Waterford.

Francis Moylan

Francis Moylan was a Bishop for forty years, twelve in Kerry, and twenty-eight in Cork. It would be impossible to condense a full and varied ministry such as his into a brief profile. He was born in Cork on 17th September 1735 the second son of John Moylan and Mary Doran. After formal early education in Cork, Francis left for the Irish seminary in Toulouse where his Jesuit uncle, Patrick Doran was a professor. After ordination on the 11th June 1761 he chose to spend a few years on the French Mission ending up as secretary to Christophe de Beaumont, Archbishop of Paris.

On his return to Cork in 1764 he received rapid promotion under Bishop John Butler the man whom he would later replace as bishop. On becoming pastor of St Finbarr's he took up the cause of Catholic education, supporting and encouraging Nano Nagle and helping to establish the Presentation and Ursuline orders in Cork as well as the Irish Christian Brothers under Edmund Ignatius Rice. After the Kerry interlude (1775-1787) he returned to Cork in the aftermath of John Butler's (Lord Dunboyne) apostasy bringing with him the Kerry priest Florence McCarthy, former classmate of Lanigan in Rome, whom he immediately groomed to be his successor in Cork.

He wielded considerable clout in the field of episcopal elections getting Gerard Teahan into Kerry, William Coppinger into Cloyne and no less than two bishops into Waterford, Thomas Hussey and John Power.¹⁰ But his big scoop came with the death of Archbishop James Butler II of Cashel on 29th July 1787. In the succession stakes Gerard Teahan was the popular choice and was declared *dignissimus*, but he flatly refused the archiepiscopal *Pallium* and would not budge from Kerry. Francis Moylan then pushed the candidacy of Thomas Bray vicar general and parish priest of Cashel. Reluctant in the beginning, Bray finally yielded to pressure and was consecrated in Thurles on Sunday 14th October 1792. It was seen as another victory for the 'We 4' (Cork, Kerry, Cashel, Waterford) caucus. From now on Francis Moylan would be a frequent visitor and guest in Thurles giving timely warning, *inter alia*, of the threat of Jansenism on the palace doorstep.

It should be clear to the reader at this stage that Francis Moylan was an Anglophile at heart; a Castle bishop with an oath of allegiance to King George III, a prelate whose Christmas Day pastoral denouncing the French so delighted the British authorities that they had it circulated in every quarter of the land. Initially he was in favour of the veto giving the British a right of rejection in the selection of bishops but later he rescinded his support for the measure, thus falling into line with the rest of his colleagues in Munster. There was, moreover, his close friendship with Lord Castlereagh, the chief architect of the Union, a friendship which expressed itself in visiting of each others homes and which, some might think, was far more reprehensible than Lanigan's friendship with the already-repentant Tamburini. Francis Moylan had already declared himself in favour of the Union and in fact sent a congratulatory message to Castlereagh when the Act of Union was passed.

When Francis Moylan died on 10th February 1815 at his house in Chapel Lane it was the end of a dream. He had hoped that his coadjutor, Florence McCarthy, would be his successor but Bishop McCarthy pre-deceased him in June 1810. Eighty years old and no longer able to cope he requested the appointment of his vicar general, Rev. John Murphy as coadjutor with the right of succession. St Mary's Cathedral Church, which he had the courage and vision to provide for his diocese, was his final resting place and his final epitaph.

Thomas Hussey (1741-1803)

Born in Ballybogan, Co. Meath in 1741, Hussey showed an early interest in becoming a priest and after a brief dalliance with La Trappe Monastery in Spain he went to the Irish College in Salamanca to further his studies. After his ordination he became chaplain to the Spanish embassy in London in 1767 and rector of the attached chapel. Here he became friendly with William Pitt, the British Prime Minister and with literati such as Edmund Burke and Samuel Johnson. He helped to establish the Royal Seminary at Maynooth and became its first president in 1795. It should be noted that in accepting this office he did not resign his chaplaincy at the Spanish embassy. He was often away and did not regard the Maynooth appointment as full time.¹¹ London saw much more of him than Maynooth. His frequent absences set a dangerous precedent for the college, so much so that during the eighteen years after its foundation there were no less than seven presidents, each with an average of just three years' tenure. The problem of getting a President willing and able to stay the course was due in the main to the turbulence of the students and the lack of communication with the trustees. Such were Hussey's absences from the college that it is extremely doubtful that he ever met Lanigan. He was appointed bishop of Waterford in 1796 much to the chagrin of the Waterford clergy. He was consecrated in Francis St. Chapel in Dublin and took up residence in *Gracedieu* in the city, unlike his predecessors who had lived in Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir. It soon became apparent that, like Maynooth, Waterford was never to be his primary commitment, though he did end his days there. But lo and behold! No sooner had he been installed as Bishop of Waterford than he refused to resign not alone from his chaplaincy to the Spanish embassy but also from the presidency of Maynooth. This was too much for his erstwhile patron Francis Moylan and also for Archbishop Troy of Dublin, who in a letter to Thomas Bray made the cryptic comment: 'He'll be got rid off!'.¹² This was achieved by Hussey's sacking by the college trustees and the appointment of his successor as president, Peter Flood of Ardagh on the 17th January 1798.

In 1799 Hussey took off again, returning to Spanish diplomatic circles in London and Paris. Whilst in Paris he helped to frame the Concordat of 1802 between Napoleon and Pope Pius VII, leading to the return of the Irish College in 1801. Lecky described him as 'the ablest English speaking bishop of his time'. He brought the Presentation Nuns to Waterford, founded St. John's College and gave wholehearted support to Edmund Ignatius Rice in his endeavours to introduce Catholic education to Waterford. He will be remembered mainly for his famous pastoral letter (1797) to his clergy. It became an instant best seller, running into seven printings. The letter gave great offence to the government as also to his episcopal colleagues (Archbishop Troy remarking that 'it had too much vinegar in it'). It dealt with his favourite obsession — the plight of the Catholic soldiers in the British army, with the education issue and with the Charity Schools of Waterford where the Catechism taught was the Protestant one.

He left Ireland again after issuing his pastoral and did not return until shortly before his death. He died suddenly in Tramore on 11th July 1803 having taken a fit while swimming there.

In a sense Hussey was a bit of a rebel in that he was the first to break the mould of the quiescent Castle hierarchy of the 18th century. Despite his long absences from Maynooth and Waterford there were many good and positive achievements in his ministry such as the issues raised in the pastoral and, significantly, his friendship with Edmund Burke which endured until Burke was on his death-bed and sent for Hussey requesting his ministrations.

Cashel Revisited

Before digressing to create profiles of his two chief tormentors we left Lanigan plodding his

homeward journey to Cashel. His odyssey to Cashel was now becoming a *via dolorosa*. But Cashel for Lanigan spelled out 'home', and when eventually he arrived in the City of the Kings he was warmly received by his aged mother and his two surviving sisters, Mary and Anne. He was also well received by the parish priest of Cashel, Edmond Cormack, vicar general and chancellor, who was a cousin of the late Archbishop James Butler II as well as being the executor of Butler's will. It will be remembered that James Butler II was the archbishop who first accepted Lanigan for the priesthood, secured a bursary for him in the Irish College in Rome, and gave him permission to take up the professorship in Pavia University. The pity was that Butler died on 29th July 1791 at the early age of fifty. The apostasy of his cousin Lord Dunboyne weighed heavily on him, bringing him to an early grave. If this prelate, the author of the famous *Catechism*, had been alive when Lanigan returned to Ireland how differently things might have turned out; Butler would never have tolerated the shameful and unjust treatment meted out to his gifted subject.

Lanigan attended a clergy conference in Thurles on 3rd July 1797 and it was around this time that he was interviewed by Archbishop Thomas Bray, Butler's successor. The austere archbishop, no doubt thoroughly briefed by his mentor in Cork, gave Lanigan a cool reception, holding out no prospect of a role in the archdiocese of Cashel. The excuse given was that the Archbishop did not favour 'clerical absenteeism'.¹³ There was no mention of the Jansenist smear but it is significant that William Howley, who travelled home with Lanigan with a doctorate from Pavia, was given the outpost parish of Clerihan and left there for the remainder of his life without any further promotion. As he left Archbishop's House the hapless Lanigan must have cast a glance at the most recent oil painting on the Palace walls — that of Dr. James Butler II — and ruefully pondered on what might have been. He then proceeded to Dublin and was attached to the old Francis St. Church by invitation of its pastor, Martin Hugh Hamill, vicar general and dean of Dublin. It was whilst here that he was approached by the two primates, Richard O'Reilly, Archbishop of Armagh and John T. Troy, Archbishop of Dublin and offered the chair of sacred scripture and Hebrew in the Royal College of Maynooth.

The Maynooth debacle

Shortly afterwards at the formal selection process in Maynooth, he was nominated on the motion of the primate Archbishop O'Reilly, seconded by Archbishop Troy, to the professorship. His election was the fulfilment of a dream. He was now a Maynooth professor. But Divine Providence had made no provision for the intervention of the redoubtable Francis Moylan, Bishop of Cork. On one of his rare visits as a trustee, still suspecting Lanigan to be a Jansenist, he suggested that he should swear to a formula which had been drawn up as a test for the French refugee clergy after the Revolution. This Lanigan indignantly refused to do, though he added that he would cheerfully subscribe to the bull *Unigenitus* issued by Pope Clement XI in 1713. The result of the dispute was that he resigned the professorship.

At the suggestion of his friend General Vallencey, he was engaged by the Royal Dublin Society as assistant librarian, foreign correspondent and general literary supervisor with a salary of a guinea and a half per week, raised in 1808 to £150 per annum. His early years with the R.D.S. were ones of dreadful drudgery, given the sheer mechanical labour of translating agricultural works from German, French and Spanish. An example is *An Essay on the Practical History of Sheep in Spain... Translated from the German* (Dublin 1800). All this ceased when he became full librarian. His help was sought in the compilation of local histories, the editing of unpublished manuscripts and the indexing of notable works. The R.D.S. gave him full latitude not only in the use of its

facilities but also in taking on extra-curricular assignments. So we find him preparing for publication the first edition to be printed in Ireland of the breviary, and editing Butler's *Meditations and Discourses*.

He was intimately associated with the literary enterprises of the time and wrote on current affairs under the pseudonyms of *Irenaeus* and *An Irish Priest* and in 1805 he engaged in a ding-dong controversy with John Gifford, a bitter little man, known in Dublin circles as 'The Dog in Office'. His wit, learning, liberal Catholicism and the dignity and suavity of his continental manners were a ready passport to the best society. Among his friends were Richard Kirwan, President of the Royal Irish Academy and former priest, and the Celtic scholars, William Halliday and Edward O'Reilly whom he assisted to found the Gaelic Society of Dublin in 1808.

He suffered from bouts of deep depression as a result of his treatment by Bishop Moylan and the Maynooth authorities. The subsequent history of the scripture chair did little to alleviate the stress and anxiety, which plagued his later years. Francis Moylan's choice, Francis Eloi, a Frenchman, lasted one year, and then one of Moylan's priests Matthias Crowley, known in his student days in Maynooth as 'The French Wagtail' because of his servility towards the French professors, was appointed professor on the 15th October 1810. He ended up joining the Established Church at the very gates of Maynooth College where he also subscribed to the 39 Articles.



JOHN GIFFARD,
"A Dog in Office."

John Lanigan's Writings

In a sense John Lanigan was blessed with good luck in being ousted from Maynooth. Had he swallowed the oath and stayed on as a professor his writings would never have seen the light of day. Maynooth from the beginning did not encourage anything that savoured of creativity or personal advancement. One hundred years after the debacle, referred to above, the most brilliant professor on the staff, Dr. Walter McDonald, Prefect of the Dunbooyne Establishment, wrote a book on motion, which was condemned by the College Trustees and later by the Congregation of the Index. Moving on another half century to the seminary days of this present writer in the 1940s one of our classmates was expelled for writing the story of Thomas Aquinas in novel form. After he left, the book became a best seller. Another was disciplined for 'the grave irregularity' of writing poetry. Lanigan was a free spirit who would never have survived in such a stifling atmosphere. Now he could concentrate on his own writings which fell into three categories: those bearing his own personal imprimatur: *John Lanigan, Ireland and Cashel*, those under the pseudonym *Irenaeus* and, to a lesser extent, those under the title *An Irish Priest*.

Ecclesiastical History of Ireland

This monumental work falls into the first category, as does the *Institutionum* already mentioned. At the outset it should be stated that his *Ecclesiastical History* is an encyclopaedic

work in four volumes, each one of approximately 800 pages, so all we can do in this essay is scratch the surface.

He began this work in 1799 and it was twenty years in composition. It contains in chronological sequence, biographies of the principal Irish saints with their 'acts' abridged, while their recorded miracles are for the most part suppressed. With his expertise in sacred scripture he transformed the scriptural crosses of Clonmacnoise, Moone and Monasterboice into sermons in stone. He was merciless in showing up the shortcomings of some of the historians who preceded him, notably the two Anglican divines, Archdall and Ledwich. He summarily dismissed Archdall for converting into monasteries all the churches founded by St. Patrick. Having described Ledwich's *Antiquities of Ireland* as a misnomer he points out ninety-five blunders in the text, ending his critique with the words 'by the magical effects of his pen he laboured to transform St. Senan into a river, St. Kevin into a rock and St. Patrick, the great Apostle of our nation, into a nonentity'. Giraldus Cambrensis also came under his lash for the anti-Irish bias in his writings and sermons.

The Round Towers: Pagan or Christian?

In the thirty-seventh chapter of the fourth volume of his *History*, Lanigan makes a strong case for the pagan origin of the Irish round towers. He holds that the round towers were built before the introduction of Christianity to Ireland and were at once observatories and depositories of the sacred fire preserved by worshippers of Baal. Fire in pagan times was an object of worship and veneration, especially the sun, the greatest of all fires. The eminent archaeologist George Petrie LL.D. resisted this theory claiming that the towers were belfries summoning the people to pray. Petrie offers equally cogent reasons for his theory in his *Towers and Temples of Ancient Ireland*.

That English Pope

As for the only Englishman ever to become Pope, Adrian IV, or Nicholas Breakspear as he had been known in his native Hertfordshire, this was a real test for Lanigan's orthodoxy and his respect for the vicar of Christ. During his papacy Adrian received a visit from the learned Englishman, John of Salisbury. According to John he got Adrian to grant Ireland to King Henry II as a hereditary fee. This was the same king who under a later pope was responsible for the murder of Thomas a Becket in his own cathedral. Handing Ireland over to a king of this calibre was for Lanigan the ultimate in treachery.

John Lanigan as 'Irenaeus'

Lanigan was an ecumenist, as was his close friend J.K.L., James Doyle, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. His first venture in this field came when he was asked to write a preface to a small work, entitled *The Protestant Apology for the Roman Catholic Church (1809)* by an author calling himself Christianus, and who in fact was William Talbot of Castle Talbot, Co. Wexford. 'I was loth' writes Lanigan 'to refuse complying with his demand as I wish to encourage the publication of every work that may conduce to soften controversial asperity and to make Christians more and more understand each other'. Talbot got more than he bargained for. His work ran to sixty-six pages only, whereas Lanigan's introduction comprised 167 pages. It was an instant best seller due in the main to Lanigan's introduction which completely threw Talbot's performance into the shade.

This was the first of Lanigan's scripts under the pseudonym of Irenaeus. He could not have chosen a better incognito. St. Irenaeus is one of those sympathetic figures in whom all the

AN CL 15
ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY
OF
IRELAND,
FROM THE
FIRST INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY
AMONG THE IRISH,
TO
THE BEGINNING OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY.

COMPILED
FROM THE WORKS OF THE MOST ESTEEMED AUTHORS, FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC,
WHO HAVE WRITTEN AND PUBLISHED ON MATTERS CONNECTED WITH
THE IRISH CHURCH;
AND FROM IRISH ANNALS AND OTHER AUTHENTIC DOCUMENTS,
STILL EXISTING IN MANUSCRIPT.

By **THE REV. JOHN LANIGAN, D. D.,**
FORMERLY PROFESSOR OF HEBREW, THE SACRED SCRIPTURES, AND
ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF PAVIA.

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Cover of An Ecclesiastical History of Ireland.

tendencies of a time meet. He was born between the years 135-140 in Asia Minor and in his youth was a disciple of the famous Bishop of Smyrna, St. Polycarp, who was in turn the disciple of St. John. There was just the one unified Church, no east or west, no Protestant or Catholic. He was a paradigm of John Lanigan particularly in his sufferings. We meet him in Rome in the year 177 recounting for the Roman church the details of the persecution of the Church in Lyons, a persecution in which he himself has suffered. He returned from Rome to find that the Bishop of Lyons had been martyred. Irenaeus was elected to succeed him and ruled until he himself suffered martyrdom.

Two books of his writing survive, one *Adversus Haereses* (Against Heresies), the other on apostolic preaching. It is to the former that Irenaeus owes his place in history. The great heresy of his time was gnosticism whose claim was that the fullness of Christianity consisted in knowledge only. Irenaeus refuted them with the traditional doctrine that God is only fully knowable by revelation: 'we must obey the elders in the Church', he writes 'who hold the succession from the Apostles ... with the sure gift of truth'.

Lanigan exhibited not only a profound acquaintance with the theological literature and lore of his own church but a prodigious knowledge of the writings of Protestant divines also. He lists twenty-four of them in alphabetical order from Burnett down to Ussher and then ingeniously makes each one of them propound thoroughly Catholic dogmas by accurate citations from their writings. He concluded his dissertation thus: 'In what I have written, I can declare, from the sincerity of my heart, that I have no other object in view than the general good of Christianity; and were I ambitious of having my tomb distinguished by any peculiar epitaph I should prefer: *Here lies an advocate for the union of Christians*'.

Commenting on Lanigan's famous *Preface to the Protestant Apology* the American critic J.H. Green observed 'For logic, learning, and respect for religious conviction, this work is generally esteemed a model of polemical writing that admits few parallels. So that we should like to see the man that could point out — taken as a divine and theologian, as a linguist, as a Christian — in the whole history of the Irish Church since the days of Sedulius, Lanigan's equal.'¹⁴

Lanigan as 'An Irish Priest'

This new *nom de plume*, 'An Irish Priest', was chosen by Lanigan in the aftermath of his decision to leave his post of professor in Maynooth. 'Take my advice Lanigan, and do not return. Once they have got this idea into their heads they will see Jansenism every time you open your mouth' — words of wisdom from his friend Martin Hugh Hamill, Dean of Dublin, a timely warning to be careful about what he said and wrote.¹⁵ A second warning in the dark days of 1798 came in the form of an unsolicited visit to his rooms by Major Henry Charles Sirr, Dublin's Chief of police and the Castle's leading agent in the campaign against the United Irish movement in the city. In the hope of finding some treasonable documents and acting, as it would appear, on erroneous information the Major ransacked the doctor's trunks, desk and papers but nothing of a seditious nature came to light, all of which begs the question: who set Sirr on the trail of Lanigan?

The 'Irish Priest' pseudonym proved very useful during the long festering veto campaign. The British Government wanted the power of veto in the nomination of Catholic bishops and, even with the sugar coating of a state pension for bishops, the campaign was unacceptable. It was furthermore opposed trenchantly by Lanigan writing in the *Dublin Evening Post* under his *nom de plume*. Lanigan refused to have any dealings with the *Freeman's Journal* because it was in favour of the veto. The controversy came to a head in 1814 when Quarantotti's celebrated

rescript arrived from Rome via England authorising the Irish bishops to vest in the government a veto in the appointment of members of their body. Initially there was a stunned and shocked re-action as any rescript emanating from Rome was regarded by the clergy as final and irrevocable. But the circumstances surrounding this rescript were strange, to say the least. Firstly the pope of the day, Pius VII, was the prisoner of Napoleon in Fontainebleau which was 900 miles from Rome and so it could not have been signed by him. Secondly the manner of its transmission, coming through England instead of directly to the Irish bishops, was unusual to say the least.

Lanigan, who saw the document, wrote in a letter to *The Dublin Evening Post* that it was absurd to think of a clerk of Propaganda presuming to decide on a question of the greatest magnitude. He went on to criticize Quarantotti's 'barbarous bog Latin' and made the following observation: 'Now he, Mr. 48 [A pun on the Latin word Quarantotto, meaning 48] would have us submit to the Veto whether we are to be emancipated or not.... Bravo, my Italian sycophant! you have shown yourself worthy of the attention of the English Government. There are sound exceptional modes of reconciling the appointment of our Bishops with the purest loyalty and obedience to our King without recurring to Vetoes, Boards, Securities, Conditions and Oaths of which, God knows, we have more than enough already. In conclusion, every attempt to weaken the Catholic Church in Ireland shall in the end prove fruitless as long as the faith delivered to us by St. Patrick shall prevail in spite of Kings, Parliaments, Orangemen and Quarantottis!'¹⁶

The double reference of Lanigan to the King is rather pointed because the Castle bishops had relied on Pitt's pre-Union assurance of Catholic Emancipation. But Pitt had not counted on the obstinacy of George III who refused even to consider Emancipation which he regarded as a violation of his coronation oath to uphold, the Protestant religion, as by law established.

Lanigan's letters to *The Dublin Evening Post* were a significant factor in the laying to rest of the veto and the episcopal pensions, as well as the consignment to oblivion of the Quarantotti Rescript.

The Doldrum Years

Long before the post-Union doldrum years the great luminaries of Catholic education in Munster were Nano Nagle and her Presentation Sisters, Catherine McAuley and her Sisters of Mercy, Mary Aikenhead and her Sisters of Charity, and the Ursuline Sisters introduced to Cork by Bishop Moylan and later to Thurles. And of course Edmund Ignatius Rice and his Christian Brothers. The Relief Acts of 1782 and 1793 removed all penal enactments against Catholic schools but there still remained the so called Charity Schools set up by the Government as well as the Charter Schools, which now became the machinery of state proselytism. To be fair to Bishop Hussey of Waterford, he was the first bishop in Munster to speak out against this campaign of proselytism. The campaign was in full spate in Cork but there was not a whimper from Bishop Moylan who was more concerned with Lanigan's unfounded dalliance with Jansenism than with what was taking place all around him. The campaign over the Charity and Charter Schools has been described as the deadliest weapon of the Penal Laws.

The Great Amends!

In 1925 the University of Pavia celebrated its one thousand one-hundredth anniversary and on November 5th of that year the National University of Ireland got permission to erect a memorial tablet in the courts of the old University with an inscription in Latin which reads in translation:

To the Rev. John Lanigan, S.T.D.,
1789-96.

Whilst the delegates of all nations assemble at Pavia to perpetuate the renown of the Royal University founded 1100 years ago, the Senate of the National University of Ireland take advantage of the occasion to erect this tablet to preserve the memory of the Rev. Dr. John Lanigan, who, born in Cashel, Ireland, was ordained to the priesthood at Rome, and held for 7 years the office of doctor of sacred scripture and of the Hebrew language with the greatest renown. A scholar of vast and varied erudition, after his return to his native land he wrote his celebrated work - *The Ecclesiastical History of Ireland* which enhanced his fame. He was afterwards appointed librarian to the Royal Dublin Society. A man of singular piety, he departed this life in the year 1828, R.I.P.

It should be noted that this was composed by Dr. John Dalton, then Professor of Classics and later president of Maynooth and later still archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland. Dr. James McCaffery, late president of Maynooth, conveyed the inscription to Pavia. Maynooth had at last made amends.

The End

Swift, during a walking excursion with some literary friends, was suddenly missed. When one of the party went in quest of him he found the dean in silent meditation before a stalwart elm, the summit of which was in a state of decay. 'I shall be like that tree,' said Swift, 'I'll die at the top first.' Similar presentiments had long filled the mind of Lanigan. The stage was darkening ere the curtain fell. It all began with depression leading into melancholy and finally dementia. His depression was initially due to his shameful treatment by his two main tormentors, Moylan and Hussey. The whole process of the disintegration of Lanigan's brilliant mind might have been arrested then with proper care and attention and a modicum of fraternal charity. In Lanigan's case the disease of dementia was slowly but relentlessly progressive, leading to death after six tortuous years in Dr Harty's private asylum in Finglas. In the beginning he retained some of his gregarious good nature, apparently in the belief that this, his Gethsemane which had just begun, too might pass. As there were no grounds attached to Harty's asylum he walked incessantly through the green fields of Finglas, the Botanic Gardens, and he even ventured into the fields of another Tipperary man, the infamous Lord Norbury, the Hanging Judge. Every evening he used to spend long periods of prayer in the Finglas parish church. At the beginning of his heart-breaking descent into cerebral atrophy but long before the withering decay that would eventually destroy him he lost his two best friends, John Thomas Troy, Archbishop of Dublin and Troy's vicar general, Martin Hugh Hamill, his classmate in the Irish College, Rome. Both died in the same year: 1823. These were the ones who stood by him faithfully in his trials.

Lanigan's mental illness has been described by his biographer W.J. Fitzpatrick as 'softening of the brain'. It was only in 1828 the year of his death that the French clinicians came up with the more accurate term: pre-senile dementia. Before long the name was transformed into the still more accurate 'senile dementia' of the Alzheimer type, after the noted physician who studied and described the condition. In 1835, just seven years after the death of Lanigan, a publication entitled *A Treatise on Insanity*, by James Prichard, a senior physician in Bristol, pointed out that patients go through a series of stages as the disease progresses, stages which Prichard called 'the several degrees of incoherence'. He could have been describing Lanigan in those last tortuous

years. Prichard recognised four such degrees: impaired memory, irrationality and loss of reasoning power, incomprehension, and finally the loss of instinctive voluntary action.

Lanigan passed through all stages. He was obviously in the first, impaired memory, when he had a visit from a priest friend, P.J. O' Hanlon. Lanigan said to him: 'I know not what I had for breakfast and except that I feel no craving, I do not even know that I have breakfasted. I, who could formerly grasp any course of study, how abstruse soever. I cannot now apply my mind to a recollection of the simplest event of yesterday. I know that I am now speaking to you but in ten minutes after you have left the house, I shall have no remembrance of our conversation, or of you'.

Death in a Cage

There are no consolations in the diagnosis of the degrees of incoherence, which brought about the death of Lanigan on July 7th 1828. There is no dignity in this kind of death. Towards the end came a final indignity with the erection of a cage welded on to his bed. This is still a common practice in parts of Europe, notably the Czech Republic where there are over 2,000 of these cages in use even today, according to a recent report in *Time* magazine. Such a cage looks like a dog kennel bolted onto the frame of the hospital bed. When a patient is judged to be in need of restraint, he is bundled into the bed and the cage locked. It is only slightly less cruel than a straitjacket. And they were used in the cramped quarters of Dr. Harty's asylum. As Lanigan lapsed into the final stages of dementia he was kept permanently in such confinement, not being released even for the relief of bodily functions. A greater affront to the patient's humanity can hardly be imagined. In this manner ended the life of Dr. John Lanigan. If there is wisdom to be found in the manner of Lanigan's death it must be found in the dignity of the life that preceded it, and in the knowledge that human beings are capable not only of insensitivity and cruelty but also of the love and loyalty that transcends not only the physical debasement but even the spiritual weariness of the years of sorrow.

Two days after his death his body was interred in the old churchyard of Finglas. Only two people stood by his grave: his brother James (who died shortly after) and Dr. Harty. The permission of the local Protestant vicar had to be sought for the burial and even he got the name wrong in registering the burial, which to this day reads: 'James Lonigan, Parish of Finglas, buried 9th July, Age 70 years'. For thirty-three years not even a headstone marked the spot. His biographer, Fitzpatrick, sought in vain for a report on his death in the local and national newspapers. Then with the publication of the 2nd *de luxe* edition of his *Ecclesiastical History* came an appeal to national feeling regarding the neglected state of Lanigan's grave. There was a generous response not only by Ireland but by America and the list of subscribers was headed by Patrick Leahy D.D., Archbishop of Cashel. A fine Irish Cross, 12 feet high including shaft, plinth and base, and designed by Petrie, now rises over the grave of Lanigan. The monument of Tullamore limestone bears two epitaphs, one in Irish and one in Latin. The one in Irish records:

Guidhidh ar Anam
An Athar Sean O' Laineagain
Ollamh Diadhachta
Ughdar eolach an Leabhair arab ainm
Stair Eaclastachda Eireann
Agus shaothar eile
Do geineadh e san mbliain MDCCXXV111

Agus d'eag se an seachtadh la den mhi mheadhain
Samhradh na bliaina MDCCCXXV111

It was a nice gesture of George Petrie to design Lanigan's tombstone. Now each of them together with the round tower controversy could be truly laid to rest.

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