

GEORGE RICHARD MACKARNESS 1823 - 1883

HIS VISITS TO IRELAND AND MADEIRA

IRELAND

George Mackarness spent from early January until the end of June 1846, at St Columba's College for Boys, in Ireland, where he kept a journal. After leaving there he had a fortnight's holiday in Ireland before returning home to England to study for his Ordination which took place in Salisbury Cathedral in September.

St Columba's College had been founded only a few years before - in 1843 - at Stackallan House, County Meath, near the River Boyne. It was a solid, early Georgian mansion (1716) standing in large parkland with farmland beyond, built for General Hamilton, one of William of Orange's generals. The coach-house had been converted into a Chapel. Two friends, Lord Adare and William Monsell, influenced by the Oxford Movement, had been keen to establish a Church School on English public school lines. They, with the Rev. William Sewell, Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford, and the Rev. J. H. Todd, Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin founded St Columba's and became its Governors. They gained the support of the Primate, Lord John Beresford, who gave £500 to the Founding Fund and agreed to be the School's Visitor. The first Headmaster - called the Warden - was the Rev. R. C. Singleton. Four of the six Fellows (teaching staff) were clergy under a quasi-monastic régime of a distinctly ascetic character including some compulsory fasting rules.

George Mackarness, who had come down from Oxford after taking his Degree in 1845, joined the staff of St Columba's in January 1846 to teach classics and history. Though he liked the boys and staff, he found the daily routine "monotonous and irksome", and the surrounding countryside ugly. He also found the régime trying. He wrote in his journal: "I know not whether the advantages of an ascetic life here are not counterbalanced by the ill-effects of such life being compulsory." He also noted an atmosphere of "discontent among the Fellows; even in this secluded retreat,

though the surface is calm there is a rough under-current." In talk with one of the Fellows they agreed that "the Nineteenth Century will not submit to the régime of the Thirteenth Century." It emerged that there were "serious disputes about the maintenance of College discipline, especially on the subject of fasting...." "The unpleasant differences about fasting seem to resolve themselves into the question: Can the monasticism of the Thirteenth Century be restored in the Nineteenth Century? It appears to me not. Others think it can...." By Ash Wednesday George recorded: "The existence of the College becomes every day a matter of greater uncertainty."

In March George was elected a Fellow of St Columba's, on which he wrote: "I cannot say the honour affected me with any extravagant feelings of pleasure, but I hope I shall be able to do my duty while here and help to make this place what I am convinced it was intended to be - a nursery for Irish Churchmen." Later in the month new Statutes for the College, signed by the Primate, arrived and were read out to the staff. George wrote: "I thought the power given to the Warden monstrous and absurd - such indeed as no man will long submit to, and to which I conceive the College will one day owe its ruin...." "I believe all faith and honesty have departed from this institution ... and I fear my connection with the College will be but short."

After a brief visit back in England over Easter, George returned to St Columba's to find the atmosphere still very uneasy, and early in May he sent in his resignation. Arguments continued on the subject of fasting, and a bye-law in favour of it was passed with the Warden and some others in support, George refusing to vote. At that point the Primate intervened and sent a letter cancelling the fasting bye-law. The Warden threatened to resign, and the state of turmoil continued. In June there was a heat-wave, and George took parties of boys on walks and swimming expeditions in the

River Boyne; he saved one boy from drowning. He also received "a fearful list of books" for study before his Ordination in September.

After a busy Examination week, George was packing up to leave at the end of June when he heard that the Warden had "left in the night without seeing or speaking to any individual in the College." Soon afterwards the Rev. William Sewell, one of the Founders, also left. In the following year he founded Radley College in England, with the Rev. R. C. Singleton as its first Warden. Radley took the motto Sicut Columba. Also in 1846 two of the other Founders, Lord Adare and Mr William Monsell joined the Church of Rome - altogether a year of upheaval for St Columba's. George wrote: "And thus with the month of June closes, probably for ever, my connection with St Columba's, I shall always look back upon it with affection mingled with regret that my time here should have happened to coincide with such a serious crisis in the College. May it flourish under other auspices, better than those that have now ceased."

In 1849 St Columba's moved from Stackallan to Holly Park on the outskirts of Dublin. Through various vicissitudes the College grew and prospered, and in 1993 celebrated the 150th Anniversary of its foundation. In that year "A Portrait of St Columba's College 1843 - 1993" by Patrick Wyse Jackson and Ninian Falkiner was published giving a very good illustrated record of the School's history. One of the Boys' houses is named Stackallan in memory of the School's first home.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful for help and information from Mr Ninian Falkiner of St Columba's, and a copy of the "Portrait of St Columba's" mentioned above. George Mackarness's journal for 1846 has been lent to him, and has been transcribed for inclusion in St Columba's archives.

After leaving Stackallan, George travelled to Dublin and joined some friends on a fortnight's Irish holiday.

They travelled by stages to Cork where he recorded in his journal "the magnificent sight of 13 Men-of-War; shore crowded with sailors and marines, many intoxicated; beautiful scenery in the harbour." On by the Bantry Mail to Bantry with its magnificent mountain views and to a romantic little inn at Glengariff. The party explored caves and mountains and made boat-trips, all amid glorious scenery, and eventually left "with real regret". They returned via Killarney. From there by early morning car to Tralee to catch the Limerick Mail, reaching Limerick about 4 o'clock. After a hasty meal their coach started again for Dublin, passing through the wildest part of Tipperary. George wrote: "night closed over us about Maryborough, and for the remainder of the journey I dozed away. We crossed the Curragh of Kildare, and as day broke we perceived the Wicklow Mountains and the Hill of Howth in the distance. Entered Dublin about 5 am after a 22-hour journey outside the coach."

It was obviously a memorable holiday for George, particularly as during it he met the two lively daughters of Mr Cosby Young of Lahard in County Cavan. He became engaged to Mary Ann, the elder daughter, in the following year, and married her after his return from Madeira in 1848.

MADEIRA

In the winter of 1847-8 George Mackarness was appointed by the Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch to accompany their young son, Lord Henry Scott, on a visit to Madeira. Shortly before the visit George had become engaged to be married to Mary Ann Young, and some of the letters he wrote to her from Madeira survive in our possession.

George and his young protégé travelled out on the 'Howe' which was carrying the Dowager Queen Adelaide, widow of William IV, who was in frail health. The Buccleuchs were well known to her, and George says in one of his letters that "she has promised to look after the boy (Lord Henry) as her own son." He adds that "our cabin is on the main deck close to the Queen's own apartments." George made the acquaintance of the Queen's personal Chaplain and other members of her retinue, and played whist with them on the voyage. The weather was very rough to begin with, and a sailor was washed overboard and nearly drowned. But the last week's sailing was in calm waters, and the Queen's suite danced on ^{deck}~~board~~ each evening. On arrival the party entered a local scene of great controversy among the English community centred on the Chaplain of the English Church in Funchal, the Rev. Richard Thomas Lowe.

Mr Lowe was an eccentric character. He had gone to Madeira originally in 1826, soon after coming down from Cambridge, and quickly started to pursue his abiding interest in natural history, studying the great variety of flowers in Madeira and the fish round its coasts. Up to that time no-one had made a scientific study of the island's plant and marine life. That visit convinced him that he should return to Madeira with his widowed mother who suffered from tuberculosis to find a future there combining clerical duties with a career as a naturalist. In Funchal he made contact with the English Church which served a resident British population of about 500, and more in winter when visitors came for the sake

of their health. Some of the residents' families had been established there in the wine trade since the late 17th Century.

Returning to Madeira Mr Lowe pursued his naturalist's expeditions, collecting specimens, cataloguing them, and sending his findings to Sir William Hooker, Professor of Botany at Glasgow University and later Director of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew. Some of his research became internationally recognised as the classic work on the flora and fauna of Madeira.

In 1833 Mr Lowe succeeded the retiring Chaplain of the English Church with the approval of Lord Palmerston, Foreign Secretary, and under a Licence granted by the Bishop of London. At that time the Oxford (or Tractarian) Movement under the leadership of Henry Newman and Edward Pusey was coming to the fore in England, and their Tracts reached the hands of Anglican clergy overseas including Mr Lowe's. He believed that he had a mission to introduce reforms into the Church in Madeira, and was strongly supported in this by the Rev. J. M. Neale, a frequent visitor to Funchal (and author of "Good King Wenceslas" and numerous hymns). The new policy, which included the introduction of weekly Holy Communion Services and Offertory Collections; the holding of evening as well as morning Services every Sunday; and Mr Lowe's custom of wearing a surplice in funeral processions from the Church to the Cemetery, aroused strong opposition from some of the English community, while others remained loyal supporters of Mr Lowe. The critics sent their complaints to the Bishop of London, while the supporters also sent him their views, and the divisions in the local community became increasingly acrimonious.

In 1845 the critics prevailed upon the British Consul to report the situation to the Foreign Office, voicing their grievances about Mr Lowe's "Romish practices." They followed this up by getting a majority vote at

the annual Church Meeting in January 1846 suspending Mr Lowe's salary for the ensuing year. Mr Lowe's supporters came to his aid with funds. The veto on paying his salary was repeated in January 1847. After continuing dissension the critics produced a "Memorial" addressed to Queen Victoria setting out their complaints against Mr Lowe whose "services are neither acceptable nor can in future be useful to a great number of his congregation." This was forwarded by the British Consul to the Foreign Office, together with a supportive testimonial from Mr Lowe's supporters and a counter-memorial from Mr Lowe himself.

In London, Members of Parliament began to take notice of the Madeira controversy, and Benjamin Disraeli, Leader of the Opposition, demanded that papers about it be laid before the House, and this was done in the form of a Government Blue Book. Lord Palmerston sent a Despatch to the Consul in Madeira saying bluntly that the present state of affairs could not be allowed to continue, and that if the next Church Meeting decided that the problem was insoluble "they should recommend another gentleman for the appointment of Chaplain." The Bishop of London received a copy of the Despatch after it had been sent. He objected strongly to Lord Palmerston's high-handed disregard of his episcopal jurisdiction. He advised Mr Lowe to resign in order to resolve the problem, but Mr Lowe replied that he would resign only if the Bishop ordered him to do so, and he meanwhile continued to hold the Bishop's Licence. The Rev. Thomas Kenworthy Brown, Vicar of Easby in Yorkshire, was recommended by the Church Meeting for appointment as Chaplain, and this was confirmed by Lord Palmerston who then formally dismissed Mr Lowe. However, the Bishop of London neither withdrew Mr Lowe's Licence nor granted a Licence to Mr Brown. So the impasse continued with each of the two men regarding himself as the rightful Chaplain, though Mr Brown did not arrive in the island until February 1848.

It was into this unhappy situation that Queen Adelaide, a keen churchwoman, and her fellow travellers, including George Mackarness, arrived in Madeira. The Queen was carried in a sedan chair along a path strewn with myrtle flowers to the mansion which had been put at her disposal. George Mackarness had evidently been briefed about the problem in advance, and in a letter written just before leaving England, he had written: "There has been terrible confusion in the Island. Mr Lowe has been Chaplain for 14 years and is a most excellent man - but unfortunately a good churchman. He established a daily Service and this gave the Presbyterians and others in the Island such dire offence that they petitioned Lord Palmerston against him. He most unhandsomely deprived him of his salary, though a petition in his favour was signed by 80 residents (all communicants), and declared him no longer Chaplain. The Bishop of London, however, refused to revoke his Licence, and the inhabitants instantly subscribed and made up his salary, so he is still ipso facto Chaplain. I have no doubt this winter will set matters right."

In a later letter George wrote: "Mr Lowe is a most excellent man who has been shamefully used, but I hope the Queen's visit will be of service to him. For she, at any rate, will not give her sanction to the malcontents."

By chance in December 1847 Bishop Robert Gray made a 3-day visit to Madeira when his ship called there en route for Cape Town where he was to take up his appointment as Archbishop. The Bishop of London entrusted to him the task of looking into the troubles in Funchal, and if possible healing the divisions. Bishop Gray was received by Queen Adelaide, and he recorded that "she has told the Consul that if the Chaplain is turned out and another thrust in without the Bishop's Licence she will be very sorry as it will prevent her attending Church." He held an open meeting to

discuss the troubles, but only Mr Lowe's supporters attended, the critics saying that there was no point in their being present since matters had "gone too far to be reconciled." Bishop Gray told his audience that if another Chaplain arrived without a Bishop's Licence it would be their duty to "communicate only with him who had the Bishop's Licence."

On his last day Bishop Gray preached an emotional sermon appealing for charity and harmony on the Island. He walked down from the Church to the beach to embark and, despite the absence of any reconciliation, many members of the English community from both sides of the divide joined in a large procession and gave him a dramatic send-off. George Mackarness wrote: "The Bishop of Cape Town's visit was a most interesting one. He stayed from Thursday to Sunday, held a Confirmation and endeavoured to arrange matters in the unhappily distracted state of this little community. I fear his exhortations had little effect on the malcontents, and this morning Mr Lowe has received from England the order for his dismissal from Lord Palmerston. This is a sad blow to the Church here - but we hope he will resist it as he still has the Bishop's Licence and is therefore actual Chaplain in spite of Lord Palmerston. The Queen is entirely in his favour, and so are all the respectable residents and visitors. A few wine merchants, chiefly presbyterians, and some low-church clergy have stirred up the whole opposition.

I witnessed a most affecting scene upon the departure of the Bishop of Cape Town. We all accompanied him to the beach through the town. Before he stepped into the boat he pronounced his blessing over us in a most apostolic manner. Many knelt, all uncovered their heads, and there were very few who were not affected - the poor Bishop most of all. He sailed away to his distant diocese with all our best wishes and prayers."

After Mr Brown's arrival in Funchal, where Queen Adelaide declined to receive him, Mr Lowe announced his intention of continuing to officiate in Madeira on the strength of the Licence he held from the Bishop of London, so the dissension went on unabated. He set up an alternative place of worship known as the Becco Chapel. There he held Services with the assurance of the Bishop of London that "as far as I am concerned you alone are authorised to act in the capacity of Chaplain." He used some of the Church plate from the English Church, and continued to officiate there for four years before deciding to resign and return to England where he was appointed Vicar of Lea in Lincolnshire. After Mr Lowe's departure the Bishop of London granted a Licence to Mr Brown. The Becco Chapel continued, but with dwindling support and at irregular intervals, and was eventually closed in 1893, the Church plate being returned to the English Church.

As for Mr Lowe, he paid several further visits to Madeira in pursuit of his "more complete and correct catalogue of living plants in Madeira than has yet been provided," and several volumes of his work were published. He embarked at Liverpool in April 1874 for yet another visit, but somewhere on the voyage to Madeira the ship and all the crew and passengers were lost and heard of no more. A plaque to his memory on a small marble cross stands in the English Cemetery in Funchal.

Before returning home, Queen Adelaide was all for going on to cruise in the Mediterranean but was advised against doing so because of civil disturbances in France. George Mackarness, eager to return to his fiancée, wrote to her: "I am sorry to lose our delightful cruise in the Mediterranean - for which we have to thank a French revolution - as I shall probably never again have an opportunity of seeing those distant parts. But then the thought of being in England and seeing you sooner reconciles

me to this, and would reconcile me to much greater disappointments." They returned to England at the end of April 1848. Queen Adelaide died the following year. George Mackarness married his Mary Ann, and subsequently became Curate at Barnwell (Peterborough diocese); Vicar of Ilam (Lichfield diocese), and finally Bishop of Argyll and The Isles, as I recounted in my Notes in 1993 on his life and some of his family connections.

Lord Henry Scott survived his youthful delicate health to become MP for Selkirk (1861-8) and for South Hampshire (1868 - 84). He was given the Beaulieu estate as a wedding present and restored Palace House. In 1885 he was created the first Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, and he died in 1905. The present Lord Montagu of Beaulieu (1994) is his grandson, and extracts from George Mackarness' letters from Madeira have been sent to him to add to his family archives.

Acknowledgement

For the history of these troubled times in Madeira I have drawn extensively on "Scandal in Madeira" by Roy Nash, published by the Book Guild in 1990.

Eleanor Booker

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