
"The Lord is my portion and I had rather be his minister in Bruff than Prime Minister of England!"

GODFREY MASSY

VICAR OF BRUFF

by Pius Browne

Godfrey Massy was for the most part of his life an outspoken and controversial character, who with the passing ages has acquired a somewhat notorious reputation not completely unmerited, but equally, not totally justified. The relevant details of his family background are perfunctory indeed, and what follows is merely a cursory sketch.

Captain Hugh Massy of the Earl of Mountrath's regiment of horse, obtained from the English Parliament in 1659 an estate and lands in Duntrileague for the arrears of pay due to himself and his soldiers. His only son Hugh Massy survived him, and remained undisturbed in the Glen of Aherlow for the next thirty years where he trebled his lands.

Godfrey Massy's mother was endowed with considerable intellectual powers, which were enhanced by the highly valued secular education that she was given. Godfrey, her third son, was born on 12 July 1803. He seems to have inherited many of his mother's characteristics "being of sweet temper and good sense, adviser and peacemaker of the whole house". (1) His formative years reflect very much the imposing maternal influence. While at school he was reputed to be "the best Classical scholar among his fellows." A universal favourite, during play hours he was often found helping a fellow student with studies. In November 1820, he entered Trinity College, Dublin as a Pensioner. He had just turned eighteen.

The transition to college academic life was not without its difficulties. Despite the best of intentions, when he endeavoured to study there was the inevitable comrade "certain to whistle for want of thought," or some intruding idler eager "to refresh his sore eyes with the sight of a green bookworm". Notwithstanding these distractions, the young student passed his exams comfortably. During his undergraduate years at Trinity, Massy displayed a strong predilection for wordy society for which his mother predictably took him to task saying "what a boon his sisters' love of reading had been to them, and how very happy they had been in not being lovers of dissipation". This shrewd counselling appeared to have the desired effect, and thereafter there is no further reference to Massy's spiritual indifference. It was his mother's dearest wish that her son would become a minister of God; which must have seemed remote when Massy intimated a keen interest in pursuing a medical profession. However, his mother's death substantially undermined his medical aspirations.

She died on 25 February 1826, and her passing was a major turning point in his life giving him cause for deep and serious reflection. The entries in his diary for that period are heavily redolent of his awareness of personal faults and inadequacies as he saw them. His self-assessment was candid and incisive. "I am," he wrote, "still under the subjection of my old enemy Sloth. My time between breakfast and dinner sadly mismanaged ... my character is yet far from being formed." Implementing his mother's dying request, he undertook the guardianship of his four younger brothers, to whom he became strongly attached. The following terse entry indicates the close bond between the brothers: "Apr. 3. - Took the three little boys to Clonmel school. Very lonesome after them, particularly Johnny."

Reacting to the changed circumstances, Massy began a phase of self-imposed and serious study, and such was the time consumed in contrast to earlier days that he wrote to his brothers thus: "I regret not seeing you as soon as I would wish". It was not surprising when he turned to the religious life.

Perhaps he felt a moral obligation to fulfill his dead mother's dearest wishes. On 17 December 1826, Massy was ordained in the Cathedral of Limerick, the first of his many connections with the Treaty City. The examinations prior to his ordination were no mere scholastic formality, but Massy measured up to the task with apparent ease after an intensive and dedicated preparation.

The parish of Fedamore (8 miles north-west of Bruff) was his first pastoral charge. There was a very small number of active parishioners in this district, and his position there was not an enviable one. Confronted with tremendous difficulties, Massy persisted until he acquired the respect of Protestant and Catholic alike. His stay in Fedamore was not devoid of incident, and one episode especially stands out. On 26 March 1830, twenty cottier families were ordered out of their holdings and subsequently witnessed the destruction of them by the sheriff and his men. Tension and ill-feeling were rampant as a result of this callous act. Massy was extremely upset by these actions and immediately (and bravely) approached the evicted persons and persuaded them to go with him to the glebe house where they obtained a generous meal and shelter from the inclement weather conditions. He was instrumental in procuring employment for the able bodied men, and others were engaged by him in turf cutting for which they were handsomely paid. It was on the basis of these spontaneous, sensitive gestures that his meritorious reputation in the area was established. The Fedamore mission was possibly a testing ground for the young priest and his performance and commitment was noticed by his superiors. He was soon to be given a more responsible position, which would see the greater part of his potential realised.

The vicarage of Bruff was offered to Massy by Bishop Jebb "as a sphere of more influence and usefulness of labour". The revival of the Protestant religion had made little impact in the town of Bruff which was described as being in a state of "woeful spiritual destitution" by concerned Protestants. Bruff was also a poverty stricken town, having been severed from the sinecure parish of Kilbreedy Minor. However, it still included Uregare and Manister. The welfare of Protestantism in Bruff was a task ready made for an enterprising and determined person such as Massy.

On Sunday 19 January 1831, Massy preached his farewell sermon at Fedamore before a packed church - contrasting markedly with his first sermon there. Many in the congregation "wept sore" to think that this was their beloved minister's last farewell. A Mrs Moloney of Ennis wrote that "I cannot describe the deep sorrow we felt at Rockstown, and I feel convinced each of his parishioners felt on his removal to Bruff." Affection and sorrow was also very evident among the Catholics. On the day Massy and his wife departed from Fedamore, the poor people (Catholics) ran for miles after his car praying that "the poor man's blessing might pursue him wherever he went". Thus began a new and, as we shall see, more significant phase in his spiritual calling.

Massy's optimism about Bruff quickly waned when he saw what his future there was going to entail. A dilapidated church with broken panes of glass, an abundance of cobwebs and an overall air of decrepitude, told their own story of neglect.



*God most faith' in the Lord
Godfrey Massy*

10th April 1836.

A signed cameo of Godfrey Massy.

Tommy Mee, the sexton, accentuated the gloom by pointing out the numerous empty pews, and referring to the many persons who were "under the priest's thumb", alluding to the local Catholic clergy. He went on to say that "no Church cess could now be collected in Bruff for the repairs of the Church". Massy's reaction was swift and somewhat inevitable. On observing a cherub erected prominently in a corner of the ceiling over the reading desk, he gave full vent to his anger. He immediately called for a ladder and proceeded to smash the little object while shouting animatedly: "The Scripture calls idols lies, and I am sure there never was a greater lie than this, for it resembles nothing in the heaven's above, or in the earth beneath. I hope that my destroying this silly papistical figure will show you all that your new Vicar is a sincere Protestant - and no mistake." This symbolic action was indeed portentous of things to come. The vicarage he found to be in a similarly miserable state, proclaiming the unhealthy position of the Church of Ireland in Bruff.

The land in the parish was no better - "teeming with fertility, yet crowded with wretched hovels." The town itself was composed essentially of small shops and cabins, with a large population. In every direction there was clear evidence of "excessive pauperism". Massy had first hand observation of this deprivation when on a stroll through the town he was confronted by seemingly unending waves of beggars entreating him to "pity the poor ould widow", or better still "the father of five small children down in the fever, and unable to get as much work as would keep the breath in their bodies". The vicar immediately distributed all the money he had in his pockets. His next visit was to the local dispensary where he was introduced to a "one armed half-pay surgeon, Dr Raleigh, a Catholic of very low esteem among his patients".

Massy's first Sunday in Bruff was humiliating with only 6 people attending a church that was capable of holding 400 in comfort. Meanwhile the flourishing and overflowing attendance

at the opposite end of the town, and its general air of opulence, must have added greatly to his despair. Being a resolute and courageous man he remained unperturbed by these enormous difficulties. An entry in one of his notebooks - "If God be with us who can be against us?" - reflects well the strength of his convictions. Massy was always armed with quotations from various sources which he used whenever an opportunity presented itself.

Six years after this inauspicious beginning a completely different situation could be observed. In 1837 there were 360 persons in the congregation at the Protestant Church, of whom 83 were regular communicants. There was a flourishing Sunday School with 100 children attending, 80 of them being Catholic. "He (Massy) was the only one," the old clerk remarked, "who could read the Church service with a clear conscience, for of them all, he alone could truly address the congregation as Dearly Beloved children." Massy, quite clearly, could do no wrong in the eyes of his admiring clerk. Even so, the shrewd and calculated methods which the vicar employed to effect these improved conditions are of interest.

He devoted a page of his memorandum to each Protestant family in the parish. The children of mixed marriages were registered. Each Sunday he wrote down on a poster (displayed prominently) the name of every absentee - a subtle form of moral coercion perhaps. He re-arranged the services of the school master Russel, and after some difficulty obtained, with the permission of Thomas Lloyd, High Sheriff of Limerick, a couple of rooms in Bruff Courthouse for a school. These rooms in no way represented the ideal context for learning, and Russel often complained that "it was hard to keep them in repair as the fortifications of a barrack." Any untidy children were gently and tactfully rebuked by Massy during his weekly examination. This was in keeping with his belief that cleanliness was next to Godliness. In a little over five years, Massy could reflect with satisfaction on the changes that he had brought about. His campaign to convert the town of Bruff to Protestantism was well off the ground, and the future looked brighter than for many years past.

It was commonly believed among Protestants that with a determined effort and a little encouragement, the Catholics might be enticed to conform to the Protestant religion. Massy saw a potentially large Protestant population in Bruff. To realise this potential much of his hopes rested upon the Scriptural education of the rising generation. Indeed, he was often known to speak about "sowing the seed of a glorious harvest in the Reformation of Ireland". In the hope of attracting new members, and holding on to those who did attend, the Church and vicarage were made more agreeably comfortable. Massy's vicarage was open to all, and those who cared to visit him were not "dosed with religion". The latter policy contributed in no small way to winning over to his ministry the gentry of the parish and the families of English officers.

His ingenious handling of the Bruff beggars is worthy of mention. Such was their cunning that every time that the vicar ventured out he was sure to be besieged by them "for some relief in his power at all at all". Massy set little store by money as is evident from his comprehensive generosity. "So with money", he rationalised, "store it up and it infects your moral atmosphere and destroys your spiritual health... lay it out in God's service and acts of benevolence and you have a principal share in the blessings which it scatters abroad". However, when he learned that his generosity was being squandered in vice he assembled the beggars and offered to divide all the help he could give them at his own house on the condition that whoever was detected by Russel in a pub or pawn office should forfeit for the first offence one third of his share, for the second a half, and so on. When the fourth offence had been committed, the guilty party would be removed from the list. Furthermore, he explicitly stated that thereafter he and his family were not to be solicited for alms at any other time or place. The initial reaction among the beggars was one of dismay. They were apprehensive about this conditional kindness until their leader convinced them by exclaiming: "It's a bargain! His Riverence (sic) is right! Long life to him, whoever of yez breaks this law

shall feel the rough side of my tongue, and Mary Gammell near (sic) threatened in vain." This declaration would seem to indicate that most of the beggars may have been women. This list began with 103 names, but soon dwindled to 35.

A mail coach - a Bianconi car - daily passed through Bruff at this time and the passengers had to contend with the relentless appeals of the mendicants. The coachmen often contrived to delay a little "to give the poor craythurs a fair offer at the passengers" who seldom passed through Bruff without leaving offerings to the poor. No sooner had they departed Bruff than they again encountered similar circumstances at nearby Grange. Speaking about the beggars of Bruff, Russel alluded to the fact that their numbers "went beyond counting on the Fair Green". Of course, a Fair Day would have attracted the mendicant elements from the neighbouring towns.

Massy's interest in medicine brought the local dispensary to his constant attention. Dr Raleigh invariably grumbled about his generosity in giving out prescriptions "...this extravagant outlay of medicine, which ought to hold for ages in such a place as Bruff". The Bridewell (local jail) was also the subject of his attention and he described it as being "a dismal and dark den of misery". He made numerous petitions to the Gaol Committee in Limerick and corresponded with Palmer the Inspector General of Prisons as part of his endeavour to improve the sanitary conditions in the prison.

Despite the difficulties which the Tithe agitation imposed on him, Massy refused to accept any aid from the Clergy Relief Fund and depended mainly on the benevolence of his own family. About this time also, he turned down an offer of service in Jerusalem which would have greatly bolstered his financial well-being, preferring instead to remain in Bruff. Though Massy expressed an antipathy to begging societies for the poor, he was to be the mainstay of one such society after the close of the Tithe war.

The Limerick Protestant Orphan Society was founded for the support of poor children deprived of their parents during the recent cholera outbreak. Speaking at a meeting of this society in Limerick on 5 March 1835, Massy said that he hoped to see "not 250 contributors to this Protestant charity established in a city containing 5,500 Protestants and double that number in its vicinity, but 2,000 Protestants of all denominations banded together as one man in this labour of love". In its first year £197.17.3d. was collected and 51 orphans were rescued from starvation. After another successful meeting in Limerick, Massy visited almost every town and village in the county to obtain funds. He tried to incite a pleasant rivalry among the different communities by stating how much had been collected in individual towns. Almost inevitably, this approach had the desired effect and many generous contributions were forthcoming. Sixty pounds was collected initially and they intended to follow these favourable beginnings "in a business like manner ... never interrupting their exertions ... till every little orphan should be able to dwell safely under its shelter, no man making him afraid". At the annual report of 1839 Massy referred to "the great utility and most satisfactory working of this benevolent institution ... so recently thought of yet so mature in its operations". His enthusiastic efforts enabled the society to reach a state of self-sufficiency.

In the early months of 1837 Massy "unconditionally, unreservedly, and in faith dedicated one tenth of his income - which as we have seen was never substantial - to the Lord". He justified this gesture by repeatedly saying "depend upon it, the poorest man can, by Christian self-denial live upon nine tenths of what God has given him". Though he endeavoured not to betray it to his friends, they were well aware of the periodic bouts of ill-health which he was occasioned to contend with.

In August 1840, Massy accompanied a deputation through Kerry, visiting Ballybunion, Kenmare, Killarney and Dingle where he made many favourable impressions. In Killarney, one gentleman proposed that the word 'Protestant' should be deleted from the title of the society as Catholics were predominant in the area. Massy's reply was curt and unequivocal: "If I forget it let my right hand forget its cunning! Is not Protestantism above my chief joy?" In Dingle a Mr Moriarty exclaimed:

"Menauragh (mo naire) the people of Kerry to be believing the people of Limerick in anything connected with humanity and christianity". Massy's response has not been recorded. His visit to Kerry was viewed with some trepidation for it was almost "an absurdity to address a few dozens of paupers and children which were all that might be calculated on". However, the outcome served to invalidate these forbodings and in the report of 1841, Massy was able to declare to the Limerick Society that he was glad for having "the distinguished privilege of extending its blessings over the three important counties in which the humbler members of the household of faith stand most in need of them in Ireland".

On 16 May 1841, Mr. Kelly the Catholic High Sheriff of the County refused the use of the Courthouse at Bruff for a meeting of the Orphan Society because of "its being for an exclusively sectarian purpose". Upon learning of this refusal Massy went to the nearest nobleman Lord Guillamore, whereupon the latter offered his own mansion for the meeting and also offered to take the chair. The meeting itself was one of the largest held in the Bruff district, with twenty-five carriages drawn up outside the doors of Rockbarton House. Thirty-five pounds was collected in the meeting room.

Lord Guillamore, on taking the chair, said that he had always regarded the occasions of his presiding at the Bruff meetings amongst the happiest events in his life. Continuing in this extravagant mood, Guillamore added his regret that a friend (the High Sheriff?) whom he had considered "the most liberal of men, should have confined his liberality to one party, and that though it was true that this society was exclusively Protestant - and he hoped that it ever would continue so - yet, it interfered with no other faith".

When it was Massy's turn to speak, he availed of the opportunity to vilify Mr Kelly saying that "when the pestilence visited Bruff and made havoc indiscriminately of all, and when for the sick poor I asked you for bread, you did not give me a stone. (2) When I asked you for assistance that might relieve the poor of Bruff, the great majority of whom are Roman Catholics (Hear!) you did not ask me what their religion was ... no one objected then that we were exclusive or sectarian ... (Cheers). And on a late occasion when the poor of Bruff were perishing with cold in the midst of a dreary winter, I see here several gentlemen who came forward without solicitation". Mr Kelly remained silent.

Begley in his comprehensive if inconsistent study of the diocese of Limerick, relates to us an incident that occurred in 1839, which is a fair indication of Massy's unrelenting dislike of the Catholic Church. (3) It concerned a Miss Todd and her Protestant companions who went to St. Michael's Church in Limerick to observe the ceremonies taking place there. Father Raleigh entered the church and noticing a group of ladies gathered in the alcove near the sanctuary, approached them and requested that they be seated. Miss Todd showed some reluctance, perhaps resenting the officiousness of the priest, and it was only after the persuasion of one of her companions that she knelt on the supposedly soiled floor. A scene was thus avoided, but the young lady did not quickly forget the slight that she believed she had been subjected to.

When Massy visited Limerick a few days later he heard the story from a friend of Miss Todd's who thought it was all rather amusing. Massy, however, interpreted the incident in a different light, seeing it as an unjust imposition on the part of Father Raleigh. He proceeded to have an affidavit drawn up with the assistance of Mr Dartnell, editor of the **Protestant Standard**. The affidavit when appearing in print, depicted the incident in an incredibly distorted manner, stating that the priest had assaulted Miss Todd. Raleigh proceeded against Dartnell and Massy, and the case was to be tried at the Cork Assizes in July 1839. Before the litigation went any further, the dignitaries of both Churches came to an acceptable settlement, whereby Massy and Dartnell both had to apologise for the unwarranted attack on Father Raleigh. Massy's over-reaction brought him into disfavour, particularly in the city of Limerick. A few days later the citizens of Limerick felt prompted to entertain Rev. Raleigh at a public dinner. Massy had clearly made a grave error, but evidently he did not learn from this humiliation.

Massy was undeterred in the pursuit of his objectives. Once more he directed his attention to the clergy of Bruff. Their superior position at the head of the local Catholic population was readily apparent to him, and he now attempted - not for the first time - to discredit the parish priest in the eyes of the people in order to strengthen the likelihood of enticing them over to the Church of Ireland persuasion. Thus began his controversial conflict with Dr Cussen, the parish priest of Bruff.

In 1843 a movement began in Mayo to curtail the dues of the clergy. Massy was quick to discern in this movement an opportunity of disparaging his long time adversary Dr Cussen. He procured a copy of one of the Mayo notices and was seen to post the document on the church pier at Bruff. However his calculations back-fired and only served to bring Massy a severe censure from the Dean. Massy was now held to be the villain of the peace, and to extricate himself from this predicament was forced to fabricate the story that the document had been sent to him by a concerned Catholic, who thought it desirable to bring the matter under the notice of the "poor deluded Popish wretches of Bruff".

This action aroused a considerable amount of controversy and a 'paper war' ensued involving both religions, which did neither party any credit. Massy regarded the whole business as a "triumph of genuine Protestantism", though he does not elaborate on, or forward any justification for, such a dogmatic assertion. He did remark that he was not impressed by the "merchandise of souls which is a silent mark of Popery. During the Tithe War I showed no vindictive spirit against the Roman priests here, but co-operated with them in charitable duties, so far as I found such cooperation practicable and useful to the poor". Despite his cleverly constructed arguments, Massy knew that the consequences of his misdemeanours could not be immediately undone. For the following six months he maintained a low profile, and it was a very reticent man that timidly made his way to and from his church. Yet he was soon to return to his favourite hobby horse. Indeed, he never took pains to disguise his opinion of the Catholic priests as was again evident in the early months of 1844 when he asked a gentleman who had been excessive in his praise of a Catholic priest's conciliatory conduct - "Did you try him by going against the plush?"

The year 1841 saw the establishment of another proselytising agent, namely, the Limerick Diocesan Irish Society. This society was founded by Rev George G. Gubbins and Rev George Maxwell. Their first report revealed some interesting figures. Upwards of 150,000 Catholics spoke the Irish language, and 900 of them received the scriptures through this agency. We are not told whether Irish was spoken as an everyday language. During its initial existence this society provided agents and salaries for carrying on "the Irish work at Bruff". This would seem to indicate that the language was still a popular idiom with many of the townspeople. The first teacher enlisted at Bruff was an old man named Bill Tubbs who had received 500 lashes for his part in the '98 Rebellion. (4) According to Massy he became "a changed man under the teaching of God's word". Another of the Scripture readers employed was a Mr Danahan who became a reader because "he had suffered persecutions they never would". These latter statements should not be uncritically accepted.

A difficult and well nigh insurmountable barrier to the 'New Reformation' in Bruff was referred to by Massy in another typical caustic remark - "The Jesuit sophistry in which the educated had been so skilfully drilled... and the 'Invincible Ignorance' of the illiterate" was difficult to overcome because "poor creatures who blindly gave themselves up to the priests to do for them and strove to scrape together the price of a habit or stuff gown, which had been blessed by some friar and engaged Purgatory Proof!" Scathing commentary indeed, brought about, one suspects, by his increasing frustration experienced in the attempts at dislodging the local clergy from their sacrosanct position among the people.

Massy was never lacking in initiative. In the Church of Ireland at Bruff, an unoccupied pew was preserved under the gallery with a green curtain hung in front as a robing room. This section was now given over to Roman Catholic inquirers and called 'The

Nicodemus Pew'. The sexton was wont to say: "O Master, there are some new Papishes in the Nicodemus Pew. I heard them say that our Church service is better than the Latin mass. They are now praising its elegant simplicity". Of course there was always the possibility of a questionable or shady character being sent by the clergy to their adversaries to ridicule the so-called reformation. Daniel O'Connell seems to have had this in mind when he declared "who spoiled the parson's proselytising by spreading ratsbane among them". (5)

In the spring of 1842, Massy's Scripture school was again expelled from the Courthouse in Bruff by Mr Lyons the new Roman Catholic High Sheriff of Limerick. This expulsion clearly illustrated the vulnerable and insecure position of the local Scripture school. This setback came at a time when the school was greatly thriving. So excellent were the conditions that the Church Education Society Inspector, Mr Mills, referred to the school as "Bruff Model School" from the scholar's familiarity with scripture and their noble conduct. The recent events convinced the Protestants that the building of their own school was essential for the sustained growth and well-being of their religion in Bruff. Massy now undertook what perhaps was to be his greatest accomplishment while at Bruff, the building of Adelaide School.

He began this venture by publishing an appeal in the chief English and Irish Protestant districts, stating that the poverty of his benefice and his family necessities debarred him from supporting a school at his own expense, as he had done for the previous seven years. "This is a most important undertaking for advancing God's glory by preserving the poor Protestants in the faith of Christ". This particular appeal yielded a return of £240.

For the next five years much of his time was spent in trying to obtain a suitable site for the proposed school. Lord Carbery of Bruff reluctantly offered a site telling Massy that his "picture of the state of things in Bruff is not very inviting". Again Massy showed great intuition by obtaining the Queen Dowager's permission to give her name to the new building. (6) This added a certain amount of popularity to the project, and gave it a greater legitimacy, which it was hoped would add to the contributions. Carbery also acknowledged that: "we are shamefully behind the sister island, even in things which we might equal them, for soap and water and sweeping brushes do not cost much". He thus contributed extra finances to meet these particular requirements.

So enthusiastic was Massy about his project that the first stone was laid on 1 August 1843, the day after he got possession of the site. On 13 October he toured England for funds to complete Adelaide House, as it was to be called. (7) The author of Massy's memoir goes to great lengths to emphasise the significance of this journey by telling us that "the Popish agitation for repeal of the Union had rendered every Irish claim very unpopular in England". There is a certain amount of truth in this argument but Massy has attributed to it a greater importance than it really merits. The fact that the school opened within twelve months of this tour would seem to indicate that he encountered no outstanding difficulties in collecting funds.

Massy, as part of his propaganda had made it well known that he was personally liable to the builder for the completion of the house, and was prepared to sell his treasured books to meet the debt. "Every one of my books", he promised, "shall be sold rather than suffer my poor people to want God's word". Such a situation never arose.

On 10 July 1844 the school was opened. The total cost of the project amounted to £802-18-5d. Carbery, apparently delighted with the outcome, enclosed the grounds with an iron palisade. Over the chimney place was suspended a list of the subscribers, bordered with flowers flanked by the initials of Carbery and Guillamore, and surmounted by the autograph of her majesty. The following inscription was also prominent: "If thou canst believe all things are possible to him that believeth". It was a joyful occasion for Massy and the realisation of one of his most long cherished aspirations.

In his final years Massy was still adamant in his refusal to recognise the National Board, thereby forfeiting an opportunity of becoming Prebendary of St. Munchin's in Limerick. On 24

May 1849, the Limerick Protestant Young Men's Association (LPYMA) presented Massy with a silver salver and £250 in recognition of his "valuable services". The response to this gesture was vintage Massy -

"I hate the praise of man, when Satan failed to ensnare my soul by the fear of man in 1843 he tried to spread a net for my feet by the praise of man in 1849".

Around this time his sight began to fail him, along with other discomfiting ailments. These hindrances did not deter him from making another visit to England in 1850. His school of orphans was a constant source of delight for him and he gloried in seeing "our little witnesses for Christ. Every time they carry their Bibles and prayer books openly through the streets of Bruff, fills me with fresh hope that the Gospel shall yet be preached in its Romish chapel". At Adelaide School there was now 83 Protestants and 140 Catholics all receiving Scriptural education, and food was provided for those in need of one.

In 1851 the Prebend of Tullabracky (1½ miles north west of Bruff) became vacant and Massy was the popular choice to fill this position. Again he refused, stating that he would rather be a humble minister in Bruff than Prime Minister of England. He had already planned to build a new church at Bruff, and contracted with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to raise £300. Ill-health caught up with him however, and he died in 1852 after a severe bout of dropsy and asthma. "May the love of the supporters of the Limerick Protestant Society never wax cold," was his final sentiment regarding the society he had served so well. Massy was buried in the south aisle of St. Mary's Cathedral in Limerick under a simple marble stone fittingly inscribed - "the Orphan's friend lies below".

Though it is not my intention to justify Massy's behaviour, it seems fair to say that he has been given a very unfavourable 'press' by both local tradition and historian alike. One must assume that many of these distorted portrayals have emanated from a biased sectarian background. Archdeacon Begley's treatment of Massy is rather specious, emphasising his proselytising efforts. However, when looked at in context, this adoption by the priest-historian of an unnecessary moralising attitude is understandable. One feels that Begley was very selective (even defensive) in what he elicited from Massy's memoirs, thereby endorsing his particular viewpoint.

On reading his memoirs - which are at times blatantly biased - his great humanity is much in evidence, and indeed transcends all else. Massy was a man of strong and deep convictions, and lived very much by them. Underlying most of his actions and policies was the belief that Protestantism was best. His last letter dispels any doubt as to this total commitment to the Church of Ireland.

This letter was written on 20 October 1852 from the Crescent, Limerick and addressed to a "Dear Friend". This message contained barely two lines, but the sentiment therein adequately summarises Massy. He wrote as follows:

"Who knows our Dear Father may hold my soul in life till I see Popery drummed out of Ireland."

Further testimony to the sincerity of his efforts are embodied in the statement that he never passed by a priest's house without praying for his conversion.

In a sense Massy's grandiose plans died with him. Perhaps his ambitions were unrealistic, though they were certainly consistent with his fanatic devotion to his beliefs. With the passing ages, Adelaide House suffered declining fortunes losing popularity, and eventually (ironically?) passed into Catholic hands. One has to agree with Begley's conclusive assessment that the decades between 1830 and 1850, witnessed a significant attempt "to convert Bruff to the Protestant faith". Massy's death thus heralded the close of a great and prosperous era for Protestantism in Bruff.

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Thanks to Mr Tom Mitchell B.O.L. Bruff, for putting this rare work at my disposal.

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NOTES

(1) Rev. Dawson Massy, **'Footprints of a Faithful Shepherd' The Memoirs of Godfrey Massy B.A., Vicar of Bruff and Hon. Sec. of the L.P.O.S.** (1855).

The subsequent quotes in this essay are from this source except where otherwise stated.

(2) See, **A History of Bruff and District**, II, pp. 180-183, for an assessment of the cholera epidemic to which Massy referred.

(3) John Begley, **History of the Diocese of Limerick**, (Browne & Nolan, 1938), III, pp. 447-451.

(4) Whether with the disturbances at Bruff in the late 18th. century were in any way associated with the United Irishmen movement is discussed in **A History of Bruff and District**, I, pp. 139-156.

(5) See, **A History of Bruff and District**, I, p. 173, for O'Connell's visit to Bruff and the tumultuous welcome that he was given.

(6) The full title of the Queen Dowager to whom Adelaide House was dedicated ran thus - Queen Dowager Amelia Adelaide Louisa Theresa Carolina. She died in 1849.

(7) This building is to this day called Adelaide House, and is one of the finest buildings in the Bruff district. It is owned by the Barry family. See, **A History of Bruff and District**, II, pp. 304, 306, 319, for reproductions of contemporary sketches of the Church of Ireland, Bruff, the vicarage, and Adelaide House.