REVIEWS

THE WADDING PAPERS 1614-38. Edited by Brendan Jennings, O.F.M. The Stationery Office, Dublin. £3 3s. 0d.


The first of these fine but expensive volumes consists entirely of a presentation of the personal papers of Father Luke Wadding which, as the editor tells us, were removed from the archives of St. Isidore's College, Rome, where he spent the greater part of his days, and deposited in the library of the Franciscan Fathers at Merchant's Quay, Dublin, from which they have been in late years transferred to the House of Studies at Dun Mhuire, Killiney. Some of these papers have been already edited in 1906 by the British Historical Mss. Commission, but, as Father Jennings tells us, "attention was then focussed principally upon the political section, and the ecclesiastical papers were, for the most part, merely calendared." The editor gives us a sketch of Father Wadding's life (with bibliography) from his birth in Waterford in 1588 to his death in Rome in 1657. Over much of that time he played a major part in Irish history and, especially, in ecclesiastical history. Moreover he also became the pre-eminent scholar and writer amongst the many eminent Irish Franciscan authors of his time. His status at Rome was such that Paul V. appointed him to be a Qualificator or member of the Holy Office (the Inquisition); he became the founder of the still subsisting College and Church of the Irish Franciscans of St. Isidore's in 1625 and with the aid of Cardinal Ludovisi of another college for the education of Irish seculars, at which such famous Irishmen as Blessed Oliver Plunket and his friend John Brennan, Archbishop of Cashel, were to study and be ordained through Wadding's aid.

Standing thus in the full current of the Irish Catholic connection with Rome and with the continent, letters and papers came into his possession, which throw a flood of light on the more intimate history of the church in Ireland in this vital period. It must be remembered that it was really in the years 1600/50 that Catholicism in Ireland really got to its feet again after the disasters of the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Elizabeth. In these years the religious houses had been dispersed, and a determined attempt made, with a considerable degree of success, to destroy the rule of the Catholic episcopacy. Moreover discipline amongst the clergy became inevitably lax and, with the changing times, and the changing liturgy, many did not know where they stood. To add to the confusion differences arose amongst the SECULARS and the REGULARS owing to the lack of episcopal direction. The interval between the death of Elizabeth in 1603 and the Cromwellian regime of 1650/60, was not free from persecution; but at least, as may be seen from the papers in this volume, it gave a breathing space during which at least the steel framework of the counter-reformation was set up and the worst
effects of the storm set to rights. Great figures like Peter Lombard, Archbishop of Armagh, and a little later, Florence Conry and the Clareman, Malachy O’Quinelly of Killala and Tuam, set up again the imperishable edifice which has since endured. The period of the Wadding Papers 1614-38 is indeed one of the most vital of the whole period of Irish church history; at the end of the reign of Elizabeth it is not too much to say that Irish Catholicism was poised between survival and disaster; by 1640/50 it was safe and strong enough to survive the Cromwellian storm.

Here in this volume of the Wadding Papers is the inner history of this period told by its leading figures. Many of the papers and letters indeed are in Latin, Italian, and Spanish, with a few in Irish, and a number of the most interesting in a kind of archaic English both as to spelling and phraseology which the reader will find most entertaining. The Latin for the most part is simple and will cause little difficulty even to one who has left his “De Bello Gallico” or his “Aeneid” a long time behind him. Most interesting of all are the intimate and unstudied letters from Ireland to Luke Wadding in Rome; they come from bishops, from vicars, from his own fraternity by what devious ways we will never know. Some are written for the third and fourth time, one indeed complains that the writer has written twenty times to Wadding but heard nothing in answer. There are copies of letters written (under assumed names) by such persons as the valiant Bishop Rothe of Ossory to Thomas Fleming, archbishop of Dublin. There are references to the fact that, even in these troubled times, the Protestant archbishop Ussher (the noted historian) was exchanging historical notes and papers with both Rothe and Wadding and seeking from the latter to abstract “from the Roman Register” when the palls for the four archbishops first came to Ireland in Malachy’s time.”

Some of Wadding’s correspondents walk straight out of the book as men of flesh and blood whom we can recognise for such. Patrick Comerford, bishop of Waterford, writing under the name of William Browne in 1630 reminds Wadding of one of his brethren in Ireland who was the occasion of some trouble. “As for that Gooseman who gaggles so much and stirs soe many coales, I marvail but that you have him distered” (i.e. sent away to a far place) “ad Garmantos et Indos, or to Angola, there to fare upon goosegoose.” He goes on to reminiscence about St. Isidore’s. “I am glad the altar is so well polished and the garden soe well fitted. I pray you by the fittest messenger send me a dish of your belle scarole or your tender broccoli, and I will send you a return by the same messenger, a dish of our sweete shamrogs.” He does not spare his own countrymen. “This, your native soil is come to a great ebb of poverty and desolation, neere half the towne ruinous, not able to make eight hundred men, whereas wee saw the year before the plag(u)e eighty hundred men march Whitsonne Tuesday. To all the towne doe not belong more than two small barcks. I fear that our times deserve all this seurgg, such is the envie, discord, detraction, and pride amongeth us.”

As a quarry for the local historian this large volume of 700 pages can hardly be surpassed. The extract given above as to the state of Waterford in 1630 will give an indication. The bishop of Ferns, for instance, emerges as a distinct personality. Wadding had sent him some extracts for the historian Dr. Rothe of Ossory. As often happened in like case before and since he lost or did not deliver them. “If any such you gave me I find them not amongst my papers but a little note of few lines . . . wherefore ye shall be pleased to take ye pains again if you think ye mattere deserveth it for ye good man’s satisfaction.” Ferns was no historian and writes of Geoffrey Keatinge “one Dr. Keatinge laboureth
much, as I heare say, in compiling Irish notes towards a history in Irish. Ye man is very studious and yet I fear yt if his work come eve to light, it will need an amendement of ill warranted narrations. I have no interest in ye man, for I never saw him, for he dwelleth in Mounster.” Praise be that Keatinge survived this damning with faint praise.

As one would expect from a historian of Father Brendan’s competence, the presentation is most accurate and complete, and the laborious work of proof reading and index making has been most accurately accomplished. Like almost everything issued from the Stationery Office the binding is poor and the price is such that it puts the work out of the reach of everyone who has not access to a well stocked library. Surely this is a short-sighted policy. If this were issued at £1 it would bring in more money than it ever can at three times that figure.

The Commemorative Volume consists of twelve papers by leading scholars, lay and clerical, on various aspects of Father Wadding’s life and times; these are supplemented by extracts by Father Cathaldus Giblin, O.F.M., from the “Processus Datariae” in the Roman archives dealing with the appointment of Irish bishops in the 17th century. The essayists include Dr. Dudley Edwards on “Irish Catholics and the Puritan Revolution”; Father Gwynn, S.J., on the relations between Father Brendan O’Connor, O.F.M., the transcriber of the Annals of Roscrea, and the Protestant Archbishop Ussher; Father Canice Mooney on the question of Wadding’s ‘patriotism’ in the 17th century connotation of the word. Father O’Flach of Armagh has a scholarly paper on Archbishop Edmund O’Reilly, and Fr. Benignus Millett a most valuable guide to the material for a biography of Luke Wadding. Perhaps the most entertaining item is Mr. Wall’s “Bards and Bruodin.” In this he discusses the perhaps unedifying, but none the less intriguing warfare waged on paper in the Wadding period between Anthony Bruodin (or Mac Brody), O.F.M., of Dunogan and Cill Caodhe (Ruan), Co. Clare, on the one hand and the Anglo-Irish Father Thomas Carew of Mobarnan, Tipperary. Bruodin was lecturer and professor at Prague and other places while at the same time Carew was chaplain to Walter Butler of Ballinakill, Roscrea, in the Austrian Imperial armies. Carew wrote what he called a ‘Lyra’ or history of Ireland written from the Anglo-Irish or Norman standpoint. It was attacked by Bruodin amongst others in another publication and what can only be described as a “slanging match” in print followed between them over a number of years. While this is entertaining of itself as all slanging matches must be in one degree or another, it is valuable to the student as throwing light on the veracity to be attached to the writings of some of the bardic families and, in particular, to Bruodin’s own “Propugnaeulum Catholicee Veritas” so often quoted for the period as contemporary history. Carew waxes almost lyrical on Bruodin’s powers of invention. Father Jennings’ verdict, “Let us allow him the credit of being a first class propagandist” seems just. Whether we are to evaluate such earlier texts as MacCraith’s “Cathreim” in the same way is a matter of interest.

Carew’s attacks on the bards and in particular the Bruodins is devastating. Bruodin had boasted of the palatial residence and large possessions of his family as Ollamhs to the Uí Briain. Carew describes them as having a herd of cattle and a few cows ‘pastured on the nearby hills,’ and their house as a cabin of light material, thatched with straw, and having its lintels smeared with cow dung, concluding “saltem meo tempore, quando fui in Tuamundia sic apparuit Bruodinorum locus.” The whole is a diverting essay and very valuable for its sidelights in particular.

In this work again the local historian will find a most useful quarry. The
extracts from the *Processus Datariae* for example solve a debateable problem in Killaloe history, viz. the birthplace of archbishop Malachy O'Quaely. Here we have an affidavit of Father Anthony Hickey, O.F.M., Wadding's friend, that he was born at "Drina" in the diocese of Killaloe and was of the same age as Father Anthony, who played with him as a child near his father's home. This may be confidently identified as the modern "Drimna" (O.S.) in the parish of Kilrush—always pronounced "Drina." There is information also on the O'Molony bishops of Killaloe and Limerick. The general reader will find this volume more readable than the other, though of its nature, not so valuable to the historian. Again however, it is to be regretted that neither the paper nor the binding is commensurate with the price. Cannot Irish publishers follow their English confreres and make use of a firm which specialises in binding?

D. F. G.