

AN IRISH COUNTER-REFORMATION BISHOP: JOHN ROCHE

X

The dispute between the diocesan and regular clergy was the principal element in the problems of the transition-stage of the reorganization of the pastoral ministry in Ireland. It was of course by no means the only problem—both diocesan and regular clergy had no shortage of problems within their own ranks—but it was inclined to influence every other difficulty. There is little doubt that the Congregation of Propaganda, and in particular its secretary, Mgr. Ingoli, wished to replace the missionary regime by a diocesan episcopate in countries like Ireland. There were many reasons, however, to prevent the transition being a simple one. The basic difficulty was that the canon law envisaged bishops as being much freer to function than they could hope to be in Ireland, where the Catholic religion was only tolerated by connivance, a situation which John Roche and other bishops were content to accept as the best they could hope for. In these circumstances the question “In so far as the bishop is impeded in his functions, is there not legitimate scope for missionary faculties?” had some point. On the more practical level, at Rome, where the decisions had to be taken, there was great difficulty and delay in getting news from Ireland, even greater difficulty in assessing the reliability of what news did arrive, much of which was certainly coloured by self-interest. Even when Propaganda had made its decision, this decision was frequently challenged, at times successfully, by older-established institutions, notably the Datary and the Holy Office. One might indeed get the impression that these two bodies were opposed to establishing a diocesan episcopate in Ireland, but it may be nearer the truth to say that they resented the encroachments of Propaganda and because of this came to resist its policies. In consequence there were long-drawn-out negotiations between many groups, which had certainly not reached any firm conclusion by the time Bishop Roche died in 1636, nor even by the outbreak of war in 1641.

In August 1626 the Holy Office had issued new regulations for the Church in Ireland. As already noted, no copy of these regulations is known to exist, but it is clear that the restrictions they imposed

on the faculties of the regular clergy were not accepted without protest. The regulars argued that these decrees had been drawn up without their point of view being heard; and that in any case they were not bound to observe them until they had received formal notification from their own religious superiors. The practical result, Roche reported to Propaganda shortly after his return to Ireland,¹ was that the decrees of 1626 were not being observed. It was six months before Roche's letters came to the notice of Propaganda, which could only admonish the Irish local religious superiors of their duty to obey;² an admonition which the bishop's earlier letters suggested would not be very effective.

In Ireland, the bishops had been in negotiation with the regulars in the matter of the 1626 decrees, but progress seems to have been very slow.³ The return of Bishop John Roche to Ireland may have been one of the reasons leading to a meeting of bishops in Kilkenny which was held from 24 to 27 August 1629, attended by the archbishops of Dublin and Cashel and the bishops of Ossory, Cork and Cloyne, Waterford and Ferns. It may be assumed that the decisions taken at this meeting followed closely the Holy Office decrees of 1626, especially as John Roche had been at pains to bring with him from Rome an authenticated copy, no doubt with some idea of formal promulgation.

The bishops at Kilkenny decreed first of all that the Tridentine legislation was to be observed in Ireland, except the marriage-decree, which required special promulgation, and such regulations as clearly could not be observed under Irish conditions, for example the wearing of the clerical dress and tonsure, or the erection of a diocesan seminary. Fifteen decrees follow, directed to more specifically Irish problems.⁴ The first lays down regulations for the Lenten fast; the second declares that orders are to be conferred sparingly, and primarily with the needs of the pastoral mission in mind. Regulars are to be ordained by their *diocesanus proprius* as defined by law. Great care is demanded in issuing commendations to ecclesiastics setting out abroad, for many of these, the bishops say bluntly, are *vagi* who are no credit to the country. In the third decree, the bishops bind themselves, in view of the recent restrictions on missionary faculties, not to delegate any faculty for use outside their own dioceses, except with the permission of the local Ordinary.

¹ Roche to Ingoli, 1 December 1629, APF, Scrittura Antiche, vol. 294, f. 315; same to same, 9 February 1630, *ibid.*, vol. 132, f. 288.

² APF, Acta, vol. 7, f. 84, no. 50, 15 July 1630.

³ Cf. Roche to Ludovisi, 20 July 1631, Moran, *Spicil. Ossor.*, vol. I, p. 173.

⁴ Text in APF, Scrittura Antiche, vol. 294, ff. 269 ff., printed in Moran, *History of the Catholic Archbishops of Dublin*, pp. 434-6.

The fourth lays down that each bishop shall put the new regulations in force in his diocese as peaceably and as quietly as he can, making it clear, however, that any pastoral office occupied by a religious without the bishop's authority is a concession to the evils of the time, and can claim no right from any law or privilege known to the bishops. Religious with the care of souls are to be subject to the bishop's visitation, and correction where necessary, even in those parishes formerly inappropriate to monasteries.¹

The fifth decree defines the "missionaries" whose faculties have been restricted by the Holy Office decree—they are all priests and prelates below the rank of bishop. Here, the bishops certainly had the Cistercian abbots in mind, as also in the following decree, which states that a transcript of a Roman mandate witnessed by a public notary is admissible as evidence in disputes concerning benefices or lesser matters, but not for the consecration of a bishop or the blessing of an abbot. The seventh urges metropolitans to be very careful in admitting appeals against their suffragans. The eighth adopts a law already in force in the province of Armagh, reserving to the bishop the right to decide in cases where a marriage-dispensation is sought, or a dispensation to retain ecclesiastical property, and invoking penalties on parish priests who flout his rights in this matter. The ninth, carefully worded, states that the houses in which religious live in Ireland do not enjoy the stability which would enable them to be recognised as completely exempt religious foundations. The tenth attempts to regulate the thorny problem of the *ius sepulturae* rather decidedly in favour of the parochial clergy, logically, if the previous decree be admitted, denying the existence in Ireland of a fully exempt place. As well, it raises the issue of funeral offerings, but goes no further in a solution than a recommendation that where the practice exists the bishops and the regular clergy should reach a fair agreement. In the eleventh, the bishops agree to be very slow in allowing the establishment of convents of female religious, in view of the difficulty of securing an adequate endowment. The twelfth briefly states that the bishops are not to make use of the faculties they possess *dispensandi cum spuriis presbyterorum*; the thirteenth calls attention to existing legislation concerning pious bequests; the fourteenth makes provision for continued co-operation with the vicars-apostolic in England and Holland, by reason of the many problems these countries share with Ireland; while the final paragraph expresses a wish that a

¹ A marginal note adds: "D. Archiepus. Dublinen. [Patrick Fleming, O.F.M.] suspendit iudicium suum super hoc articulo quoad tempus, scilicet donec de eodem melius considerarit".

meeting similar to the one just concluded should be held every year, or every two years at most.

The bishops were not anxious to describe this meeting as a synod, for a synod would be expected to issue decrees, and decrees could be challenged. The meeting, which was attended by two archbishops and some bishops from both provinces, could hardly be brought under any of the regular synodal groupings; but the regular clergy, who had naturally been watching the meeting with interest, were not inclined to accept this as a sufficient reason for no decrees being issued. The Roman authorities were soon enquiring for a copy of the decisions which had been taken at the meeting,¹ and on 3 April 1632 a special committee of five cardinals was established to discuss these decisions and the objections raised by the regular clergy.²

The recommendations of the special commission led the Congregation of Propaganda to attempt to draw up a kind of basic canon-law for the Church in Ireland. The laws proposed, and the modifications introduced after various discussions, are to be found in the *Acta* of Propaganda containing the minutes of the meetings of 16 March 1633, 11 July 1633, 9 October 1633, 16 December 1633, 11 October 1634 and 5 December 1634. From the minutes of the meetings alone it is possible to form a good idea of the care and thoroughness with which the questions were discussed. It is clear that the over-riding consideration is to bring the discipline of the Church in Ireland into line with that of the universal Church. The difficulties appear clearly also; the number of people who have to be consulted—at every turn the Holy Office and the Datary, who do not appear to be over co-operative; the unexpected twists and quirks in the Irish scene, very unexpected to these Italian ecclesiastics—just when they expect no difficulty it suddenly emerges that because of such-and-such circumstances such-and-such modifications must be introduced in Ireland, which means that the law cannot be applied exactly, which means in turn, only too often, a scramble to avail of the most which can be made of the anomaly. In spite of the difficulties, one has to admire the expeditiousness and efficiency of the Congregation. The first four meetings, spread over nine months, produce a set of proposals sufficiently final to be circulated to Irish bishops and other ecclesiastics.

At Rome, the proposals were submitted to a group representing the Irish clergy, regular and secular. The meeting seems to have

¹ Cf. Roche to Ludovisi, 20 July 1631, Moran, *Spicil. Ossor.*, vol. I, p. 173.

² APF, *Acta*, vol. 8, f. 51, no. 3, 3 April 1632; Propaganda to Roche, 10 April 1632, APF, *Lettere*, vol. 12, f. 46v.

been an amicable one;¹ at any rate all agreed in making certain recommendations to Propaganda, which seem judicious and reasonable. The Irish bishops were also consulted. Propaganda sent a copy of its draft decrees to the metropolitans to be communicated to their suffragans.² At the end of February 1635 John Roche received from Rome notification of this decision, but as the weeks went by and no word came from his metropolitan his suspicions were aroused, for relations between the Franciscan Archbishop Fleming and the bishops of Ossory and Ferns had never been over-cordial and were not tending to improve, especially by reason of the disputes in Dublin and certain steps taken by the bishop of Ossory in regard to the religious in his diocese. Matters were quieter in the diocese of Ferns, partly no doubt because the bishop had a temperament somewhat milder than his brother in Ossory, but there could be no doubt that the two stood together.³ John Roche was prepared to admit that Archbishop Fleming might not have received the Propaganda decrees sent to him from Rome—he knew only too well that documents were constantly being lost in transit⁴—but when he finally received them from the archbishop in September 1635 his suspicions that they had been deliberately held up in Dublin grew firmer, for by the end of March he had received a copy unofficially from a friend in Rome. On 4 April he sent to Propaganda a lengthy comment on the proposed legislation.⁵

The copy of the decrees which Roche received from Rome in March 1635 does not correspond exactly with any redaction to be found in the *Acta* of Propaganda. Nevertheless, it does contain the main decrees, and no tendentiousness is apparent in selections or omissions. His comments simply register agreement in most cases, for the proposed legislation to a large extent reflected his own views

¹ They met at St. Isidore's, and communicated their findings to Propaganda on 9 October 1634. Their report is in APF, *Scrittura Antiche*, vol. 14, ff. 87 ff, printed in *Archivium Hibernicum*, vol. XII, pp. 197-8. It is reproduced in APF, *Acta*, vol. 10, ff. 131 ff, dated 11 October 1634, i.e., the day the Congregation discussed it. The regulars were represented by Dominic de Burgo, O.P., and Luke Wadding, Anthony Hickey and "Franciscus Maria" [Tully], Franciscans. The representatives of the bishops—"diversorum episcoporum agentes"—were two secular priests, "domini Edmundus et Conaldus". "Dominus Conaldus" is almost certainly Daniel O'Connell, who had succeeded, in some measure at least, to the unsuccessful Michael Cantwell. "Edmundus" is Edmund O'Dwyer, who gradually became general agent of the Irish bishops. See archbishop of Cashel to Wadding, 17 November 1631, *Wadding papers*, p. 613, Rothe to Ingoli, 12 July 1636, APF, *Scrittura Antiche*, vol. 106, f. 51r, printed in Moran, *Spicil. Ossor.*, vol. I, pp. 211-2.

² Propaganda to Roche, 5 August 1634, APF, *Lettere*, vol. 14, f. 74r.

³ Cf., e.g., Roche to Wadding, 19 July 1631, *Wadding papers*, p. 542; Rothe to Wadding, 20 July 1631, *ibid.*, p. 549; Roche to Propaganda, 18 November 1633, Moran, *Spicil. Ossor.*, vol. I, p. 190.

⁴ Roche to Propaganda, 4 April 1635, APF, *Scrittura Antiche*, vol. 14, f. 133.

⁵ APF, *Scrittura Antiche*, vol. 14, ff. 133 ff.; and cf. Roche to Propaganda, 20 October 1635, *ibid.*, vol. 135, f. 193r, printed in Moran, *Spicil. Ossor.*, vol. I, p. 204.

on how the Irish pastoral mission should be reorganized; his own report in 1625, as has been seen, had been an important factor in the beginnings of the attempted reorganization. He agreed wholeheartedly with the proposal that the Irish Church should be, as far as possible, organized *normally*, that is to say, in accordance with the Tridentine legislation; in particular, that the exemption of religious should take cognisance of the existence of a diocesan episcopate in Ireland.¹ In regard to the proposal to limit the number of bishops in Ireland to eighteen—an archbishop and three bishops in the two smaller provinces, and an archbishop and four bishops in the two larger ones—he repeated an opinion he had already given, namely, that eighteen bishops were too many; with an unsophisticated people, “*sola rara sunt pulchra*”.² He agreed in general with the proposal that vicars-apostolic be abolished—there were occasions when they had caused trouble by refusing to submit to the metropolitan’s jurisdiction on the grounds that they were delegates of the Holy See—and that the dioceses which had no bishop should be granted *in commendam* to a neighbouring bishop to be administered through a vicar-general,³ but he counselled that the change should be made quietly, and that the vicars-apostolic, who had much good work to their credit, should be replaced by degrees as vacancies occurred by death or by promotion to the episcopate.⁴ He gave unqualified approval to the remaining three degrees concerning bishops. The first imposed the Tridentine law concerning diocesan visitation and the holding of provincial synods; only when these cannot be held may the metropolitan visit the province, having first had recourse to the Holy See for faculties, and indicating the reason why a provincial synod cannot be held.⁵ He approved also of the proposal that the admission of appeals by metropolitans against their suffragans should be strictly in accordance with the terms of the legislation of Clement VIII;⁶ and finally he commented “*bene et benigne indultum est*” on the proposal that for a period of twenty-five years the Irish bishops should be dis-

¹ APF, *Scrittura Antiche*, vol. 14, f. 134v.

² Roche to Ingoli, 1 December 1629, APF, *Scrittura Antiche*, vol. 294, f. 318; and cf. same to same, 4 April 1635, *ibid.*, vol. 14, f. 134; APF, *Acta*, vol. 7, f. 84, no. 50, 15 June 1630.

³ APF, *Scrittura Antiche*, vol. 14, f. 134.

⁴ *Ibid.*, and cf. Roche to Ingoli, 15 November 1634, APF, *Scrittura Antiche*, vol. 105, f. 480, printed in Moran, *Spicil. Ossor.*, vol. I, p. 198.

⁵ APF, *Scrittura Antiche*, vol. 14, f. 134v. For the Tridentine legislation, see especially sess. XXIV, cap. 2 de reform. In 1631 Roche had found himself a delegate of the Holy See in protecting the bishop of Killaloe against his metropolitan—*Wadding papers*, pp. 526-9.

⁶ *Archiepiscopalis auctoritas*, 16 October 1600.

pensed from their *ad limina* visits or allowed to make them through a procurator *in curia*.¹

The next set of decrees concerned the regular clergy. To the proposal that religious superiors should be warned to control immoderate questing, he replied that he did not believe that either the bishops or the religious superiors could do anything effective; the only effective control was a reduction in the strength of the regular clergy.² Next came detailed regulations governing the pastoral mission—the general law was to be applied where regulars were appointed by bishops *ob defectum sacerdotum*, or where they ministered in parishes to which regulars had the right of nomination; a clause was to be added in any Roman missionary faculties issued to regulars safeguarding the pastoral rights of bishops and parish priests. Roche contented himself with the comment that it would be difficult to get the Cistercians to observe this, as they claimed complete exemption; he did not venture further into the legal labyrinth arising from the conditions under which the clergy ministered in Ireland.³ He approved of the decree warning religious superiors to see that their subjects observed the *clausura* where possible, but commented that the superiors had little real control and had to indulge their subjects for fear of apostacy. He approved too of the proposal to tighten discipline in the novitiates. Novitiates in Ireland, he felt, should be closed, for they could not be properly maintained, and there should be some limitation on the admission of Irish candidates to novitiates abroad; otherwise the government might well decide on a mass-expulsion of the Catholic clergy from Ireland. It was necessary, he felt, to insist frequently on the law forbidding regulars to preach in a diocese without the permission of the Ordinary, for it was widely ignored. The balance of the man appears in his comment on two further proposals—first, to check a tendency of the regulars to attach themselves to the wealthy and neglect the poor. The charge, he commented, is exaggerated; it is not a matter of such common occurrence as to be properly met by a law. Secondly, in reply to a proposal to warn the regulars against attacking the bishops in sermons, he said that while such attacks were admittedly frequent in private conversation, and something should be done to check them, he did not know of any being made in sermons. He must have been aware, of course, that the dispute in Dublin had begun in precisely this way. That, however, was eight years ago. The dispute was now quiescent, and there seemed

¹ APF, *Scrittura Antiche*, vol. 14, f. 134 rv.

² *Ibid.*, f. 134v. A later decree forbade the Cistercians to quest with a relic of the True Cross. Roche comments that the ordinaries have already put a stop to this.

³ For what follows see APF *Scrittura Antiche*, vol. 14, ff. 134v-135v.

to be general agreement to do nothing which might threaten to revive it.

Finally, there were four decrees concerning the clergy in general. The first was a warning to bishops and religious superiors to remove the abuse of the clergy receiving payment on the occasion of the administration of the sacraments. It illustrates the difficulty the Roman authorities must have had in grasping the full implications of the problems facing the support of the ministers of the Church in a country where all endowments had been confiscated, where the Church could not legally acquire property, and where in consequence the clergy depended on the offerings of the people. It is a calumny, Roche comments, to say that the sacraments are withheld unless a payment is made. He admits that they are withheld occasionally, with the consent of the Ordinary, from wealthy people who refuse to contribute to the upkeep of the priest. They are never withheld from the poor.

Two further decrees, restraining the clergy from frequenting taverns and indulging immoderately in festivities on patron days he approved of, adding to the second the wry comment that the depressed state of the country in recent years was a more effective prohibition than any law. The last regulation, governing the *ius funerandi*, raised a particularly complex issue, all the more disputed because of its financial implications. The proposal was, again, to apply the general law. Roche outlined the difficulties. The regulars claimed that if a person had expressed a wish to be buried in the regular habit they had the right to conduct the funeral service even if it had to be held in the house of the deceased. The seculars claimed that no such right was conferred. The house was a non-exempt place, where by law the seculars had precedence. The regulars retorted that were it not for the laws against religion the service in question would be held in an exempt place, and that the penal laws must not be allowed to work to their disadvantage. The seculars replied by a *tu quoque*, insisting that the penal laws must not be used by the regulars as a pretext to set up quasi-exempt places anywhere and everywhere. The puzzled officials of Propaganda submitted the riddle to the Congregation of the Council. At that stage I lost track of it in the Vatican archives. In fact, no strictly legal solution was possible; it is a very good example of the difficulty of applying the general legislation in the conditions in Ireland.

All in all, however, the officials of Propaganda did a good job; the real difficulty was to enforce their legislation. The obstacles were divided interests in Rome, the bad communications with distant Ireland, the divided interests there, divisions which often

reflected problems which the letter of the law could not solve, as it was not designed for a country where Catholicism existed on sufferance. The answers could only be hammered out by time, and the problems had certainly not been solved when John Roche died in 1636, nor indeed when catastrophes which again radically changed their terms struck Ireland after 1641.

XI

John Roche's life, so much of which had been spent in diplomatic circles in the European capitals, ended among his own people in the diocese of Ferns, and his story may be aptly closed with an account of diocesan administration during the seven years of his episcopate. Here too the account has to be pieced together from scattered sources of information. There is nothing like a continuous record of the bishop's administration of his diocese. In all probability, for prudential reasons, no such record was ever kept.¹ The freedom enjoyed by a Catholic bishop was precarious enough to discourage putting too much on paper, and any diocesan records which may have survived were almost certainly destroyed in the Cromwellian sack of Wexford. In consequence, our main source must be once again the bishop's Roman correspondence.

John Roche lived in Wexford town—another indication of the truth of a suggestion already made, namely that his own family was either extinct or in obscurity, victims of the constant pressure kept up by the law against Catholics of wealth or position.² In any case, the bishop had to seek hospitality from a family in Wexford. Which family is indicated by the signature "J. R. Turner" to so many of his letters. The initials, "J. R.", made it clear to the initiated that the writer was the bishop, John Roche; while to the uninitiated "J. R. Turner" indicated only the stranger who lived with the Turner family in Wexford and was believed to be a cousin who had spent most of his life abroad.³ It might seem an elaborately useless camouflage in a town no larger than Wexford, but its value can be seen on an occasion such as the visit of Justice Cressy to

¹ For instance, in the only letter from Bishop Roche to a diocesan priest known to survive, the references he makes to the progress of his diocesan visitation are so enigmatically set down that if the letter went astray little could be deduced from it except that the author was on a trip in the country. A copy of this letter is preserved in the Franciscan archives, Dún Mhuire, Killiney, printed in *Archivium Hibernicum*, vol. XV, p. 14.

² See *Irish Theological Quarterly*, April 1958, p. 113, note 2.

³ As appears also from the letter referred to above, note 1. It is addressed to Father Thomas Turner, and begins "Cognate mi Thoma"—*Archivium Hibernicum*, vol. XV, p. 14.

Wexford in 1633. Cressy's letter to Strafford has often been quoted, but it remains interesting enough to give at some length in the present context. It shows how precarious was the toleration enjoyed by the Catholic Church, but it shows also how effectively the bishop could be protected by the willingness of the influential Catholics to close ranks whenever government officials became too curious:

The gaols here are in a manner empty, and the complaints few . . ., but this I find, that this county, which doth contain the most ancient English plantators, and were lately the most forward professors of the reformed Christian religion in the kingdom, by the pernicious confluence of priests, who have raised amongst them a Romish Hierarchy of Bishops, Commissaries, Vicars General, and Parochial Priests of their own, to the great derogation of his Majesty's royal power, and to the establishing of a Foreign State and Jurisdiction in all causes Ecclesiastical, are now in a sort become principally Romish and Popish; and so, as themselves confess do even groan under the Burden, I mean the secular and common people.

Now, my Lord, this being directly against the Laws established, not invading only, but even abrogating H.M.'s jurisdiction and princely Government over them of his States of this his kingdom of Ireland; I held myself bound, not only by my oath as a Judge, and as a servant to the King, but even by my allegiance, to oppose this with all the force and strength that my place could afford, and therefore in my charge unto the Jury did declare unto them the quality and fearful consequences thereof, and, as far as I could, did endeavour to anticipate and prevent the policy of their Priests, absolutions from Perjury, and wilful breach of their Oaths; but, I fear, all in vain; for, they are all Recusants, not one Protestant amongst them.

I shall this day press them to find their Bishop of Fernes here placed amongst them by the Pope's authority: what they will do, I shall hereafter relate unto your lordship.

In the mean time I have been privately solicited by one of their sect, a professor of law, to look to myself, a man in years, likely ere long to lay my bones amongst them; and tendered me a priest, to confer with for a preparation; I told him, if he would bring me a beneficed priest, or one that had spiritual jurisdiction amongst them, I would talk to him, but upon this, and my declaration of my distaste for his counsel, we parted . . .¹

The Turner family was long established in Wexford. The name is to be found in records of the town back as far as the fourteenth century at least, but the family's rise to real wealth and prominence seems to be closely connected with the looting of the monasteries and other ecclesiastical property in Tudor times. The Turners joined in this with no twinges of conscience, and they got a full

¹ Printed, from Strafford's letters, in Hore, *Wexford*, pp. 245-6.

share of the spoils.¹ In the early seventeenth century they gave two M.P.s to the town, John (1613) and Patrick (1634), and three mayors, John (1609), Patrick (1626) and Walter (1646). They also gave a priest to the diocese, Thomas, who died in 1645, and this, together with their receiving the bishop into their household, is a good indication of the change which had come over the Catholicism of the Turner family since the reformation. The changed quality of their Catholicism was in no way unique in Wexford. Another English visitor reported in 1635:

The most of the women wear a crucifix tied on a black necklace hanging betwixt their breasts. It seems they are not ashamed of their religion, nor desire to conceal themselves; and indeed in this town are many papists. The present Mayor, Mr. Mark Chever, attended the judges to the church door, and so did the sheriff of the shire, both of which left them there and went to Mass, which is here tolerated and publicly resorted unto in two or three houses in this town, as appeared by that slender congregation at Church where the judges were.²

The bishop then could depend on the loyalty of his Catholic people, who maintained him and kept the rather open secret of his presence from those that might make trouble. It was, nevertheless, a half-hunted life, and in spite of the insinuations of Justice Cressy and others there was no material gain to be had from it. There was no material gain because the Irish Catholics, in the towns especially, were feeling the pinch of a government policy increasingly directed at Catholic wealth. "For God is my witness", Roche wrote to Wadding,³ "since my coming to the land, in this twelvemonth my charge is not worth me twenty crowns, and yet since I left Paris I have spent of mine own above hundred pound". From Wadding too he enquired anxiously about a "little pension" which he had been receiving from Spain and which for some reason or other had been held up.⁴ Materially, John Roche was not the gainer by coming to an Irish bishopric. Neither was he the gainer in peace of mind, surrounded by quarrelling ecclesiastics, whose quarrels came home to him especially in the career of his brother, Matthew Roche, vicar-apostolic of Leighlin.⁵ The English-speaking communities of

¹ Cf., e.g., Hore, *Wexford*, pp. 160 ff., 170 ff., 208 ff.; *Enniscorthy*, pp. 231 ff., 245 ff.

² "Diary of Sir William Brereton", printed in Hore, *Wexford*, p. 248.

³ Cf. Cressy to Strafford, cit., and Roche's comments (with figures) on the often-repeated assertions of the government and Established Church that Catholic bishops and priests were doing well for themselves, Roche to Wadding, 26 May 1630, *Wadding papers*, p. 370.

⁴ Roche to Wadding, January 1630, 26 May 1630, *Wadding papers*, pp. 333, 370.

⁵ See *Irish Theological Quarterly*, January 1958, pp. 18-20.

the Irish towns had retained their faith, they had indeed deepened and strengthened it, but they were increasingly harrassed by the government, which had failed in its hopes of turning them into centres of native Protestantism in Ireland, and was determined that the towns should pay for their resistance. The 1630s were anxious years during which people came to realize that they must assert their rights or be slowly beggared, and there are many indications that Bishop Roche, whose own family had been pushed under in the unrelenting struggle, shared very fully the anxieties of his people.¹

These problems were common to all the Irish towns. They were felt too in the other considerable town of the diocese of Ferns, the bishop's native New Ross. Here the mood of depression may have contributed to an old problem coming under discussion again. In New Ross, it had long been a conviction that the town's misfortunes could be traced to "the friars' curse", an event of such hoary antiquity in their history that it seems impossible to recover all the details with certainty. The "curse" seems to have been incurred as early as the thirteenth century, when the townspeople killed some members of a community of Crutched Friars—one account says they burnt the whole community alive in their house—in consequence of crimes the friars had committed—again, the details of the crimes vary in different accounts. There is general agreement, however, that the town was put under papal interdict and subjected to "the friars' curse", which was worse than the interdict, which could be got rid of by repentance and a legal process. There was, in any case, a firm conviction that the town had been in decline since it incurred the friars' curse in the thirteenth century. Early in the fifteenth century the then bishop of Ferns, Robert Whitty, had petitioned Pope Eugene IV to grant absolution. The petition was granted, and the town formally absolved by the bishop in the church of St. Mary on 6 February 1436.²

The absolution did not seem to improve the fortunes of New Ross very much. In 1611 it is described as "a poor, ruined, town, out of trade, but one of the best harbours for shipping in the kingdom".³ The depression of the 1630s, and the presence of a bishop who was a native of the town and influential in Rome, were probably the two factors which had most to do with bringing the matter up

¹ See especially his letter to Propaganda, 4 May 1631, APF, Scrittura Antiche, vol. 294, f. 178, which is obviously written in a mood of deep depression.

² The papal bull, with a note that it has been executed on this date, was copied by Sir James Ware. The copy is now in the B.M. Add. MSS., from which it is printed in Hore, *New Ross*, pp. 226-7.

³ Carew MSS., Lambeth, vol. 629, p. 62.

again. On 25 February 1632 Roche wrote to Propaganda asking for a papal absolution.¹ The matter was considered by the Congregation at a meeting on 24 July,² and on 14 August the secretary was able to write saying that the Pope had approved the request and that a brief empowering him to absolve the town from the censure would shortly be sent to the bishop.³ The brief, dated 7 September,⁴ was sent by the secretary of Propaganda ten days later.⁵ It must, unfortunately, be added that this second absolution does not seem to have been any more effective in removing the "friars' curse". At any rate, a few years later New Ross suffered one of the greatest calamities in its history, a disastrous fire which burnt down most of the town, including the great church of St. Mary.⁶

In the years of John Roche's episcopate, power and property were still almost altogether in Catholic hands in the southern, English-speaking baronies of Co. Wexford. Though government pressure was steady, there were few defections from Catholicism among the Old-English. New English Protestant landowners were equally few. The great transfer of property in "English Wexford" came only with the Cromwellian confiscation, which at one blow destroyed a society of small country gentry closely linked with the town merchants, which had not been substantially changed since the Norman conquest.⁷

Conditions were much more complicated in the northern, Irish-speaking baronies, since the extensive plantation there in the reign of James I. As a result of this plantation, about half the land had passed into the hands of the New English. There were, however,

¹ Roche to Ingoli, 25 February 1632, APF, Scrittura Antiche, vol. 150, f. 319r, printed in Moran, *History of the Catholic Archbishops of Dublin*, pp. 438-9; Roche to the Cardinals of Propaganda, 25 February 1632, *ibid.*, vol. 150, f. 320r, printed in Moran, *Spicil. Ossor.*, vol. I, pp. 173-4.

² APF, Acta, vol. 8, f. 85, no. 4, 24 July 1632.

³ APF, Lettere, vol. 12, f. 84v.

⁴ AV, Secretariate of Briefs, vol. 790, f. 6.

⁵ APF, Lettere, vol. 12, f. 106v.

⁶ Cf. Hore, *New Ross*, p. 294.

⁷ The pattern of pre-Cromwellian society appears very clearly in detail in the *Civil Survey (Wexford)*, Dublin, Stationery Office, 1953). Beyond the general solid Catholicism of the people, there is little evidence of their relations with Bishop Roche apart from two letters in the *Wadding papers* (Roche to Wadding, 7 February 1630, pp. 337-8, and 26 May 1630, pp. 370-1). Both deal with a marriage-dispensation for the heir of Viscount Mountgarret, and afford an interesting sidelight on the close relations between an Anglo-Irish aristocratic Catholic family and two English Catholic families, one in England, one (Castlehaven-Audley) settled in Ireland. The Edmund Butler whose marriage-affairs are discussed in these letters, later the fourth Viscount Mountgarret, married Dorothea Touchet, second daughter of the earl of Castlehaven. It might be noted that Edmund's mother, first wife of Richard Butler, third Viscount Mountgarret, was Margaret, eldest daughter of Hugh O'Neill, earl of Tyrone.

further complications. There were Catholic recusants among the New English planters,¹ and there were some defections to Protestantism among the native Irish landowners, who had been subjected to severer pressures than the English-speaking Catholics of the south.² The partly dispossessed Catholics in the north of the diocese, almost altogether Irish-speaking, were in many ways a society with which the bishop had few natural affinities—it will be remembered that at the time of his appointment an objection had been raised that he knew no Irish, which would be a grave handicap to his ministry in parts of the diocese.³ In spite of this handicap, however, the bishop extended his care to the Irish-speaking territory. He did this partly by personal visitation,⁴ but to a considerable extent he relied on the help of Daniel O'Brien,⁵ a priest who had been educated at Compostella, where he had developed such an admiration for all things Spanish that he was ever afterwards known as Donal Spáinneach to his people in north Wexford, among whom he soon became a much-venerated figure. His name occurs in a list of diocesan priests in 1622;⁶ in 1632 Bishop Roche appointed him archdeacon,⁷ and he became dean of the diocese in 1645.⁸ He remained at his post after the Cromwellian conquest,⁹ and was put to death at Wexford on Easter Saturday, 14 April 1655, on the charge of being a priest.¹⁰

In his report to Propaganda in 1629 Roche states that there are

¹ Especially Sir George Calvert, Lord Baltimore, "of late principal secretary to King James, a known and professed Catholic"—Rothe to Wadding, 17 September 1625, *Wadding papers*, p. 102. Cecil, second Lord Baltimore, became a Protestant in 1640.

² Again, the pattern can be seen in detail in the *Civil Survey*.

³ See *Irish Theological Quarterly*, April 1958, p. 119.

⁴ A reference to one visitation will be found in the letter to Thomas Turner already referred to above, p. 321, note 1: "Jam rus cogito, et ante reditum (quod intra mensem facturum spero) propono visitare Duffry et Mome". "Duffry" is the area between Enniscorthy and the Blackstairs Mountains. I cannot identify "Mome" with certainty. The reading seems to be beyond all doubt, though the word occurs at the end of a line, where the manuscript (Dún Mhuire, Killiney, D. IV, p. 370) is worn.

⁵ "Cuius opera utor in regendis populis, in quibus iure honestissimorum natalium et vitae probitate magnam obtinet auctoritatem"—Roche to Propaganda, 25 February 1632, APF, Scrittura Antiche, vol. 150, f. 321r, printed in Moran, *Spicil. Ossor.*, vol. I, pp. 174-5. The name is usually spelled "O'Brien", but a better modern equivalent would probably be "O'Brien", a family widely established in the Duffry area at the time. See *Civil Survey, Wexford*, Scarawalsh barony, *passim*, where the name is consistently spelled "O'Breine".

⁶ BV, Barberini latini, vol. 8626, f. 23rv.

⁷ Roche to Propaganda, 25 February 1632, APF, Scrittura Antiche, vol. 150, f. 321r.

⁸ Dún Mhuire, MS. D. 13.

⁹ Cf. Bishop Nicholas French to Propaganda, APF, Scrittura Antiche, vol. 298, f. 70. Undated, but clearly written on the occasion of the bishop's visit to Rome in 1653.

¹⁰ Lynch, *De praesulibus Hiberniae*, vol. I, pp. 358-9.

about thirty secular priests in the diocese.¹ It was a constant struggle to keep up the numbers; in 1635, towards the end of his episcopate, there were twenty-eight.² The bishop had sent a seminarist to the *Collegium Pastorale* in Louvain, Nicholas French, consecrated bishop of Ferns in 1645;³ in the earliest lists of students of the Irish College, Rome, the names "Donaldus Hesse, alias Heys, Lageniensis", and "Richardus Stafford, Lageniensis", suggest Wexford origins;⁴ there is, unfortunately, a gap in the Salamanca admission lists between 1629 and 1637. Maintenance of the clergy was as difficult as recruiting new candidates. All the pre-reformation endowments had been lost,⁵ and the clergy depended on the offerings of the people, who were themselves impoverished by persecution.⁶

If the numbers of the diocesan clergy were a cause of worry to the bishop, he spoke very highly of their quality, and especially of the way they worked together with charity for one another and for the regular clergy in the diocese. Though he judged them good material he was nevertheless conscious that they might be improved further. He particularly wished to see every parish priest give catechetical instruction every Sunday, for, as he noted, while there was little of bad disposition among the people of his diocese, there was a great deal of blank ignorance of the truths of faith.⁷ It is hard to estimate exactly his success in this matter. His *Relatio Status* of 1635 suggests that it was limited,⁸ but the picture of the continued failure of the Established Church given a few years later by Bishop Andrews⁹ would seem to indicate that any note of disappointment which might be detected in John Roche's words must only mean that he had expected too much, and possibly expected it too quickly.

There can be no doubt that the Irish scene had its depressing moments for one so accustomed to the Catholic countries of Europe. The counter-reformation in Ireland had to struggle against quite unusual difficulties. It may be that when John Roche decided in 1632 to restore the dignities of the cathedral chapter he had in mind an idea of restoring something of solemnity or splendour in the

¹ APF, *Scrittura Antiche*, vol. 294, f. 316v.

² *Relatio Status*, 17 July 1635, printed from the archives of the Congregation of the Council in *Archivium Hibernicum*, vol. V, pp. 90-1.

³ Cf. *Wadding papers*, pp. 453-4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 282-3.

⁵ Roche notes, by way of exception, that some pre-reformation chalices and vestments survived at New Ross, *Relatio Status*, 17 July 1635, *Archivium Hibernicum*, vol. V, pp. 90-1.

⁶ Roche to Propaganda, 4 May 1631, APF, *Scrittura Antiche*, vol. 294, f. 178.

⁷ Roche to Propaganda, 1 December 1629, APF, *Scrittura Antiche*, vol. 294, f. 317; Roche to Wadding, 19 July 1631, *Wadding papers*, p. 543.

⁸ *Archivium Hibernicum*, vol. V, pp. 90-1.

⁹ Printed in Hore, *Enniscorthy*, pp. 281-2.

observances of religion, though when seeking the approval of Propaganda the motive he gave was the wish to forestall the granting of these purely honorary titles to non-diocesans by the Datary.¹ On 25 February 1632 Roche informed Propaganda that he appointed William Devereux, his vicar-general, who was almost sixty years of age and had been twenty-eight years in the ministry, as dean of the diocese; John Wadding, aged fifty, twenty-five years in the ministry, chancellor; Daniel O'Brien,² archdeacon; Richard Fitzharris, aged sixty, for twenty years a priest in the diocese, precentor; and Thomas Turner, a member of the family in whose home he found hospitality, treasurer.³ Propaganda raised difficulties, and asked the bishop if his action had any precedent in Ireland.⁴ It is rather inexplicable that there seems to be no further correspondence on the subject in the archives of Propaganda,⁵ but in the absence of such correspondence it is impossible to say what was the position in regard to the chapter of Ferns until the period of the Confederation, when further appointments were certainly made to it.⁶

"The regulars", Roche wrote to Wadding,⁷ "I found good labourers, and very loving and respectful to myself; and I think they could not complain but that they receive the exchange of their love; for nowhere in this land are we less at odds than in my charge, where we conspire to endure what we cannot redress". The bishop had particularly happy relations with the two or three Jesuits who ministered in New Ross, whom he described as upright men and hard workers, particularly in teaching catechism and other educational efforts. There were two Franciscan convents in the diocese, seven or eight friars at Wexford, four or five at New Ross. The bishop tried to induce them to be content with one foundation, on account of the distress of the times. The friars would not agree to this, but it does not seem to have strained relations between them

¹ That there were some elements of abuse in this practice at the time appears from the "Per obitum" volumes of the Datary, the Dublin entries from which are printed in *Archivium Hibernicum*, vol. I, pp. 28 ff.

² See above, p. 326.

³ Roche to Ingoli, 25 February 1632, APF, Scrittura Antiche, vol. 150, f. 319, printed in Moran, *History of the Catholic Archbishops of Dublin*, pp. 438-9; same to Cardinals of Propaganda, 25 February 1632, *ibid.*, vol. 150, f. 321, printed in Moran, *Spicil. Ossor.*, vol. I, pp. 174-5.

⁴ APF, Acta, vol. 8, f. 85, no. 4, 24 July 1632; Ingoli to Roche, 14 August 1632, APF, Lettere, vol. 12, f. 84 rv.

⁵ It is easy to miss a document in the "in-letters" (Scrittura Antiche) the files of which are in great disorder during these years, but the "out-letters" (Lettere) and minutes of meetings (Acta), which are in very good order, provide no clue.

⁶ Dun Mhuire, MS. D. 13.

⁷ 19 July 1631. *Wadding papers*, p. 543.

and the bishop.¹ What he seems to have feared most of all was a clash with the two Cistercians in his diocese,² and indeed their relations seem to have been uneasy at first.³ Although they improved later, Roche never quite trusted the Cistercians, but in his own diocese he lived at peace with them, "something", he remarked, "quite unusual in the rest of this kingdom".⁴

Roche's *Relatio Status*, presented at Rome in 1635, marked the end of five years work in his diocese. Later that year he applied to the Holy Office through Propaganda for a renewal of his delegated faculties.⁵ The request arrived in Rome rather more quickly than usual,⁶ and the renewed faculties were issued without undue delay.⁷ Before the renewal reached Ireland John Roche was dead.

He died in Kilkenny on 9 April 1636, while on a visit to David Rothe, bishop of Ossory. While there are from time to time references to his ill-health, death seems to have come suddenly. He is buried in Kilkenny, probably, as Carrigan surmises, with the Rothe family in St. Mary's. No stone or inscription marks his grave.⁸

His life's work is his best epitaph. Though there are tantalizing and serious gaps in the story as it can be assembled at present, what can be known is enough to give a good idea of the measure of the man. It cannot have been ordinary ability which so impressed itself on Cardinal Bentivoglio, or which gave the Irish bishops an agent in Rome such as they did not easily find again. This experience gained in the higher levels of diplomacy in the Church was very valuable to the Irish episcopate when he returned to Ireland. Roche brought with him more than a knowledge of the details of ecclesiastical administration and canon law.⁹ His most valuable quality was the mature personality which had been formed by the wide exper-

¹ Roche to Ingoli, 1 December 1629, APF, Scritture Antiche, vol. 294, f. 317; *Relatio Status*, 17 July 1635, *Archivium Hibernicum*, vol. V, pp. 90-1. In the first document Roche makes a passing reference to the Dominican, John Murphy. He was probably dead by 1635.

² Roche to Ingoli, 1 December 1629, APF, Scritture Antiche, vol. 294, f. 314v. They were John Devereux (cf. *Triumphalia Monasterii S. Crucis*, pp. 103-4, 109) and Laurence Fitzharris (ibid., p. 107, Lynch, *Alithinologiae supplementum*, p. 37).

³ Roche to Propaganda, 4 May 1631, APF, Scritture Antiche, vol. 294, f. 178.

⁴ Roche to Ingoli, 15 November 1634, APF, Scritture Antiche, vol. 105, f. 480, printed in Moran, *Spicil. Ossor.*, vol. I, p. 198; *Relatio Status*, 17 July 1635, *Archivium Hibernicum*, vol. V, pp. 90-1.

⁵ Roche to Ingoli, 20 October 1635, APF, Scritture Antiche, vol. 135, f. 193r, printed in Moran, *Spicil. Ossor.*, vol. I, p. 204.

⁶ Considered at a meeting of Propaganda on 14 January 1636, APF, Acta, vol. 12, f. 11v, no. 38.

⁷ Cf. Propaganda to Roche, 26 January 1636, APF, Lettere, vol. 16, f. 6v; same to same, 8 March 1636, ibid., vol. 9, f. 75rv.

⁸ Rothe to the Cardinal Protector, 12 July 1636, APF, Scritture Antiche, vol. 140, f. 240r, printed in Moran, *Spicil. Ossor.*, vol. I, p. 211; Rothe to Ingoli, 12 July 1636, ibid., vol. 106, f. 51r, printed ibid., pp. 211-2.

⁹ A point much stressed by Rothe in his letters announcing Roche's death.

iences of his life. "Doctrina humanitateque insignis", says the Cistercian obituary,¹ and John Lynch, in spite of the errors of fact in his brief notice of Bishop Roche,² is accurate in summing up his character and the impression he made on those who met him: "politiori literatura, morum concinnitate, sermonis urbanitate, eloquii suavitate, philosophiae theologiaeque scientia, in agendo prudentia limatus . . . ea enim morum suavitate praeditus fuit ut omnes qui cum eo consuetudinem habuerunt summo eius amore tenerentur".³ These were valuable qualities in the service of the Catholic Church in Ireland at a critical stage in its history.

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¹ *Triumphalia Monasterii S. Crucis*, p. 188.

² He even gives the year of his death wrongly as 1638.

³ *De praesulibus Hiberniae*, vol. I, p. 355.