JAMES BONNELL, 1653-1699.
Accountant-General of Ireland.

I

THE reformation in England and Ireland, it is generally thought, was primarily a political movement. Religious fervour such as we associate with the names of Luther and Calvin, is supposed to have had but secondary place. Latimer, Cranmer, Jewel, Hooker are, with the partial exception of the first, men whose faith moved in academic grooves rather than in the vast unreclaimed wilderness of the world. It may be just enough to label Anglicanism with the word "Erastian". Personal piety of a genuine, even noble, sort existed in plenty; but it lacked that prophetic autonomy which in Geneva and in Scotland put the Church first in the loyal impulses of men's hearts, and constrained them to be men of the Church if circumstances compelled them to choose between its interests and those of the State.

Personal piety of the true Anglican sort shows itself well in Donne and Herbert. Theology as distinct from piety begins with staunch Calvinism of the Lambeth Articles, and the early Reformed Archbishops. Then comes Laudianism with Arminian doctrine, stricter ritual, and a persecuting spirit native to the age, and repaid by the stringencies of Parliamentary Puritanism. Some may exalt Charles I as a martyr for the Church of England, and see in him a fair, but tragic flower of Anglican religious liberty, crushed by those who aimed at subordinating religion to the civil power. Charles, however, stands for a conflicting bondage of religion; the principle of the Divine Rights of Kings. The fading Calvinism of the church of England persists longer in the Church of Ireland and is given definite expression in the Irish Articles of 1614 which, in spite of Usher's protests, give way to the less full-blooded Thirty-Nine Articles in 1634. We have the curious result that when Usher yielded in Ireland to the Laudian Bramhall, he, the greatest Reformed Bishop Ireland has had, carried his Irish Articles to the Westminster Assembly, and bequeathed thus to Scotland an inheritance Ireland might

have gained by, for in more peaceful times it might have reconciled the Scottish settlers with the Reformed Church of the land of their adoption to the great blessing of religion.

When the Civil War and Commonwealth passed it has been accepted by many that pure spirituality left Anglicanism to abide with the extruded non-conformists, among whom shone as stars in the firmament such men as Baxter and Bunyan. Yet, we cannot overlook the fact that a rich perception of faith must have survived in a church adorned by Jeremy Taylor, and many others who loved liturgy, and matured in the half-mystical, sweetly serene atmosphere portrayed for us in *John Inglesant*. It was, doubtless, Arminian: it was conscious of no contradiction of its spirit in the fact of establishment, in Royal supremacy. This last seemed, indeed, most proper. Without severe logic, without curiosity over what others held to be antinomies, it went on its way, cultivating the garden of the soul, so conscious of heaven that temporal problems and those who agonized over them could be quietly forgotten. Perhaps this spirit is the explanation of the acquiescence in the many external corruptions of seventeenth century Anglicanism. The building of God's altar in the temple of the soul often delays the building of His Kingdom on earth, and pietism is too often self-contained; content with gentle admonitions rather than vigorous reformations. The bawling evangelicalism of the eighteenth century was Arminianism of a very different sort when compared with the religious life with which we are concerned here.

To many the last decades of the seventeenth century present a lamentable picture of the state of religion. Test Acts to harass dissenters in England, with progressive exclusion from public office, and in Ireland vexatious tyrannies on the part of bishops against the Presbyterians, and over all the menace of Roman Catholic ascendancy under James II. Possessors of Gibson's *Preservative against Popery* may measure the extent of this by noting the number of publications in that collection which were elicited by the fear of a great royal campaign against the reformed religion. Energy could be evoked by a threat to the established order. The more subtle dangers of neglect, indifference, worldliness, called forth no such protest in official circles. Those prelates who were vigorous administrators and conscious of their responsibilities were not numerous, and were often hindered in their work. It will be sufficient to quote, in the case

of Ireland, from a letter written in 1686 by Lord Clarendon, the Irish Lord Lieutenant, to the Archbishop of Canterbury: "The state of the Church is very miserable; most of the fabrics are in ruins; very few of the clergy reside on their cures, but employ pitiful curates. . . . I find it an ordinary thing for a minister to have five or six cures of souls, and to get them supplied by those who will do it cheapest. . . . When I discourse with my lord bishops on these things, I confess I have not satisfactory answers." A specimen of episcopal malpractice (an extreme one) is given in the case of Bishop Hackett who held the see of Down from 1672. "For the twenty succeeding years he had been notoriously negligent of his pastoral office, and resident in England" (Mant, *History of the Church of Ireland II*). Archbishop Tillotson of Canterbury urged his deprivation and in 1694 a commission of two bishops, Dopping of Meath and King of Derry, deprived him of the see. Bishops Foley and Walkington, his successors, were men of the type to do all they could to repair the damage caused by Hackett's neglect.

Clarendon wrote the letter we have quoted in 1686. Twenty six years had passed since the Restoration, so that a complete recovery could have been achieved, had the leaders of the Church determined upon it. We have mentioned that some were zealous. Had all been, no trace of the destructive Civil War and Commonwealth rule need have remained.

II

Yet there persisted the type of individual piety we have written of with approbation. It is like entering another world to leave the negligences, intolerances, and strifes of that day, and to turn to the life and thought of the man whose name stands at the head of this article, James Bonnell, Accountant-General of Ireland. His memory and character have been preserved for us in a little volume entitled *The Exemplary Life and Character of James Bonnell, Esq.*, by William Hamilton, Archdeacon of Armagh. The fourth edition (which we are using) was published in 1718. It contains a fine engraving of Bonnell, whose calm, youthful face, and shapely features speak to us of one who had received the promise, "My peace I give unto you". Beneath is a reproduction of the Bonnell arms, with the

motto: "Terris peregrinus et hospes"—an appropriate text for men of the heavenly disposition.

Archdeacon Hamilton, in his preface, writes: "It is hoped that the character of one in whom every Christian grace did so eminently shine, may contribute somewhat towards raising a spirit of true religion in this age; that the consideration of his early piety may animate the youth among us; of his constant devotions, may quicken our zeal; of his justice, his charity, and universal goodness, may stir up lasting resolutions in our minds, of following so great an example of these through all the parts of virtue and holiness." The Archdeacon adds that Bonnell had had the systematic habit for many years of writing down each day some devout thoughts, as well as composing prayers for his own needs. When the book was finished, he says, some eminent bishops of our Church looked it over, and approved it as a faithful account of their departed friend. The Bishops of Kilmore and Derry (Drs. Wetenhall and King) especially, supplied much personal information. The bulk of the book is taken up with Bonnell's meditations: "By these we are chiefly to judge of Mr. Bonnell; from them we may see how he laboured to overcome the world and himself; to get above the esteem and fear of men; to inflame his soul with the love of God, and fix every virtue there."

Some critics, we gather, thought Bonnell's life too uneventful to be worth recording. In answer to this the Archdeacon has a very wise comment: "The lives of Princes, Statesmen and Generals must be written, whether they have been good men or no; because their lives make up the general history of kingdoms and states, and consequently of the world; and 'tis fit that their vices should be laid open as well as their virtues, that those who succeed them in their honours and employments may be encouraged to imitate their virtues, and avoid their vices. But the world has no use for a private man's life if there be nothing extraordinary in it but only a common mixture of virtues and frailties such as are matter of daily observation. The life of a private man should only be published when his virtues are very shining, and his goodness so remarkable, that his example may do good to mankind. But when a man's life is primitive and apostolical, when prudence and goodness, probity and piety, meekness and patience; when such simplicity of manners, such freedom from faction, such unshaken fidelity make up a man's

character, 'tis then fit to acquaint mankind with such virtues, and propose such a pattern to their imitation, which can't be done without praises; since in such a case a bare relation will become a panegyric."

Archdeacon Hamilton sought and obtained weighty approval of his memoir, for he was able to publish appreciations of its subject from the Archbishop of Dublin (Dr. Narcissus Marsh, and the Bishops of Meath, Derry, Limerick, Clogher and Down (Drs. Tenison, King, Smythe, Ashe and Smith).

These prelates were men of distinction, Marsh especially being an outstanding leader, church-builder, and administrator. He enriched Dublin by establishing a public library within whose walls the eighteenth century still lingers. Reposing in that library is the manuscript of a diary Marsh kept for some years. The entries which refer to Marsh's spiritual life show how he treasured the same spiritual experiences and faith which created Bonnell's gracious nature. Marsh's prayer on being made Archbishop was, " O Lord, as this is Thy sole doing, I beseech Thee to grant me sufficient assistance of Thy Holy Spirit to enable me to perform the work which Thou hast assigned me ".

Tenison was a man of philanthropic disposition. King earned the following eulogy from Dean Swift: " He spends his time in acts of hospitality and charity . . . in introducing and preferring the worthiest persons he can find, in the practice of all virtues that can become a public or private life ". He was also a metaphysician and controversialist. Smith showed zeal for the well-being of his diocese and people. Ashe, though he treated his bishopric as " a pompous sinecure " (King) had culture and learning, and Smith was active in church-building. It seems natural to suppose that such men would not value Bonnell unless they had sympathy with his devout instincts. They doubtless represent the best elements in the Irish episcopate of the time.

With this long preamble, we come to Bonnell himself.

III

He was born in Genoa, 14 November, 1653, the son of a merchant of high repute, and the great-grandson of Thomas Bonnell, a citizen of Ypres, in Flanders, who fled to England,

and settled at Norwich to avoid the fury of the Duke of Alva against the Protestants of the Netherlands. (This fact was recorded in the inscription composed by Bishop King for Bonnell's monument in St. John's Church, Dublin: " proavo Thoma, qui sub Duce Albano religionis ergo Flandria patria sua exul, Norvicum in Anglia profugit ubi mox civis, et demum praetor.")

Samuel Bonnell, James's father, was a strong royalist, who impoverished himself by giving large sums of money for the maintenance of the family of King Charles I. The Stuarts had no name of being mindful of their benefactors, but they did remember the worthy merchant, and at the Restoration gave him a patent to be Accountant-General of the revenue of Ireland, his son being included as well. He died, however, in 1664, leaving James to the care of a pious and prudent mother. At school in Trim, Co. Meath, James had as his master, Dr. Tenison, of whom we have written. This association seems to have been happy and profitable, and to have laid the foundations of a deeply Christian life. Possibly in a present-day school this early piety would be repressed by schoolfellows, if not by masters; but at Trim *sub ferula* Dr. Tenison Bonnell's soul awakened and a carefully disciplined practice of worship and prayer began from the age of eleven, which continued till death. In later life he wrote of his early sense of penitence, and resolution to pass on " to the methodical practice of the duties of religion ", so the Holy Club at Oxford and the Wesleys had at least one precursor! He continues: " Thus I went cheerfully on, rejoicing much that the work of conversion, as I thought, was past with me." We may note here that assiduity in pious practices cannot take the place, no matter how good the heart may seem to be, of the Pentecostal awakening, though, as Bonnell says, he enjoyed a great encouragement after holiness, a foretaste of its sweetness. Let us again note that a faithful and diligent and prayerful preparation for full awakening ought not to be despised, but encouraged, seeing that it can lead to such grand maturity.

Leaving Trim, Bonnell went to a private school near Oxford, and thence to St. Catherine's Hall, Cambridge. Having graduated, he became a private tutor. During his student years he was a regular communicant, a practice which he maintained throughout life. In 1678 he visited the land of his forefathers, and spent a year at Nimeguen, in Holland. In 1684 he went

to France for a time. Thence he came directly back to Ireland, and assumed the office of Accountant-General which, since his father's death, had been carried on by deputy. It appears that he had long thought of taking Holy Orders, but being very conscientious about the execution of his weighty office, he would not lay it down until he found a man of equal virtue and trustworthiness to succeed him.

This desire to abandon worldly employment found expression in his private meditations. His longing to serve God acceptably was hampered by his consciousness of the intrusion of earthly and self-centred interests: "The more forward we are many times, the more of self-ends there is secretly lurking in the bottom of our hearts. But if I find myself at any time filled with a sincere zeal for God's glory, and pious affections towards Him, I may then go on with His work, He calls me to it: but if I find at any time the esteem of men, and the pleasure or good things of this world, to have a considerable relish or gust in my mind, and by consequence, my heart not so tenderly affected towards God, then let me not offer to put my hand to His work. I shall pollute it. And so my bodily temper unfits me, as God gives me other work to do, according to my duty in my station, then He calls me off from His work by His providence, and I must meekly submit to it, till He thinks fit to give me leave to take it up again. He thinks fit to put this *Remora*[1] to it, this rub in my way, and knows well why; and I shall have the pleasure and glory, another day, of knowing the reason too."

IV

In the confusions and dangers of the revolutionary period in Ireland, Bonnell continued to administer his office personally; 1689 was a dangerous time for Protestants here. They were ejected from their offices, subject to insult, in peril of proscription by the Roman Catholic party then in the ascendant under the Roman Catholic Viceroy of a Roman Catholic king.

In spite of Bonnell being an uncompromising Protestant, one whom the party in power could not hope to win over, his abilities and faithfulness, as well as his father's support of the Stuarts in exile, and, perhaps, an unexpected inclination to tolerance in some cases, led to his remaining undisturbed in office.

[1] Remora—a small fish which clings to larger ones, hence, an obstacle or drag.

Such was his reputation also that " the enemies of his religion respected his person ". The times were indeed fraught with great anxiety for members of the Established Church throughout the whole country, as well as for the Presbyterian congregations in the north. In March, 1689, James II had left France, and landed in Ireland with a French army. In Dublin, Bishop King tells us, in his *State of the Protestants*, that many clergy had been assaulted, and imprisoned; while the Parliament assembled by James passed an Act of Attainder which imposed the penalties of high treason on many Protestants. Many bishops and clergy were attainted. Of the 2,445 names on the lists, nearly all were churchmen. Vacant sees were filled by the appointment of Roman Catholics, while churches were handed over to Roman Catholic worship, including the Chapel of Trinity College. Meetings of more than five Protestants were forbidden. But the victory of William of Orange at the Boyne (1 July, 1690) saved the situation for Bonnell's co-religionists.[1]

Bonnell, with the truly Christian otherworldliness which characterizes the true saints, rose above these calamities, and gave witness to his conviction that most churches need to be awakened by correction, seeing that they are too apt to be corrupted by prosperity, and lulled to sleep by a long course of peace and safety. He looked forward to times of trial as times of cleansing the Church from corruption and unworthy men. In expectation of a massacre of Protestants on 9 December, 1688 (men had not forgotten the massacres of 1641), Bonnell, in a city crowded with refugees from the country, filled with terror and disorder, wrote: " If I desired to follow the direction of God, and watch and observe the guiding of His providence in every lesser affair of my life, surely I should do it in the most important one, my life itself; for if I may presume anything relating to me to be His care, this no doubt is. Now the index of His will is His providence, and of His providence is my

[1] Thomas Davis, *Irish Parliament of James II* writes (Intro.) : " No Protestant Prelates were deprived of stipend or honour—they held their incomes, and they sat in the Parliament. They (the Parliament) enforced perfect liberty of conscience. . . . Thus for its moderation and charity this Parliament is an honour and an example to the country." On the Act of Attainder Davis writes that between twelve and thirteen hundred were conditionally attainted for rebellion. If within seven weeks they came and stood trial for treason this part of the Act would not affect them. These were both Roman Catholic and Protestant. Two sections attaint others who had left the Kingdom unless they returned by a certain date. Davis reduces the total of names by about two hundred. He severely censures the accuracy of King's *State of the Protestants*, and commends Leslie's *Answer to King*. One's opinion of this Parliament will be controlled by one's sympathies, rather than by legal and constitutional considerations. See Lecky—*Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, and Froude—*The English in Ireland*.

duty. This is the star that points out to me the course I can to take. If I am discharged from my duty, I may expect God's protection in going from hence; if not, in staying here." So, his public business continuing, he stayed in Dublin.

Later, he wrote again: "Let me attend the motions of Thy providence with a constant eye lifted up to Thee; if Thou callest me from hence, let me go in obedience to Thy will. If Thou requirest me to stay here, and bear Thy good servants company (for Thy suffering servants are the purest of Thy flock), let me stay in obedience to the same will, and dispose myself to bear with them the issues of Thy pleasures upon us; that we may glorify Thee by life or by death, or whatsoever Thou shalt ordain for us."

When large numbers of leading Protestants were seeking refuge in England or Wales, it is not surprising that the Archdeacon should remark that Bonnell "had quite different notions of the means of safety from the generality of the world!" Being undisturbed in his public life, he had great opportunities of relieving distress, spending his salary generously on the needy who had been driven out of their country homes by the animosities of the Jacobite following.

The temporal troubles of the time could not affect the depths of the soul of a man like Bonnell. His chief concern was regret that the distresses they experienced did not produce that reformation among Protestants which might have been expected while the rod was upon them. His reflections on Whitsunday, 1689, contain these words: "We see a world, in which we are, lying in wickedness; the judgments of God gone out against it, and yet the inhabitants of it do not learn righteousness. God seems resolved to reform or cut us off, and yet little reformation appears." This need for repentance was ever present in his mind, and after the victory of the Boyne he hoped for a fresh dedication to God. Yet he saw only that immorality and profaneness conquered as fast as William's victorious arms. Ingratitude to God saddened him more than deliverance brought him joy. Danger now being over, he resigned his office, and a few years later married. After five years of happiness and increasing spiritual growth, he died in 1699, and was buried in St. John's Church, Dublin.

V

We have noticed his personal piety and practice of the spiritual life in the light of the age in which he lived. As a student he is a good example of the best minds of his time. An accomplished classical scholar, he also had a good knowledge of Hebrew, mathematics and music. He studied the Greek Fathers, as well as theologians like Hooker, but above all he was a constant and daily student of the Bible, which he not only read, but prayed over. Love to God, and humility before Him were his ambitions, and the practice of secret almsgiving at best one of the ways by which he expressed them. As a member of the Church of Ireland two hundred and fifty years ago he in one respect differed from most of his fellow-churchmen. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was probably administered only once a month in the Dublin parish churches (in the eighteenth century the great Dean of St. Patrick's, Jonathan Swift, established a weekly communion service); and this, doubtless, satisfied most worshippers; but Bonnell, says Archdeacon Hamilton, used to wish there were more churches in Dublin wherein the Holy Sacrament were administered every Lord's Day "for going about from church to church (he said) had something of ostentation about it," and with difficulty he at last conquered this scruple. This struggle against anything savouring of spiritual or worldly pride in a man of rank must have been rare enough. It gave reality to his self-denials, and these grew out of his frequent meditations upon the nature of the life our Blessed Lord lived as man.

Full as was Bonnell's devotional life in the privacy of his home, he conformed to the practice then general in the city churches of attending daily morning and evening prayers. "He had," writes his biographer, "the justest value and highest veneration for that great repository of true devotion, the liturgy of our Church; for which his regard was not in the least abated, by the great fervour of his private prayers. For though his devotion was very intense, and full of life and warmth, yet it was calm and governable, and confined within the strictest bounds of sobriety and reason." At the same time he had no censures for those who chose another way of worship when he believed conscience was their motive. He had the true spirit of unity for "he honoured true piety wherever he saw it; and loved those

who, he believed, served God sincerely; though their own way of worship differed from his own. None considered more the power of custom and education, and the difficulty of relishing modes of worship we are strangers to, till practice remove our prejudices, and observation and experience reconcile us to them."

We have spoken of Bonnell's desire to attend the Communion weekly: it must not be supposed that such frequency implied inadequate appreciation of the solemnity of the occasion. Hamilton tells us that his life was a constant preparation for the Holy Communion. He made diligent preparation to that special end each week, and on his return from church retired to a private room for a period of prayer and thanksgiving. Such practice became one who held each Lord's Day in utmost reverence. He would entertain no company that day, so that his servants might be free to attend divine worship, and the evenings he would spend alone, or else in such company as would be happy in religious conversation. The difficulty of finding such at length led him to resolve to visit only the sick and afflicted on Lord's Days. This Sabbath strictness he extended to the Holy Days and Fasts observed by the Church.

In public he found much joy in furthering the religious societies which began in Dublin about 1693. These, we may suppose, aimed at the increase of personal religion, and works of charity. Many feared that they might degenerate into conventicles, but Bonnell was their constant defender, and his death was a serious loss to them.

VI

A remarkable feature of his outlook in the days which saw the systematization of Penal Laws against Irish adherents of the Pope,[1] was his opposition to any kind of secular pressure to make them change their religion. "Force," he said, "is a sieve that winnows out the good, and saves only the bad, because the good will be destroyed by it, and the bad only brought over."

Such a man could not fail to be sought out by similar men as a friend and adviser. He was the centre of a group of highly placed men who shared his devotion and developed under his

[1] These penal laws, modelled in part in the anti-Huguenot laws of the same period in France are to be explained by the reaction against the attainders of the Jacobite Parliament, by the memories of the 1641 rebellion, and the political dangers or Roman Catholicism. The suspicions of Stuart intrigues must also be considered. They were drastic and effective, though not always vigorously enforced.

example. The century on whose threshold Bonnell died may be styled by some " The Great Ice-Age of the Church ", but there remained in it, and grew in it the leaven prepared by men like Bonnell and his friends. The fruitful religious movements of the eighteenth century found groups and individuals in many places ready for the new expansive forces which were to revitalize these nations. The welcome extended in Ireland to Whitefield, to quote one example, is understandable only in the light of the lives of such men as our subject, who by precept and example prepared the way, and fostered an abiding interest in the life of the Spirit. The fact that Archdeacon Hamilton should have thought fit to compile a biography which by 1718 had had four editions implies a continuity of serious and spiritually-minded readers. A book devoid of romance, drama, and moving incident; rich only in examples of prayer and meditation and illustrations of spiritual growth cannot create an interested public—that public must exist first, and must express its longing for such a book. The true picture of the religious life of that time is not to be found in the pages of Fielding, or in the controversies of the Deists, or in the sedate posture of the Established Churches. It will not be found in its completeness in the enthusiastic biographies of the Wesleys and their associates. It must be created out of these in part, but it must include what we learn from such men as William Law, from the quiet successors of the non-jurors and the puritans, and from Bonnell and his friends.

We cannot conclude better than by quoting words written by Edward Wetenhall, Bishop of Kilmore, in the preface to the sermon he preached at Bonnell's funeral: " Mr. Bonnell was truly a citizen of the New Jerusalem. A sweet and unaffected contempt of this world appeared in his behaviour. In all the opportunities he had to enrich himself, money neither stuck to his fingers nor his heart. He lived in the midst of much business with a mind full of composedness; with affections free from being entangled by earthly concernments, or the secret witchcraft of seen and sublunary goods."

N. D. Emerson.

St. Mary's, Dublin.