

Cardinal Wiseman and His Association with South Kilkenny

BY DANIEL DOWLING

Nicholas Patrick Stephen Wiseman, Cardinal and Archbishop of Westminster, was born in Seville, Spain, on the 2nd August, 1802.

His grandfather, James Wiseman, was a Merchant in Waterford, who emigrated to Spain towards the end of the eighteenth century, and settled in Saville. His youngest son, James, was the Cardinal's father, and he was married twice, first to the daughter of a General in the Spanish Army, and secondly to Xaviera Strange, of Aylwardstown, Glenmore. This second marriage produced three children, James, the eldest son, Nicholas, who became Cardinal, and one daughter Frasquita, who married Count Gabrielli of Fano, in Italy. In 1805 their father James died, and shortly afterwards the mother returned to Ireland, accompanied by her two young sons, and stayed at Aylwardstown. About 1808, they were sent to a Boarding School in Waterford, where they remained until 1810. It was in this period that Nicholas first became familiar with the English tongue. In March 1810, he was sent to Ushaw College in Durham, to complete his education, and it was during his time there that he decided to become a Priest. On the reopening of the English College in Rome, in 1818, Nicholas Wiseman, and five companions, were sent there from USHAW; to pursue their studies for the priesthood.

During this period Nicholas began to show signs of the remarkable qualities of scholarship, that were afterwards to make his name famous throughout the length and breadth of Europe. In 1824, he graduated as a Doctor of Divinity, and in the following year he was ordained Priest. Three years later he was appointed Vice-Rector of the English College, which position he held for twelve years until 1840. After his ordination in Rome he devoted much of his time to the study of the antiquities of the eternal City, and also carried out extensive research on the Syriac Manuscripts in the Vatican Library, under the guidance of Cardinal Mai, the celebrated linguist. He returned to England in 1835, when he lectured in the Sardinian Chapel in London, and in Moorfields Church, to mixed congregations of the learned Catholics and Protestants of the day. In 1836, he was responsible with O'Connell for the founding of the Dublin Review. So widespread had his reputation grown and his name become so commonplace among the scholars of Europe that by 1838 he was receiving visits from such celebrities as Macaulay, and Gladstone.

On the 8th June 1840, he was consecrated Bishop, and named Coadjutor Vicar Apostolic of the Central District of England, with the title of Bishop of Melipotamus, and at the same time appointed President of St. Mary's College, Oscott, near Birmingham. In 1846 he was transferred as Coadjutor Vicar Apostolic to the London District.

Invited to Ireland by the Bishop of Clonfert, to preach at the opening of a new Church in Ballinasloe, Co. Galway, Cardinal Wiseman arrived in Dunlaoire on the 23rd August 1858 and on the following day proceeded to Ballinasloe by train from the Broadstone Station. The enthusiasm and respect shown by all classes, rich and poor, and Protestant and Catholic alike, marked the progress of his entire visit throughout the Country.

At the birthplace of his mother, and of his own childhood days at Aylwardstown, Glenmore, where he paid a brief visit, he celebrated Mass, which was attended by a huge congregation of the local populace. On the 14th September he entered Waterford and was accorded a civic reception, which occasion was thus described by a journalist of the day :

"Placards had been posted on Monday evening, announcing that His Eminence would enter the City at two o'clock from Aylwardstown, the residence of Mr. Strange, and long before that hour the streets through which he was expected to pass were thronged with people of all classes. Large numbers proceeded on cars and on foot along the road to Aylwardstown, for the purpose of conducting the Cardinal into the City. He was met by them a couple of miles outside Waterford when, after greeting him with hearty cheers, they formed a procession, composed by members of the several trades of the City, bearing banners, and of the people generally, carrying quite a forest of green boughs, and preceded by a Band of Music. Although as has been stated, it was announced that his Eminence would arrive at two o'clock, it was twenty minutes to five before the cheers of those who accompanied him had announced to those who had been waiting for hours on the Bridge, and on the Quays, that he was coming. His Eminence was seated in the Carriage of the Mayor, and was accompanied by that gentleman, and the Very Rev. Dean Burke. The Cardinal was met near the City by a considerable number of the Clergy of the district and by the leading citizens.

At the City Hall, in the course of his speech in response to the toast in his honour, he had this to say in relation to himself and his forebears :

"The tie between myself and Waterford is not one of yesterday, for when I look around the room, I can find few countenances which lead me back to the period when I first knew it or recall the circumstances under which I came. I should not think the mere fact of my family being united by proximity to the City a subject worth while entering on, all I know is, that from her to whom I owe my education, as I had the misfortune to lose my father in infancy, from her whose warmest recollections and most affectionate feelings were connected with this City, and with the neighbouring place where she was born. I remember to have heard histories which remain engraved on my memory, that tell me what my ancestors had to endure to preserve the faith, how they shared in the confiscations and spoiliations of



property which were the heirlooms of every Catholic in those days. Friends of mine since then have thought it kindness to find in the Record Office in Dublin, the original decrees of confiscation and spoilation of the property my ancestors possessed here, but all this has been nothing compared to the tales she told me of the secret, unseen sacrifices, by which some of her ancestors preserved the faith to themselves and their children."

His triumphant Irish tour ended on the 17th September, when he sailed from Dun Laoghaire on board the Mailboat "Cambria", never again to see the land that gave birth to his forebears.

The following is a brief extract from a letter which he wrote on return from his Irish visit, to his aunt, Mrs. Harriet Butler, wife of James Butler, of Kilmogar, in the Parish of St. John's, Kilkenny :

20, Upper King Street,
Bloomsbury,
London.

9th December, 1835.

My Dear Aunt; You have, I fear, been long expecting the fulfilment of my promise to give you notice of my safe arrival at this side of the water. I found however much arrears of correspondence and such occupations awaiting me that I have hardly found a moment's leisure. I spent two very pleasant days at Aylwardstown, where I was received with the greatest possible cordiality, and renewed all my old recollections. I embarked at Waterford for Milford, had a beautiful voyage without the slightest suffering, and by travelling day and night reached London, on the Saturday morning. Since then, I have been employed without interruption from morning till night. I am six hours writing every day in the British Museum, and I preach three times a week to overflowing audiences, once on Sunday, and in the evenings of Wednesday and Friday, for an hour and a half at a time. I have besides a thousand other calls upon me which do not leave me a moment idle".

In delicate and failing health for a number of years he took suddenly ill on 15th January, 1865 and lingered until 15th February when he died at the age of 63.

The "Times", too, which was the first to attack him and all he stood for had this to say : "Yesterday the body of Cardinal Wiseman was solemnly buried at the Roman Catholic Cemetery of St. Mary's at Kensal Green, amid such circumstances of ritual pomp as, since the Reformation at least, have never been seen in this country and, we may add, amid such tokens of public interest and almost of sorrow as do not often mark the funerals even of our most illustrious dead. Altogether the feeling among the public seemed deeper than one of mere curiosity, a wish perhaps to forget old differences with the Cardinal, and render respect to his memory as an eminent Englishman, and one of the most learned men of his time".

On the paternal side, the Cardinal claimed descent from Capel Wiseman, Protestant Bishop of Dromore, the third son of Sir William Wiseman, Baronet, and great grandson of Sir John Wiseman, one of the Auditors of the Exchequer in the reign of King Henry VIII. Although the

pedigree was never exactly defined, the family of Wiseman of Caulfield, in Essex, acknowledged the kinship, at the time of the Cardinal's death, when then head of the family, Admiral Sir William Wiseman of the British Navy attended a Requiem Mass in the Catholic Cathedral in Sydney, Australia.

The Eighteenth century Church Registers of Waterford City contain the following entries relating to the Wiseman family :

ST. JOHN'S: Married on the 19th January 1714, Edward Wiseman of Wexford, and Alice Dobbyn Alsrageet, of St. Patrick's, and had issue as follows : Mary (1716); John (1717); James (1720); Ellen(1722); Edward (1725), and possibly others.

ST. PATRICK'S AND ST. OLAVE'S: Married on the 21st September 1755, James Wiseman and Helen Dower, and had issue : John and Joseph (1759) and Alice (1760).

Married on the 29th November 1759, Francis Wiseman and Mary Power. It is quite probable that the James Wiseman who married Helen Dower was the Cardinal's grandfather, but this is only conjecture, and needs further research.

A Patrick Wiseman, a native of the City of Waterford, died at Madrid, Spain, on the 31st August 1822. He was Prinsipal of the House of Wiseman, and Gower, Bankers of that City, and formerly of the House of James and Patrick Wiseman of Seville.

Of Norman origin, the family of Strange were settled in various parts of England, in the centuries following the Invasion of 1066, principally in Berkshire, Rutland, Warwickshire, Gloucestershire, and Shropshire. It is not exactly known when they first came to Ireland, but it would appear that they had attained a degree of importance in Waterfrd, by the early years of the fifteenth century, as the holder of the office of Mayor in that City in 1427 was a Peter Strange.

Their continuous association with Waterford, down the centuries since then, is reflected in the fact that bearers of the name held the Mayoralty of that City in the following years : Peter (1431 and 1434); Peter (1465); Richard (1485); Peter (1560); Richard (1581 and 1588); Paul (1597), Thomas (1607); and Richard (1634). Nearer to our own time, the honour of that office was accorded to Thomas Fitzgerd Strange in 1853, and to his son Laurence Charles Strange, in 1899, both of whom were of the Aylwardstown family.

In 1542, Robert Strange or Stronge, a Merchant of Waterford, was involved in a law case, with Thomas Butler of Ross, over a consignment of Spanish wine, and in 1537, Richard, probably his son, is mentioned in connection with his Manor Dromdowney, in the present parish of Slieverue. He also held the Manor of Dunkitt in Kilmacow Parish, and in 1585 he was involved in a suit against Francis Lovell of Knocktopher. This Richard Strange left a son Edward of Dunkitt. He held the lands of Flemingstown, Ardbeg and Grogan, in the present parish of Glenmore and other landed property in Mullinavat, Kilmacow, and Mooncoin.

He died on the 1st June 1621, leaving four sons, Richard, his heir, Thomas, Peter, John and two daughters, Anastatia and Margaret. This Richard became M.P. for Waterford City in 1634.

In 1641 the family's landed possession, in South Kilkenny, included the following acreages :

In the Barony of IDA: The Rower (663), Flemingstown (548); Davidstown (213); Grogan (225); Ardbeg (359); Rochestown (617); in Parish of Glenmore, Dunkitt (1151); and Drumdowney, Slieverue (755). In the Barony of Iverk present Parishes of Mooncoin and Piltown (452).

During the Commonwealth period, these lands were confiscated, and parcelled out to the new Cromwellian invaders, and the owners transferred to Connaught, where the following lands were allocated to them by Order of February 1655/6; 954 acres in the Barony of Clonderalaw, Co. Clare, 954 acres in the Barony of Ballymore, and 157 acres in the Parish of Killinan, Barony of Loughrea, both in the Co. Galway.

Laurence Strong or Strange of Drumdowney, son of Thomas, who died in 1625, is mentioned in one of the dispositions of 1641. He was alive in 1661, at which date he was aged 46. This man was probably the father of Richard Strange who was appointed a Burgess of Inistioge in 1688, and grandfather of Laurence Strange of Aylwardstown, whose will was admitted to Probate in 1720. In this Will is mentioned, his brothers James and Pierce, his brother-in-law Nicholas Aylward, his sisters Ellen Walsh alias Strange, Mary Kealy alias Strange, his wife Mary alias Aylward, his eldest son and heir Richard then a minor and his other sons Patrick and Pierce Strange. The above Peter Strange, mentioned in the Will of Laurence his father in 1720, appears as a sponsor at the Baptism ceremony in Aylwardstown, on the 30th December 1770, following the birth of Nicholas Laurence Strange, son of Peter Strange Junior, and Mrs Mary Fitzgibbon, and Mrs. Mary Shee. In 1777 Ellenor Strange was born at Aylwardstown of the same parents, when the sponsors included Laurence Strange of Cadiz in Spain.

This union was still producing children in 1790, when Harriet Strange was born, which fact would indicate that they were both young when married.

The succession at Aylwardstown devolved from the above Laurence, whose Will was admitted to Probate in 1720, to either Richard, Patrick or Peter, his sons, but most probably Peter. His son in turn Peter, junior, was married some time prior to 1770. His son again, Laurence, was the father of the late Peter in Aylwardstown.

This Peter Strange died unmarried, on the 23rd December 1872. His Will was proved at Kilkenny, in 1873, by the Oath of Mary Eliza Chapman, his sister, a Widow, formerly of Ringwood, in the Rower, but then of Aylwardstown. This Mary Eliza Chapman died at Aylwardstown on the 18th January, 1881, aged 74 years.

The family burial place of the Stranges of Aylwardstown is in Kilackeveoge graveyard, in Glenmore and the plaque to their memory there includes the inscription : Thomas F. Strange, born 11th May 1812, died 2nd

February 1897. He was one of two brothers of Peter of Aylwardstown, who moved to Waterford in the early 1830's, where they purchased the then well-known Newspaper, "The Waterford Chronicle", from the Barron family. Thomas F. became a Solicitor and practiced at 5 Great Georges Street, Waterford. He became Mayor of Waterford in 1853 and was involved in the politics of the period, including the Land League. He died at 5 Bellevue Terrace, Tramore having previously lived at Christendom, and Mount Neill. He had the following children : Agnes, Mary, Grace, Rose, Laurence C, and Thomas.

Thomas inherited Aylwardstown, on his uncle Peter's death, and his sister Rose, the Rochestown, part of the farm, formerly the property of the Forristal family, to which the Stranges had been intermarried. Their tenure did not last long, and the property was sold in 1888, thus breaking the Stranges' long connection with the area.

Prior to the Commonwealth period, the property of the Strange family in South Kilkenny, amounting to 5,172 acres, had probably been acquired by purchase and intermarriage, but the Dispossession and Transplantation Acts resulted in their forfeiture of this extensive landed area, to the Cromwellian soldiers, and Adventurers. Although title of ownership of the property had gone, it did not mean that every member of the Strange family had to leave the area, or that the new owners remained on. Success and failure, which are the fortunes of families in every generation, also played their part in the post Cromwellian period. A lot of the new owners faded out due to a variety of reasons, and the sons of former proprietors became tenants in the new ownership. The Strange family of Aylwardstown would appear to have fallen into this latter category, by becoming tenants of the Ponsonby family at Kildalton, Piltown, the head of which was the Earl of Bessborough. This Earl in 1876 owned 23,968 acres of land in County Kilkenny.

In the early decades of the last Century, when they possessed far greater landed property than at the time of their departure from the scene, the Stranges were considered benevolent landlords, and a letter from a Glenmore tenant farmer to the "Waterford Mirror", in 1835, bears testimony to this assertion. In this he stated, "that Laurence Strange of Aylwardstown had a few days ago assembled his tenants, and reduced their rents, very nearly one half, some from £3 per acre to £1-12-0, and others from £1-15-0 to £1 and 18/-. In addition he forgave all the heavy arrears which were due to him, and this he did without being solicited by any of his tenants.

Highly regarded and esteemed in their native Parish of Glenmore, they provided excellent employment in an age when work was hard to be found. Sometimes up to forty men and women were in their employment, and tradition has handed it down that those who worked for them remained for the duration of their lives, which fact in itself proves the type that they were. Every year, they held a great feast after the corn was saved, which was known as a "Harvest Home". All their employees, neighbours and friends were invited to partake of their generosity, and enjoy themselves to a



bounteous supply of food and drink, and dance to the strains of the local fiddlers.

Charitable to those in distress, they were also generous benefactors of the Church, and in 1813, when the present Chapel of Glenmore was built, they provided money, men, horses and materials for its construction.

It is now nearly ninety years since the Strange family passed from the Glenmore scene, but it is hoped that this sketchy, and incomplete article, will result in awakening an interest in the life and times of that illustrious scholar and churchman, Nicholas Cardinal Wiseman, first Cardinal in England, since Reginald Pole died in 1558.

THE middle section of the Scotch House i.e. No. 31, was bought in 1914 by Miss Josephine Brennan, Bawnmore, Johnstown. She had it repaired and opened as a drapery shop.

About 1917 she married Jeremiah O'Brien, Newtown, Kells. The shop became known as "Brennan and O'Brien's". There was no family and as he survived her the property passed to his nephew, Martin O'Brien, Bennettsbridge. He sold it in 1958 to Hendy, and it continues as a drapery shop.

Re. Article on High Street in O.K.R. (1968) P. 14.

Old Kilkenny Review

Articles and notes of Kilkenny interest are always welcome for the Review. The editor would like to have all such material to hand by late summer to expedite publication at an early date in winter.

Editor's address:

REV: SEAN O'DOHERTY,
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