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CHAPTER IV

STUDENT LIFE; THE YOUNG CONTROVERSIALIST; PURITANISM IN TRINITY COLLEGE

When Ussher entered Trinity College in 1593, he immediately directed his attention to Greek and Hebrew studies. He also devoted much attention to history and chronology. The words of Cicero — *Nescire quid antea quam natus sis acciderit id est semper esse puerum* — seemed to have had great weight with him. At the early age of fourteen he had begun his *Annales* and a year later he had drawn up a chronicle of the Bible, as far as Kings, the nucleus of the work he published later in life, and which still supplies the dates at the headings of the chapters in the Authorised Version of the Old Testament. By what authority Ussher's chronology obtained this position in our Bibles seems never to have been clearly ascertained.

In 1596, Ussher went up for the degree of B.A., having previously been elected to a scholarship. He performed the necessary exercises in the presence of the Earl of Essex, the Lord-Deputy and Chancellor of the University. On the death of his father, two years later, we are told that he resigned the whole of his estate

to his brothers and sisters, with the exception of a small portion which he retained for himself. He seems to have done so from a desire to be as free as possible from worldly cares, with a view to prosecuting his studies without interruption.¹

Two circumstances now combined to give a marked bias to the theological opinions of Ussher. One was a natural reaction from the Roman Catholic leanings of some members of his family, the other the strong Puritanical element that prevailed in Trinity College. Stapleton, a polemical writer in the interests of the Church of Rome, had written a book called the *Fortress of the Faith*, in which he endeavoured to prove, by quotations from the Fathers, that the Roman Catholic Church was the old Church, and Protestantism altogether a new religion. To combat Stapleton, Ussher's attention was directed to the earliest Christian writers, and he commenced that study of the Fathers which only ended with his thirty-eighth year.

But Ussher found a still more formidable foe to his faith in the Jesuit Henry Fitzsymons. The career of this remarkable man deserves more than a passing notice. He was sprung of a good stock, who were all "of name and account in Dublin." His branch of the family was settled in Swords, and he himself was born in Dublin in 1566. His father was a senator or alderman of the city, and his grandfather was Sir Thomas Fitzsymons, Prime Serjeant-in-Law. By his mother, Anna Segrave, he was allied to the Stanihursts, and James Ussher was his cousin.² Fitzsymons seems to have been born a Roman Catholic, since he tells us that when ten years of age he was "inveigled into heresie," and at twenty-one he claimed that he was "able to convert into Protestancie any encounterer whatsoever." In 1583, he matriculated at Hart Hall, and subsequently returned to Ireland,

1. In this year the infant College was in a precarious condition. "For lack of maintenance it was ready to dissolve and break-up if it had not been relieved on this instant. The Queen's grant of £100 per annum was accordingly raised to £600." — *Calendar of State Papers*, 1596, p. 190.

2. See *Ussher Memoirs*, p. 29, 277; and *Dict. Nat. Biog.*

and gave "great disedification in Dublin by his error" — i.e., Protestantism. In 1587, we find Fitzsymons, in Paris, where, in controversy with Father Darbyshire, "an owld English Jesuit," nephew of Bishop Bonner, and formerly Archdeacon of Essex, his Protestantism was overthrown, and he was received into the Roman Catholic Church.

In 1596, Fitzsymons, who meanwhile had joined the Jesuit Order in Rome, was sent back to Ireland in response to a petition from O'Neill and others, to carry on a mission, and he opened a chapel in a nobleman's house in Dublin and celebrated the first high Mass that had been heard of in the city for forty years. As is always the way with converts, Fitzsymons, from being a warm supporter of Protestantism, had now become one of its most bitter assailants.

At length his aggressiveness became so great that the authorities were compelled to interfere, and Fitzsymons was seized and thrown into prison in the Castle of Dublin. His incarceration, however, could not have been very severe, as he was permitted to hold a religious controversy with Challoner, Hanmer, and Rider the Dean of St. Patrick's. Against the latter he maintained the thesis that "all antiquitie is repugnant to Protestancie." Fitzsymons himself, in the dedication of his "Britannomachia" to Aquaviva, the General of his Order, gives a graphic account of his controversial labours, and also of his interview with Ussher. "While I was in captivity in the Castle of Dublin for five years, I did everything in my power to provoke the parsons to a discussion. . . . Whenever I knew they were passing in the corridors or castle yard, I cried to see them, and by word or gesture to attract their attention. But they neither wished to look up at me in the tower, nor did they pretend to hear me when I challenged them in, a stentorian voice.³ One indeed, a youth of eighteen,

3. The Castle was to Dublin what the Tower was to London. According to the *Carew MSS.*, it had some very loathsome "dungeons." — See also Hogan's *Celebrated Irishmen of the Sixteenth Century*, p. II, 12. Fitzsymons seems not to have been harshly treated, and to have enjoyed a considerable amount of liberty.

else, imprinted his character on the Irish clergy of his day. — Report of the Dublin Church Congress, p. 126. Professor Mahaffy's view is that Travers, Alvey, and Temple were men who were "balked in their English promotion by their acknowledged Puritanism." — *Book of Trinity College*, p. 17. In the MS. Room, Trinity College, Dublin, may be seen notes, made by Ussher when an undergraduate, of Travers' sermons preached in the chapel, Trinity College, Dublin, dated 1594 (Class C. 5, 13). Trinity College was not exceptional in its Puritanism. It had a rival in Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where the authorities discarded surplices and hoods at morning and evening prayer, as well as at the celebration of the Holy Communion. College suppers, as a rule, were given on Fridays. Bishop Hall writes to Wadsworth, afterwards tutor to the Infanta: "In Emmanuel College they receive the Holy Sacrament sitting upon forms about the communion-table, and doe pull the loafe one from the other after the minister hath begon. And so the cupp, one drinking, as it were to another, as good fellows, without any particular application of the saide words more than once for all." — *Lewis's Life of Hall*, p. 32-3. It was of this college that Dr. Preston became president. We also read that in the absence of Dr. Whitgift, on a certain Sunday, Mr. Cartwright and two of his adherents made three sermons so vehemently inveighing against all ceremonies of the Church that, at leaving prayer, all scholars save three cast off their surplices as an abominable relic of superstition. — See Fuller's *History of the University of Cambridge*, p. 197. Compare the surplice riots of our own day in St. George's-in-the-East, as described by Stanley, *Life and Correspondence*, ii, p. 25, &c.

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