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CONNOP THIRLWALL, BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S

It is fitting that this issue of CEREDIGION should include an article on Connop Thirlwall ; it is almost exactly a hundred years since he retired from the bishopric of St. David's, which has always included Cardiganshire within its bounds. Connop Thirlwall is, moreover, an interesting example of an Englishman who came to Wales to fulfil a specific task and who made an important contribution to the life of his adopted country.

Newell Connop Thirlwall, to give him his full baptismal name, was one of three sons of Thomas and Susannah Thirlwall of London. His mother had previously been married to a Welsh apothecary ; she survived her second husband and lived to see her son become Bishop of St. David's. Thomas Thirlwall demands more lengthy notice. He claimed descent from the Thirlwalls of Northumberland whose castle, built according to tradition with stone from Hadrian's Wall, still stands in ruins. He was an Anglican priest who became rector of Bowers Gifford in Essex in 1814, after serving a number of cures in London. For some time he was chaplain to Bishop Thomas Percy (1729—1811) editor of the *Reliques of ancient English poetry*. Thirlwall was a Justice of the Peace for Middlesex and Essex and in 1817 he became widely known through a pamphlet in which he defended the London magistrates against charges made against them in the Report of the Committee on the State of the Police of the Metropolis. The publication of some parts of his pamphlet was considered a breach of Parliamentary privilege, and Thirlwall was called to the bar of the House of Commons and rebuked. His other writings included a treatise on the Gospels, and editions of the works of Sir Matthew Hale and of Jeremy Taylor's *Holy living* and *Holy dying*.

Connop Thirlwall was born in Stepney on February 11, 1797. In his later years he was often the guest of Mrs. William Bayne, whose husband had been a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, on his birthday ; she always made sure that there was a dinner which included eleven guests, eleven dishes and eleven different kinds of wine.

Thirlwall went to school as a day-scholar at the London Charterhouse from 1810 until 1813. His schoolfellows included George Grote the historian and J. C. Hare who was Thirlwall's contemporary as Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. Thirlwall's academic record

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was not brilliant ; he evidently read far and wide instead of concentrating more narrowly on his prescribed studies. Before he entered Charterhouse he had already appeared as an author. His father, who was very proud of his clever son, published *Primitiae*, a collection of his essays and poems, in 1809; it was dedicated to Bishop Thomas Percy. Connop Thirlwall did not like to remember this volume in later years :

‘ If you had been aware of the intense loathing with which I think of [*Primitiae*] . . . you would not have recalled it to my mind . . . If I could buy up every copy for the flames, without risk of a reprint, I should hardly think any price too high . . . ’¹

In 1814 Thirlwall entered Trinity College, Cambridge, of which he became a Fellow in 1818. From 1815 until 1817 he was secretary of the newly-founded Cambridge Union Society which, in the latter year, was suspended through the efforts of the University authorities. Just as Thirlwall’s wide-ranging reading while at Charterhouse looks forward to his life-long interest in European literature, so his participation in the Cambridge Union Society looks forward to his later insistence upon the necessity of free and informed discussion of important issues.

Thirlwall’s election to a Fellowship freed him from the immediate necessity of choosing a profession, and he spent over a year travelling in Europe. When he returned, he entered Lincoln’s Inn as a law student in 1820. He was called to the bar in 1825 and practised law until 1827. Although he worked hard and competently, Thirlwall was never truly interested in the profession of the law. He certainly found his work much less congenial than his increasing familiarity with the *literati* of London. This was of great value to him ; on the one hand he formed a number of lasting friendships, while on the other he developed his ability to speak and argue with clarity and fairness. John Stuart Mill gives us a glimpse of Thirlwall at this period :—

‘ [in a debate on Owenism in 1825] the speaker with whom I was most struck . . . was Thirlwall . . . Before he had uttered ten sentences, I set him down as the best speaker I had ever heard, and I have never heard any one whom I placed above him . . . ’²

During this period Thirlwall published two works which both illustrate his interests and anticipate his later activities. In 1825 he published, anonymously, a translation of Friedrich Schleiermacher’s critical study of St. Luke’s Gospel. This was a brave thing to do ; Schleiermacher was one of a number of German theologians who were subjecting the Bible, and in particular the records of the life of Jesus, to unprecedented scrutiny. The vast majority of English theologians

and clergymen knew very little of German theology and were alarmed by what they heard about it. Thirlwall's translation of Schleiermacher was attacked as an encouragement to infidelity and the spread of improper ideas about the Gospels. He decided to publish the translation because he was convinced that theology, like other studies, could not flourish unless differing opinions could be expressed freely and unless the results of contemporary scholarship were used in their support. In his earlier years, at least, Thirlwall does seem to have had a somewhat imperfect sense of the weight of conservative opinion against new ideas ; he was surprised more than once by the fury of the attacks upon him, or upon ideas for which he stood and which he was convinced were beyond dispute.

In 1825 Thirlwall also published his translation of Ludwig Tieck's two stories, *The pictures* and *The betrothing*. His translation was clear and faithful albeit, like his other writings, without obvious literary graces. It is an instance of his continuing interest in European literature and his desire to make it widely known. His interest in literature continued throughout his life ; his letters include frequent references to the latest books he has been reading, and he was for some years President of the Royal Society of Literature, of which a former Bishop of St. David's, Thomas Burgess, had been the first President.

Thirlwall was ordained deacon in the Church of England in 1827, and ordained priest the following year. He had considered ordination earlier in his life but had been uncertain about his ability to reconcile his own liberal theological views with Anglican formularies. For a graduate, the Anglican church provided a career which promised security, comfort, and an assured place in society ; it frequently provided, in addition, ample leisure for reading and study. As a Fellow of Trinity, Thirlwall would, in the normal course of events, gain lucrative preferment from among the many livings in the gift of the College. Men of learning, such as Charles James Blomfield, J. H. Monk and J. C. Hare—all Fellows of Trinity—were common among early nineteenth-century clergymen. Throughout the nineteenth century many parish priests, like Connop Thirlwall himself, were to write authoritative works while incumbents of rural parishes ; Charles Merivale's *History of the Romans under the Empire* (1850-64) and Mandell Creighton's *History of the Papacy* (1882-94) come to mind.

During his remaining years at Cambridge, Thirlwall spent little time in specifically clerical duties. In 1829 he became incumbent of Over near Cambridge but his duties extended to little beyond the conduct of services. Most of his time was spent in Classical studies and in college affairs. In co-operation with J. C. Hare he translated Neibuhr's *Roman history* (1828-32) and edited *The Philological Museum* (1831-33), a periodical devoted to Classical studies, in which some of

Walter Savage Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* first appeared in print. From 1832 Thirlwall was one of the Tutors in Trinity College. He worked hard and took much interest in his students. He did much to turn the emphasis in teaching the Classics from preoccupation with literature to a due regard for the study of ancient history and thought.

To many people, it must have seemed likely that Thirlwall would remain at Trinity for many years, secure in his fellowship and enjoying an increasing reputation as a scholar. In 1834, however, he became involved in a controversy about the admission of Dissenters to University degrees. He was one of sixty-three Cambridge men who signed a petition for the admission of Dissenters to degrees which was presented to the House of Commons in March 1834. Thomas Turton, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, published a pamphlet in which he maintained that great evils would ensue in educational establishments in which the students held a variety of theological opinions. Thirlwall replied to this in his *Letter on the admission of Dissenters to academic degrees*, in which he argued that the 'Anglican' element in Cambridge college environment and discipline was not so precious as to be allowed to stand in the way of the admission of Dissenters to degrees. A brisk exchange of pamphlets and letters followed. Thirlwall seems to have been genuinely unaware of the intense prejudice within the University against changes and against the extension of its privileges to people outside the Anglican church. In May 1834, the Master of Trinity, Christopher Wordsworth, invited Thirlwall to resign his tutorship. Thirlwall did so, under protest, to avoid being the centre of further controversy. He retained his fellowship, but took no further part in College affairs.

Thirlwall's connection with Trinity College was not yet ended. William Whewell and W. H. Thompson, who succeeded Wordsworth as Master of the College, were respectively personal friends and pupils of Thirlwall, who returned to Cambridge from time to time throughout his life. In 1867 he was elected Honorary Fellow of Trinity College and in 1884 the Thirlwall Prize was instituted at Cambridge for dissertations involving original research.

Although Thirlwall now seemed without hope of advancement, he soon received unexpected preferment. Since 1830 the Whig government had been rewarding clergymen of merit and of liberal views with handsome preferments such as the canonry of St. Paul's given to Sydney Smith in 1831. In November 1834, Brougham, the Lord Chancellor, offered Thirlwall the rectory of Kirby Underdale in Yorkshire; the day after he made the offer the government fell. Thirlwall accepted the living; the following letter indicates some of his reasons:—

... before I had signified my acceptance of the living the London papers had announced the presentation. I have at least the satisfaction of knowing that it came perfectly unsought . . . On the whole, I am very glad of such an opportunity of withdrawing from college, where, though I have many excellent friends, I cannot help feeling my position rather awkward, and could, perhaps, never get rid of some unpleasant recollections . . .³

Kirby Underdale is sixteen miles east of York ; there were about 300 people in the parish, and the living was worth over £800. Thirlwall took up residence in February 1835. He was a diligent parish priest, conscientious in conducting services and visiting his flock. He was sometimes asked to write letters for his parishioners who could not do this for themselves. His fondness for children and animals first became apparent during this period of his life. While he was at Kirby Underdale he undertook the education of his nephews, and his letters to them and to their father illustrate this trait in his character :—

... When you come again I dare say you will be as good-tempered and merry as you used to be . . . I hope you may be as fond of me as I shall be of you . . . I think you will say that England is the best place after all to live in all the year round, though we may be equally happy everywhere if we have only good friends about us, and make ourselves beloved by them. That is what I have no doubt you will do here when you come, and therefore I long to see you quite as much as you can long to see me. You must tell Johnny that I long to see him too . . . Also, when you see Sukey next, you must give her a kiss, and tell her that Uncle Connop sent it to her folded up in a letter all the way from Yorkshire.⁴

Thirlwall returned to Kirby Underdale after he had become Bishop of St. David's. In a letter to John Thirlwall (14 April, 1866), he describes a visit :—

[The incumbent drove Thirlwall] to Kirby. He had assembled some of the patriarchs—male and female—to a tea . . . the Church is as it was, except that the Chancel has been nicely reseeded . . . the tea-party were sure that I should not have 'kenned the toon again' . . .⁵

Life at Kirby Underdale left Thirlwall much leisure for study and writing ; it is said that he was in his study for up to sixteen hours a day. From 1835 until 1847 he brought out his *History of Greece* which ranks among the most important works of Classical scholarship produced in Victorian England ; a revised edition appeared between 1845 and 1852. It was closely followed by George Grote's *History of Greece* (1846-56) which quickly established itself as the foremost work of its kind, and attracted much attention which might otherwise have gone to Thirlwall's *History*.

Thirlwall's work was, nonetheless, of great importance. Previous histories of Greece in English had been written when historical method was imperfectly understood, and some were vitiated by political bias.

Thirlwall's *History* approached its subject—as the future bishop was later to approach theological controversy—with calm detachment. It made one of the earliest attempts to separate history from myth. Its very detachment and absence of party spirit account, to some extent, for its speedy eclipse by Grote's work, whose 'radical' interpretation of Greek history attracted the Victorians more than Thirlwall's greater caution in passing judgment upon people and events. Thirlwall wrote little apart from his theological works after he had completed his *History*; this was due to as much to the demand on his time as bishop as to any feeling that he had nothing more to say in the field of Classical scholarship.

During his time at Kirby Underdale Thirlwall did not lose touch with London, or with the friends he had made while at Lincoln's Inn and Cambridge. Public recognition of his interest in unsectarian education came when, in 1836, he was elected to the Senate of London University.

In 1837 he was proposed as Bishop of Norwich. Both King William IV and William Howley, Archbishop of Canterbury, were unwilling to see Thirlwall made a bishop, on account of his liberal views; Norwich went to Edward Stanley, whose son Arthur Penrhyn Stanley became a friend of Thirlwall and preached his funeral sermon in Westminster Abbey. Three years later, in 1840, Thirlwall was nominated to the see of St. David's. At first he would not accept; this astonished a number of people, including Thomas Carlyle. Queen Victoria was not so alarmed by 'liberal' clergyman as William IV had been and William Howley's objections were overcome largely by the wish of the Prime Minister, Melbourne, to see Thirlwall appointed:

. . . Thirlwall's first impulse was to refuse. He was anxious to complete his *History of Greece* . . . It is said to have taken all the power of suasion by his friends to make him agree to be a bishop . . . [When he went to see Melbourne] Melbourne was in bed surrounded with letters and newspapers.

'Very glad to see you; sit down, sit down; hope you are come to say you accept. I only wish you to understand that I don't intend if I know it to make a heterodox bishop . . . I sent your edition of Schleiermacher to Lambeth . . . [the Archbishop of Canterbury] does not concur in all your opinions, but he says there is nothing heterodox in your book.'⁶

Nevertheless, Thirlwall's liberal views caused some alarm, and attempts were made to prevent his appointment to St. David's. A group of Tractarians, including John Keble, E. B. Pusey and Isaac Williams, alleged that Thirlwall was an unsuitable choice as a bishop since he drank to excess and smoked; they were really objecting to his theological views. Their objections were overruled although C. J. Blomfield, Bishop of London, did express his own opinion that smoking

was a habit unbecoming to a clergyman and a gentleman. Other critics, among whom Sir Benjamin Hall of Llanover was particularly outspoken, lamented that yet another English bishop was being placed in charge of a Welsh diocese. All these objections were of no avail ; Connop Thirlwall was consecrated and installed in 1840 and remained Bishop of St. David's until 1874.

Before considering Thirlwall as Bishop of St. David's, we may pause to survey the diocese over which he presided and the bishops whom he succeeded.⁷

In 1840 the diocese of St. David's consisted of Cardiganshire, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Brecon, Radnorshire (except for six parishes), Gower and some parts of Montgomeryshire, Monmouthshire and Herefordshire. Apart from the transfer of parishes in the three last-named counties to the dioceses of St. Asaph, Llandaff and Hereford, its area remained unchanged throughout Thirlwall's episcopate. It covered an area of over 2,250,000 acres. In 1835 there were 416 benefices—the other three Welsh dioceses had each less than 200—and over 470 Anglican churches and chapels.

The diocese was divided into the four archdeaconries of St. David's, Cardigan, Carmarthen and Brecon. The cathedral was at St. David's and the bishop's palace and diocesan headquarters were at Abergwili near Carmarthen.

The diversity among parishes within the diocese was enormous. Some, such as Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn in Cardiganshire, (32,000 acres) were of enormous extent ; others, such as Swansea and Llanelli, were densely populated. On the other hand there were, especially in Pembrokeshire, livings whose area and population were both extremely small. Many livings had either no parsonage house at all or else a house which was considered unfit for residence by a clergyman. Many livings were ill-paid ; in 1835 there were 338 livings worth less than £150 a year. Inadequate housing and poor livings combined to encourage non-residence and plurality among the clergy ; in 1835 more than half the clergy of the diocese held more than one living. Stipendiary curates served many parishes ; frequently they performed the duties in a number of parishes, for a fraction of the income of the non-resident incumbent.

Many of the problems of the diocese were beyond the bishop's control, and were not peculiar to Wales. Once an incumbent was instituted and inducted, it was impossible to remove him—however unfit he was to serve the parish in question—for anything short of open immorality. Many livings were in the gift of the Crown or individuals and institutions outside the diocese who were more likely to think of the advancement of people they knew rather than the kind of incumbent a particular parish needed. There was comparatively little

patronage in the gift of the diocesan bishop, and it was almost impossible for him to refuse to institute a clergyman to a living unless he was leading a notoriously scandalous life.

There were considerable difficulties attendant on the provision of new churches and the rebuilding and enlargement of existing buildings. The Nonconformists could build new chapels comparatively easily, with little legal procedure. The legal and parliamentary procedures involved in dividing parishes or building new churches were such as to dishearten all but the most enthusiastic advocates of such schemes. In addition the poverty of many parishes, and the understandable reluctance of Nonconformists to contribute to a church-rate, made rebuilding or restoration of churches a difficult task. Thirlwall himself commented on this problem :—

... I have still to lament the difficulty which in small rural parishes continues to impede the execution of the most urgently needed repairs ; sometimes from the poverty of the parishioners, sometimes from the inertness or positive resistance of the lay impropiators, who, though bound . . . to keep chancels in repair, neglect . . . that duty. In other cases again, where a church-rate has been duly made, its collection is prevented . . .⁸

The diocese of St. David's had, in addition, what we may call a ' linguistic ' problem. This has recently been dealt with most fully by W. T. Morgan.⁹ There were some areas of the diocese—such as all but two of its Radnorshire parishes—whose inhabitants were monoglot English speakers, while other areas—such as Carmarthenshire, north Pembrokeshire and north Cardiganshire—were almost totally inhabited by monoglot Welsh speakers. The appointment of incumbents took little note of the language problems of the parishes they were to serve.

Between 1660 and 1840 there had been twenty-five Bishops of St. David's. Many of them stayed less than ten years; fifteen of them were translated to other dioceses. Only two of these bishops—William Thomas (1677-83) and John Lloyd (1686-7)—were Welsh. The poverty of the see encouraged rapid translation of bishops ; the remoteness of the diocese from London and the House of Lords, and the difficulties of travelling within it, made St. David's a diocese which few bishops were unwilling to leave. The policy of appointing as bishops men who would support, or at least not loudly oppose, the government of the day led to a succession of English bishops who had frequently next to no understanding of the particular problems, linguistic, social or ecclesiastical, of St. David's diocese.

The revival of church life in the diocese after the Interregnum was not assisted by William Lucy (1660—1677), the first Restoration bishop. He was interested in his own episcopal rights rather than in the

general condition of the diocese ; as a result of his dispute with the Archdeacon of Brecon, archdiaconal visitations—an important means of contact between the various ranks of the clergy and a useful source of information for the bishop—were suspended until 1837. Although there were a number of conscientious bishops, such as George Bull (1705-10) and Adam Ottley (1713-23), little advance was made until the episcopate of Samuel Horsley (1788-93). Horsley was a vigorous controversialist and an energetic prelate. He revived the office of rural dean—particularly important as a vehicle of communication between the bishop and clergy in the absence of archdiaconal visitations—tried to secure a comparatively learned and well-paid clergy, and strove to ensure a minimum stipend for assistant curates. During the episcopate of Thomas Burgess (1803-25) great advances were made. He was an energetic man who was truly able to place the welfare of his diocese, and particularly of his clergy, at the forefront of his mind. He held, along with his bishopric, a prebend of Durham ; he used the income from this to help augment the revenues of the bishopric of St. David's. He founded St. David's College, Lampeter, in 1822 in order to provide ordinands from the diocese with an education of a good academic standard within their means ; he saw St. David's College as fulfilling an important role in the encouragement of a learned and useful clergy. Burgess anticipated Connop Thirlwall in his efforts to learn and speak Welsh, and made great efforts to secure clergy who spoke Welsh for the parishes in which Welsh was the first language of the people.

What was Connop Thirlwall's conception of a bishop ? He always saw his episcopal activity in national as well as diocesan terms. As a leading member of the established church, he was required—or so he thought—to help in maintaining the balance between church and state ; the idea of disestablishing the Church of England was beyond his thoughts, even though he supported the disestablishment of the Irish Church in 1869. Like his contemporaries, such as A.C. Tait of London and Canterbury, Samuel Wilberforce of Oxford, and Henry Phillpotts of Exeter, he regarded attendance at the House of Lords as an important part of his duties. Thirlwall spoke comparatively little in the House of Lords, but when he spoke he commanded respect. In the Lords Thirlwall represented first the Church of England (as in his support of the 1870 Education Act) ; secondly the diocese (in his support of the Church in Wales and in his opposition to the proposal to unite the dioceses of Bangor and St. Asaph) ; third, informed Christian opinion (as in his advocacy of the admission of Jews to Parliament).

Within the diocese, Thirlwall saw the bishop as a director rather than a chief executive greatly concerned with detail. He certainly did not consider that he was required to interfere in the details of the

life and work of his clergy, who were expected to look to the archdeacons and rural deans for guidance in their day-to-day affairs. It was not for the bishop to intrude his opinions unasked upon other individuals ; he was to be unobtrusive in directing his diocese rather than to be in any way a bustling partisan. Here Thirlwall looked back to the eighteenth century and had little in common with his younger contemporaries like Wilberforce and Tait whose activity in their diocese was incessant and involved them in much more controversy within their diocese than Thirlwall aroused or desired. As J. J. S. Perowne remarks, ' he did not belong to the modern type of bishop, whose efficiency is measured in common estimation by his power of speech and motion.'¹⁰

Nevertheless Thirlwall diligently performed the traditional duties of a bishop ; visitation, confirmation, ordination and preaching within his diocese. He took pride in his care in visiting even the remotest parts of his diocese. There is for example, a long letter to his uncle, John Thirlwall of Alnwick, describing a tour of various parts of the diocese in 1843. In it he comments on church buildings and the countryside with warmth and interest. Another letter, written in the following year, shows his interest in the growing town of Pembroke Dock.¹¹ During his episcopate he increased the number of confirmation centres within the diocese, and he frequently urged the importance of confirmation itself, and of adequate instruction and time for preparation of people who were to be confirmed.

Thirlwall began his episcopate in a way which pleased clergy and laity throughout the diocese. He was the first bishop to be enthroned in person for many years. He quickly learned Welsh sufficiently well to be able to read and preach in it ; a volume of his Welsh sermons was published after his death. He is thought to have had the help of John Jones (' Tegid ') in mastering Welsh. Although his Welsh remained somewhat stilted and ' bookish ' he had something of George Borrow's delight in, and high opinion of, his facility in speaking Welsh:—

. . . Few occurrences worth recording took place . . . until I left Abergwili . . . [one of these was] that on Sunday, the 6th of last month, I read the Morning Service, including the Thanksgiving for the Queen, in Welsh and administered the Sacrament in the same tongue to above 100 communicants . . . [At St. David's, on the Sunday after Christmas] one of the Welsh Prebendaries being absent on account of a domestic affliction, I undertook the Welsh service in the nave . . . I was told next day that the people insist on it that I must be a Welshman by birth, "for I read better than the clergy". I believe it possible that my pronunciation may be more correct than that of many who officiate here . . .¹²

He lost no time in becoming familiar with his diocese and made a practice—first implemented in 1840—of regular periods of residence

at St. David's which he used in order to keep in touch with the life of the cathedral and as a means of increasing his familiarity with the western portions of the diocese.

Thirlwall soon became disliked by the clergy over whom he was placed, and to whom he seemed remote and hard. For the first time in his life he was obliged to be in regular contact with colleagues—as distinct from his parishioners at Kirby Underdale or the undergraduates he taught at Cambridge—with whom he had little in common and who could not 'draw him out' by their wit, learning or conversation. Many of his clergy were monoglot Welsh speakers who were unable to understand much of what Thirlwall was saying or who could not join him in learned conversation. Only a few of his clergy—usually educated men like Isaac and Rowland Williams—managed to penetrate his reserve. Although the clergy did not like Thirlwall, they respected his learning and his position as something of a national figure who brought credit to the diocese to which they all belonged.

Some aspects of Thirlwall's episcopate may now be considered in greater detail. His relations with his clergy, already touched upon, may first be examined. Thirlwall held a very solemn view of holy orders as this passage from an ordination sermon shows :—

... Go forth then to your work, as from the personal presence of your risen Lord
... Consider yourselves as sent by Him, to return before long with an account of your commission . . . In all the labours and trials of your ministry, let His blessed image be still before your eyes, and His gracious salutation ever sounding in your ears, "Peace be unto you." If you faithfully "keep that which is committed to your trust", if you diligently "stir up the gift of God", if you patiently endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ", then that peace, a peace which the world can neither give nor take from you, will surely be yours, and will abide with you . . .¹⁸

He had a genuine desire to help and encourage any clergyman who cared to approach him, but few of his clergy made the attempt. If people would not come to him with their problems he would not seek them out. His correspondence with his clergy is that of an administrator rather than a pastor or spiritual guide. He did, however, give his clergy as a body much practical help. A fund he set up, and to which he contributed over £30,000 from his own income in order to augment the value of poor livings, did much to meet a desperate need among the clergy of the diocese. His visitation Charges, delivered between 1842 and 1872, provided the clergy with advice on the ecclesiastical problems of the day. Certain exhortations are constantly repeated. Thirlwall frequently urged the importance of study as part of a clergyman's life and as the source of much of his effectiveness in combating false opinions. He stressed the importance of a clergyman's

visiting his flock in their homes. He wished to see a spirit of unity and fellowship develop among the clergy, and his first visitation Charge includes a strong plea for regular meetings among the clergy and for a willingness in each clergyman to think of the work of the church in the diocese as well as in his own parish :—

There is, I am persuaded, no one among us . . . who thinks so highly of himself, as not to believe that he may learn much, and derive much assistance from communication with his brethren, nor so engrossed with his own share of the common work, as not to be desirous of imparting to others whatever has been recommended by his own experience to himself . . . It is not enough that we are members of one great body, unless we feel ourselves to be so, and realise the unity we profess by mutual sympathy and succour . . .¹⁴

His own personal behaviour, however, did little to assist the growth of fellowship among the clergy ; he gave no personal example of willingness to meet his clergy apart from formal occasions. He approved the idea of diocesan synods, which were revived in the diocese of Exeter in 1851, but did nothing to assist the formation of a Diocesan Synod or Diocesan Conference in his own diocese. He frequently urged closer co-operation between clergy and laity ;

. . . . Without the willing and zealous co-operation of the laity, the exertions of the clergy, however, strenuous, can never be attended with more than a very scanty measure of ambiguous success . . .¹⁵

Here again, he did not give much of a lead himself, although he did much to commend the church by his own standing among the leading intellectuals in the country at large.

Above all, Thirlwall continually emphasised the supreme importance of the work of the clergyman in the routine cares of his parish :—

. . . What I am now insisting on is of a more immediately practical nature. I am not recommending indifference or inertness . . . What I am urging is a double measure of quiet, steady activity, concentrated on the regular ordinary undisputed work of the Church. . . . Your churches, your schools, the dwellings of the poor, the chambers of the sick, the ignorant, the erring, the careless, the weak-hearted—these you have always with you. If these objects of your pastoral care should so engross both your time and thoughts, as to leave you none to spare for [controversy] . . . I am sure that you will not be the less happy . . . In [your ministerial labours] you will find the answer of a good conscience, the peace of God resting with yourselves. Through them, while you make full proof of your ministry, you will help, each in his measure and degree, to draw down upon the Church the blessing of peace.¹⁶

Within his parish, it was most important for the clergyman to set a good example :—

. . . We must be prepared to find that each of us is regarded by most of those

around us, as affording a measure and test of the character and efficiency of the Church. We have too many mournful illustrations of the truth of this remark constantly before our eyes, to be allowed either to question or forget it. . .¹⁷

Zeal and devotedness are to be cultivated above all else. His final Charge states this most clearly :—

. . . There is a call for a more than ordinary degree of devotedness. Everyone has something to offer, and the question will not be whether it is much or little, but whether it is his best, and offered with a willing mind . . . However narrow and obscure may be the sphere of their labour, it is the same work in which they have to take part, the same faithfulness which is to be shown in that which is least as in much . . . While his zeal is quickened in the care of that which is specially committed to his stewardship, his sympathy will be drawn out to all that affects the welfare of the Church at large. . .¹⁸

Thirlwall himself set an excellent example of hard work done quietly and without show, although he undoubtedly underestimated the importance of his own duty to be a pastor to his clergy and to give them constant and kindly encouragement in their own pastoral work.

Connop Thirlwall regarded his triennial visitations as most important, since he delivered on these occasions Charges in which he set out his own opinions on the contemporary ecclesiastical situation. He delivered eleven Charges between 1842 and 1872 ; these were heard and read not only within the diocese, but throughout the country. They exemplify Thirlwall's vast learning and his own theological standpoint. He saw his Charges as affording him opportunities of declaring his views to his clergy rather than as providing him with the means of replying to questions which they themselves put to him. The style of the Charges was formal, and it is likely that they made little impression on the large number of his clergy whose first language was Welsh. Sometimes they rose above formality into something more fervent :—

. . . The Bishop gave a most magnificent charge—some will say too long . . . His delivery was far more solemn and impressive, than in reading his charge you would guess ; and to hear the deliberate thoughts of so masculine a mind rolling out in equable flow, and with a wonderfully sustained energy, for about two hours and a half, was one of the most solemn things at which I was ever present. Highly as I thought before of Thirlwall's intellect, my idea of it was thus considerably raised ; and still more did he rise during some portions of the charge, in his character of Bishop, speaking with a kind of apostolic dignity and fervour, for which (from the cold march of his periods) I had never given him credit . . .¹⁹

Thirlwall had, by his way of life—in which reading occupied every moment which was not occupied with his work or with the animals,

birds and chosen visitors whom Thirlwall loved to entertain at Abergwili—much more opportunity for study, and more inclination for it, than many of his fellow-bishops. His great learning, while not paraded to the slightest extent, lent weight to all his Charges. Contemporary comments indicate that Henry Phillpotts of Exeter and A. C. Tait of London were the only bishops whose Charges commanded anything like the respect accorded to those of Thirlwall. The following comment of Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin, on the Primary Charge of A. C. Tait as Bishop of London (1858) might also be applied to any Charge by Connop Thirlwall :—

. . . Your Lordship's charge presents a striking contrast—as all must admit—to the prevailing idea of an Episcopal Charge, viz, an elaborate and studied inanity, carefully avoiding anything that might be displeasing to any of the clergy, and accordingly keeping clear of everything on which there may be two opinions among them ; thence dealing only in vague and barren generalities, as unprofitable as they are unobjectionable. I am so glad to see a Bishop . . . determined to show that he has at least something to say and is resolved to say it . . .²⁰

Like many other Charges, they were lengthy ; that of 1857 lasted three hours and twenty minutes. In them Thirlwall dwelt on general topics of concern to the Church rather than on topics of interest primarily to members of his diocese. He frequently urged his clergy in his Charges to think of themselves as part of the whole church of God and not let their thoughts be confined to the diocese :—

. . . However much your thoughts may be occupied by subjects relating to the particular sphere of your ministry, you feel it, I am sure, to be not less a privilege than a duty to look abroad from time to time on the general prospects of the Church . . . no feeling that you could carry back with you, when you return to the discharge of your ordinary duties, can be more desirable, than a heightened consciousness of your relation to the Church of Christ militant here on earth, and a lively sympathy with her fortunes . . .²¹

Thirlwall regarded his Charges as helping the clergy to keep intellectually alert and aware of contemporary feeling in the Church. He offered his opinions to his clergy and did not expect people to agree with them. He wished, in particular, to give impartial comments on the major ecclesiastical questions of the day. He avoided—as no other contemporary bishop except A. C. Tait was able to avoid—dealing with controversial topics in a way which was likely to cause needless alarm or laying undue stress on a particular aspect of the controversy under discussion. In his examination of such phenomena as the secession of J. H. Newman to Rome in 1845 or the publication of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860 Thirlwall wished to aid his clergy in deciding how to consider the points at issue by setting before them the

whole situation facing the Church and not merely confront them with the opinions, however sincerely held, of a single individual.

It will be appreciated, from his concern for the intellectual needs of his clergy, that Thirlwall regarded the educational work of the Church as one of the most important parts of the work of the diocese. Even a somewhat hostile critic such as J. Vyrnwy Morgan gives Thirlwall high praise for his efforts in this field.²² Thirlwall was constantly urging the clergy to remember that the education of the children in their parishes was a matter for their concern. Like his contemporary, Thomas Vowler Short (Bishop of St. Asaph, 1846-70), he encouraged the establishment of many new schools and gave from his own funds to assist in the work. He urged the clergy to co-operate with the School Boards who would implement the provisions of the 1870 Education Act, and indeed to be represented on such Boards, while at the same time recognising their own special place in the provision of religious education in their parishes :—

. . . Churchmen, but especially clergymen . . . [who] denounce secular education as if it was a positive evil, and ignore the moral influence of school discipline in contrast with habits of vagrancy and lawlessness, are I believe doing more damage to the cause of religious education than its avowed enemies. But they would be still farther from the truth, and in greater danger of showing themselves unfaithful toward their most sacred duty, if they treated such instruction as sufficient . . . and did not feel that it only adds a new motive for the discharge of that part of their office which relates to the feeding of Christ's lambs . . .²³

In 1857 Thirlwall announced the foundation of the St. David's Diocesan Education Board to co-ordinate efforts of the clergy and laity in the diocese, both in raising funds and in personal exertion, to improve the provision of elementary education. He welcomed the establishment of Trinity College, Carmarthen (1848) and Llandoverly College (1847).

Thirlwall's attitude to university education in Wales has provoked some adverse comments. He certainly showed no interest in the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, founded within his diocese and during his episcopate. As Bishop of St. David's he was Visitor of St. David's College, Lampeter. He envisaged his position as Visitor of the College as that of a judicious, unobtrusive figure who was not to interfere unnecessarily. In addition he felt that his powers as Visitor were so circumscribed as to greatly limit his ability—even if he had the desire—to intervene in College affairs to any useful purpose.

Thirlwall was, however, compelled to intervene in various controversies centring upon Rowland Williams, Vice-Principal of the College from 1850 until 1862. The Vice-Principal of Lampeter was in a difficult position ; the first Principal, Llewelyn Llewellyn (1827-78), held other preferments, including the Deanery of St. David's, and the

effective government of the College, the maintenance of its administration, its finances, its academic standards and the morale of its members, devolved largely on the Vice-Principal. Rowland Williams expected to find in Connop Thirlwall a strong support ; both men welcomed free enquiry in theological matters and Thirlwall was a noted supporter of educational enterprises. At first they were on good terms, and Williams paid a number of visits to Thirlwall at Abergwili.

In his Charge of 1857, Thirlwall replied to the protest of more than seventy clergymen from within the diocese who were alarmed at the tone of Williams' *Rational godliness*, a book of sermons. He made it quite clear that, while he did not agree with Williams' writings, he was not—because of the limitations imposed on him as Visitor, and because of his own high regard for Williams and the way in which he was fulfilling his duties at Lampeter—prepared to censure or inhibit him :—

... I venture to doubt whether his [Williams'] doctrinal statements would have attracted much attention, if they had not been forced into notice by the accident of his position . . . I cannot . . . be surprised that the work should in some minds have left the painful impression, that its ultimate tendency is to efface the distinction between natural and revealed religion. But I gladly declare my conviction . . . that in this case . . . the man is better than his work . . . And I will add that I feel such confidence in his personal character, as assures me that the liberty he enjoys will be to him the most effectual of all restraints . . . [The power] which is actually lodged in the Visitor of St. David's College only enables him to deprive any of its officers for misconduct or incapacity . . .²⁴

Williams contributed a chapter to the controversial *Essays and reviews* (1860) and doubts were once again raised about his future as Vice-Principal of Lampeter. The theological aspect of the controversy is beyond the scope of this article.²⁵ Thirlwall was once more compelled to make a public statement. Williams felt that Thirlwall had neither declared his own position firmly nor given himself and Lampeter the support needed while the College was under attack. Thirlwall had indeed urged Williams to resign in 1858, after an appeal had been made to him as Visitor ; it must be owned that Williams' behaviour and writings were not calculated to restore confidence in his orthodoxy, in his possession of superlative intellectual powers or in his prudence. Thirlwall was in a difficult position since Williams held for some years his Lampeter appointment together with a living in the diocese of Salisbury, whose bishop, W. K. Hamilton, instituted legal proceedings against Williams in 1861. It certainly seemed to many people that Thirlwall was refusing to support Williams because he did not wish to be drawn into controversy. He was undoubtedly relieved when Williams left Lampeter in 1862.

Like all Victorian bishops, Connop Thirlwall continually emphasised the need for adequate church buildings throughout his diocese. Over

200 churches and chapels were restored at a cost of over £500 during his episcopate, and during the same time thirty-one new or entirely rebuilt churches were consecrated.²⁶ The first church in Cardiganshire—and only the second in the diocese—consecrated by Thirlwall was at Llangorwen (1841) and the last St. Mary's Aberystwyth (1873).

Thirlwall himself gave a lead in supporting church building and restoration work; his gift of £1,000 towards the restoration of St. David's cathedral was only one of many gifts he made for this purpose, and he frequently encouraged other gifts by generous acknowledgement of efforts made to finance and carry out restoration and rebuilding. In his Charge of 1851 he spent some time in countering, in no uncertain terms, assertions made by Sir Benjamin Hall of Llanover about the ruinous condition of churches in the diocese.²⁷ Thirlwall also urged his clergy to remember that they were, with the laity, responsible for the preservation of ancient buildings in order that future generations might make use of them.

Thirlwall's interest in church building arose from his deeply-held concern that worship should be properly conducted within his diocese. He strove for decency and order, and obedience to the rubrics of the church. Well-designed and roomy churches erected in the most convenient place within the parish, where intelligible services—in which prayer, reading from the Bible, and preaching were evenly balanced—were to be performed; this was, to Thirlwall, the basis of the most proper kind of Anglican worship. Services were to be conducted according to the forms prescribed. Thirlwall has been criticised for his disapproval of services in which the sermon seemed to be unduly emphasised; the truth seems to be that he failed to understand fully the importance of local custom in worship—in St. David's diocese a tradition of emphasis on the sermon had become widespread—and the unpopularity of anyone who seeks to alter it. Here we see once more the man who in 1834 could not understand the force of the opposition to the granting of degrees to Dissenters.

Thirlwall was much less concerned than some of his fellow-bishops to secure uniformity on specific points of ritual and worship. He avoided disturbances such as those provoked by the directives of C. J. Blomfield of London in 1842 and Henry Phillpotts of Exeter in 1844 ordering the wearing of the surplice in preaching. He was, indeed, tolerant of details of ritual which were clearly in accordance with the Book of Common Prayer. The new church at Llangorwen, near Aberystwyth, for example, built by the Tractarians Matthew and Isaac Williams of Cwmcynfelin, included among its furnishings a stone altar—the first erected in Wales since the reformation—and an eagle lectern, and the daily service and turning to the east among its ritual activities; none of these was forbidden by the law and Thirlwall, who attended the

daily service some time before he consecrated the church, permitted them without any hesitation. Thirlwall, was, however, totally opposed to any innovations of a 'Romanising' nature, and in particular he deplored the practice of solitary communion. He wished to encourage reverence in church, and a proper view of worship among the laity, by all legitimate means. He urged discretion in church building and decoration and, like many Victorians, considered contemporary architecture a great improvement on that of the previous century :—

. . . A new church in the style which would have satisfied those who saw it fifty years ago, would now offend all who try it by a higher and more correct standard . . . It must therefore be deemed a happy coincidence, that in the case of some of the most precious remains of ecclesiastical architecture which have been handed down to us, the work has been reserved for our day, and for skilful and tender hands, by which they will be not only preserved from further decay, but renewed in their original freshness . . .²⁸

Churches should always make adequate provision for free seats for the poor, they should be open during the week, and there should be frequent celebrations of the Holy Communion.

Thirlwall was one of the first bishops to license readers after the revival of the office of reader in 1866. Between 1869 and 1873 he licensed seven readers ; the first of these, John Wesley Reese, was nominated by the Rector of Llanllwchaiarn.²⁹

In his Charge of 1872 Thirlwall stated that he expected that this would be his final visitation Charge. The opening of the Charge is worth quoting, since it shows that he had become, towards the end of his episcopate, less withdrawn from the clergy than formerly, although he always remained rather remote from most of them :—

I cannot meet you on this occasion without a personal reflection which, if I was able, I should not think it right to suppress. The temporary disability by which I was compelled, two years ago, to seek assistance for my last Confirmation, called forth marks of sympathy and kindness which I can never forget. But it also admonished me that the time could not be very far distant when my strength would no longer suffice even for the ordinary work of the Diocese, to say nothing of new calls which might be expected to arise out of the shifting circumstances of the Church . . .³⁰

Until 1869 no English bishop had been able to resign without an Act of Parliament and many bishops had remained in office after their powers had begun to fail. Thirlwall was determined that he should resign as soon as he felt he could not administer the diocese rather than stay on until people wondered why he still remained in office. By 1874 his mental powers were unabated, but his sight and hearing were failing. In May 1874 he resigned. A letter to the Archdeacon of St. David's explains his reasons for resigning and also shows that he

recognised the help he had derived from individual clergy during his episcopate :—

. . . It belongs to your character to depreciate your own merits and services ; but I am too deeply conscious of the extent to which my own labours have been lightened by your co-operation not to set a very different estimate upon them. They have been to me quite invaluable, and far more than I had any right to expect. I feel sure that no act of my episcopate will have proved more useful to the diocese than my resignation. If ever there was a diocese which needed the full vigour of two active bishops it is St. David's. It has had of late only the half, if so much, of one, and he an invalid, verging upon eighty.

But however it may be with others, the continual contraction of my power of work, of which I have been for some time painfully sensible, arising not only from advancing age, but from various ailments which must be growing with lapse of years, made the burden too heavy for me to bear.

I can most truly say that among all the good and pleasant things which I leave behind me, there is not one which I shall miss more keenly than the opportunity of intercourse with you and yours, which has been the source of an enjoyment I can never forget, or remember without the most earnest and affectionate wishes for the happiness of you all . . .³¹

After his resignation Thirlwall lived with one of his nephews in Bath. He continued to read and study, in spite of failing health. Much of his time was spent on detailed study of the Old Testament ; since 1870 Thirlwall had been a member of the committee undertaking the revision of the Bible whose labours led to the publication of the Revised Version (1881—1885). Although he became almost blind, and was increasingly feeble physically, he was able to write and later dictate letters and to have books read to him almost until his death on 27 July 1875. He was buried in Westminster Abbey in the same grave as George Grote. He is remembered in his diocese by the west front of St. David's cathedral, which was restored in his memory, and by a tablet in Abergwili church, which he helped to restore.

Connop Thirlwall commands attention in a number of ways ; as a theologian and scholar, as a defender of the individual's right to his own opinion, as a conscientious parish priest and bishop. He is a man for whom one feels a great and wholesome respect ; the respect due to someone who fulfils his appointed duties well with the help of all the mental, spiritual and personal qualities he possesses. He indeed, despite his lack of pastoral gifts and his remoteness from many of his clergy, may be counted among those who can truly be called 'servants of the servants of God'.

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The Charges of Connop Thirlwall and some of his other writings were collected in *Remains, literary and theological*, edited by J. J. S. Perowne, in 3 volumes (London, 1877—1878), henceforth cited as *Remains*. His letters to Betha Johnes of Dolaucothi were selected for publication by A. P. Stanley and edited by J. J. S. Perowne. They appeared as *Letters to a friend* in 1881. A second edition, which added some new material, was published in 1882; references in this article are to this edition, henceforth cited as *Letters*. A portion of the Dolaucothi collection, deposited at the National Library of Wales, includes material relating to this publication.

Many letters of Thirlwall, chiefly to members of his family and to a boyhood friend John Candler, and many sermons are included in the St. David's Diocese material included in the mss. deposited at the National Library of Wales by the Church in Wales. Edited texts of many of these letters are given in *Letters, literary and theological, of Connop Thirlwall*, edited by J. J. S. Perowne and L. Stokes. (London, 1881) henceforth cited as 'Perowne and Stokes'.

J. C. Thirlwall's *Connop Thirlwall, historian and theologian* (London, 1936) gives the fullest treatment of Thirlwall's life, writings and opinions. The article by J. Willis Clark in the *Dictionary of National Biography* is still of value.

Two more recent studies illuminate two aspects of Thirlwall's work. (i) O. G. Rees concerns himself with Thirlwall the theologian in his article 'Connop Thirlwall: liberal theologian' (*Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales*, Vol. XIV, 1964). (ii) Delyth M. James devoted part of her unpublished M.A. thesis, *Some social and economic problems of the Church of England in the Diocese of St. David's, 1800—1874*, (Aberystwyth, 1972) to Connop Thirlwall.

NOTES

1. Connop Thirlwall to Betha Johnes of Dolaucothi, 18 May 1868. *Letters*, pp. 184-5.
2. John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, third edition, London, 1874, p. 125.
3. Connop Thirlwall to John Thirlwall, 5 December 1824 ; Perowne and Stokes, p. 129.
4. Connop Thirlwall to his nephew Thomas Thirlwall, 8 June 1836 ; Perowne and Stokes, pp. 144-6.
5. Church in Wales (St. David's Diocese) mss. deposited in the National Library of Wales : Connop Thirlwall box.
6. W. T. McC. Torrens *Memoirs of . . . Melbourne*, second edition, London, 1878, pp. 330-2.
7. Much of the information in this description of the diocese is based on details given in Delyth M. James *Some social and economic problems of the Church of England in the Diocese of St. David's 1800—1874* (unpublished M.A. thesis, Aberystwyth, 1972), henceforth cited as 'James'.
8. Charge of 1857. *Remains*, Vol. I, p. 309.
9. See his most recent article, 'The Diocese of St. David's in the nineteenth century : the unreformed church (III)'. *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales*, Vol. XXIII (1973), pp. 18-25.
10. Perowne and Stokes, p. vi.
11. These letters are among the Church in Wales mss. referred to in footnote 5. In his Charge of 1851 (*Remains*, Vol. I, p. 142), Thirlwall refers to his visits to remote areas of the Diocese.
12. Connop Thirlwall to his brother Thomas Thirlwall, 2 January 1841 ; Perowne and Stokes, pp. 169-71.
13. Ordination Sermon (1845). *Remains*, Vol. III, pp. 365-55.
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21. Charge of 1845. *Remains*, Vol. I, pp. 95, 97.
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23. Charge of 1872. *Remains*, Vol. II, p. 331.
24. Charge of 1857. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 292, 308-9.
25. A good account of Rowland Williams and his relation to the theological thought of the period is to be found in M.A. Crowther, *Church embattled : religious controversy in mid-Victorian England*, Newton Abbot, 1970.
26. James, pp. 290-1. 412-6.
27. Charge of 1851. *Remains*, Vol. I, pp. 142, 104-6.
28. Charge of 1866. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 93.
29. James, p. 293.
30. Charge of 1872. *Remains*, Vol. II, p. 290.
31. Connop Thirlwall to the Archdeacon of St. David's, 13 May 1874 ; Perowne and Stokes, pp. 375-6.