



REV. DR. HENRY MONTGOMERY
1788 - 1865

*A Profile
in Courage*

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INTRODUCTION TO THE 2015 REPRINT

The life of Henry Montgomery is worth celebrating on many counts and to do it justice much more space would be required than afforded in this small publication. That said, there is no better source, authoritative, lucid, concise, than the paper prepared and presented by the Rev. William McMillan (then of Newry) at Dunmurry, on 27th March 1966 at the Special Centenary Lecture marking Dr. Montgomery's death on 18th December 1865. It is reproduced here in full as a fitting tribute to all that Henry Montgomery represented and fought for during his long Ministry.

In this the second decade of the 21st century his name will not be known or referred to in many households in Ireland or beyond. In many ways the tenor of the debates from 19th Century in which he was engaged may seem arcane. Nevertheless, his vision and his life's work and dedication to reform, tolerance, and freedom to worship for all, combined with powerful oratory, all forged from his own early experiences, provide an example we might all do well to follow.

His life spanned some seven decades, from the late 1700's to the mid 1800's- turbulent times in Europe, America and Ireland. His family had long supported reform in Ireland, with particular emphasis on the needs, exclusions and general deprivations of the Presbyterian and Catholic population. The involvement of his brothers in the 1798 Rebellion led to the burning down of his family home at Killead, Co. Antrim. Thus, Henry like those of us in current times, was no stranger to conflict, to bigotry, its corrosive force, and the consequent destruction of lives and hopes.

His response, like many others then and now was to rise above anger and hate, to see and champion the cause of tolerance, charity, reason, all as exemplified in the Gospels and in the life of Jesus, who was himself exposed to the excesses of both the church of his time and the power of the state as exercised by Rome.

Henry Montgomery, no doubt like all of us, had his faults and would not have been slow to admit to them. He was nevertheless totally convinced of the 'Non-Subscribing' ethos which he defended eloquently, powerfully and forcefully, both in his long running debate with Henry Cooke and throughout his life. Henry Cooke narrowly won this debate over the course of several Synods and the centrality of the 'Westminster Confession of Faith' continues to be a significant divisive factor within Presbyterianism and given the emergence of increasing conservatism in 'mainstream' Presbyterianism is likely to remain so for some time to come.

It is therefore perhaps apposite that at this time of political uncertainty, scepticism, and increasing materialism in Ireland and abroad we take a little time to reflect upon, and laud afresh, a man of stature who, in this small island of ours, committed his life to the service of his God and his people and to perhaps learn something which might contribute to a better future for us all.

Alfred Martin

Clerk of Session, First Presbyterian Church (NS) Dunmurry

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A PROFILE
IN COURAGE

By the Rev. WILLIAM McMILLAN, M.A.
*Minister of First Presbyterian (Non-Subscribing) Church,
Newry.*

Henry Montgomery 1788—1865



The Rev. HENRY MONTGOMERY, LL.D.
1788 - 1865.

FOREWORD

By the Rev. JOHN McCLEERY, B.A., S.T.M.
(DUNMURRY)

HAVING agreed to the suggestion that the anniversary of Doctor Henry Montgomery's death on the 18th December, 1865, should be marked by a Special Centenary Lecture, the Session and Committee of the First Presbyterian (Non-Subscribing) Church, Dunmurry, were delighted when the Rev. William McMillan, M.A., of Newry, accepted the invitation to deliver it on Sunday, 27th March, 1866. That evening, Doctor Montgomery's old Church was filled to capacity, part of the family silver plate was on display, a most interesting lecture was listened to with unrupt attention, as the speaker dealt with the life and activities of the great orator, statesman, educationalist and personalities of the Nineteenth century, who was also the founder of what is now, the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

Both then and afterwards, there were numerous requests for copies of the script of the lecture, and with Mr. McMillan's consent, the Session and Committee of Dunmurry Church agreed to publish this in booklet form, and so provide a souvenir of a memorable occasion. The Session and Committee are grateful for this opportunity of thanking, the Rev. William McMillan for his services, also the Trustees of the Ulster Museum for their kindness in lending the Montgomery Silver, and all who helped in any way to make the Lecture such an outstanding success.

It is their prayer that this booklet going out among our own people, may inspire them to deeper loyalty to their Church and all it stands for, and circulating among those of other Households of Faith, may eventually lead to clearer understanding of our position and much closer fellowship

among Christians everywhere. Doctor Henry Montgomery had a long ministry in Dummurry, some fifty-six years, from 1809 to 1865, but so many of the things he said and did, are still relevant to the present day.

No complete biography of Doctor Montgomery has ever been published. His son-in-law, the Rev. John A. Crozier of Newry, finished one Volume of what was intended to be a two Volume work, but the second Volume never appeared. This together with the disappearance of many valuable personal papers, correspondence, and other records, which the Doctor or his son-in-law must have had, has always prevented historians from doing justice to the life of a really great man. It is therefore with all the more pleasure that the Session and Committee of Dummurry now present Mr. McMillan's lecture, as a valuable addition to present knowledge.

ON a cold December night in the year 1865 two young men from Dromore made their way up the avenue to the Glebe House, Dummurry. James Kennedy and James Mulligan, first year students in Queen's College, Belfast, were keeping their customary Saturday night interview with Dr. Henry Montgomery, their Professor of Pastoral Theology and Church History. The aged friend and tutor was not at the door to greet them. The disease—renal calculus—which for several years had caused him excruciating pain had again forced him to seek some relief from opiates. Despite his illness his mind was still vigorous and his ideas of hospitality unimpaired. He insisted on receiving the students in his bedroom. But let Kennedy tell the tale: "He talked a little with us, somewhat incoherently, his language punctuated by sounds of agony heard by us even on the steps of the door as we left. He gave us his blessing and said, 'Jads I shall soon be better now.'" (1)

A few days later the young men were again in Dummurry. This time, in this very Meeting House, they listened not to the words of the Great Doctor but to the Rev. William Crozier of Rademon: "The torch of a great and splendid intellect, which has long shone with brightness . . . is quenched. It will be seen no more. 'A Master in Israel is fallen asleep', An eminent servant of God has paid the debt of nature . . . I am persuaded there are many hearts in this great funeral concourse that are penetrated with grief for the loss of this general friend and father of his people; that they are overcome by the thought, which they can scarcely yet realise, that they will never again feel the friendly grasp of his hand; never more meet the kindly beam of his eye; never more hear the tones of his voice . . . The great heart which never quailed before the face of man; which has battled manfully for God's Holy Truth for half a century, amidst the storms of the world and the strife of tongues . . . has ceased to beat. Is that eye, whose lightning flash could rebuke with indignant scorn the wrong doer and the hypocrite, and whose mild benignant light could woo the child to his knee, closed forever in rayless night? Is that tongue, whose wonderful eloquence has enchained

(1) Letters and Notes of the Rev. James Kennedy. See also The Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Magazine, January, 1923, p. 11.

admiring thousands by its powerful charm now mute forever? Yes, it is so. Dr. Montgomery, that familiar distinguished and venerated name, is now the name of one that was . . . the cheerful, joyous and instructive companion . . . the accomplished and eloquent orator, the enlightened and useful member of society, the learned Divine, the pious and devoted minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom he gloried, lives now but in our thoughts, our hearts and our memory." (1).

It was Wednesday, 20th December, 1865, when the body of Henry Montgomery was laid to rest outside this Meeting House where for fifty-six years he had ministered to a faithful and devoted congregation. "A thousand gentlemen of Ulster" were said to have attended the funeral, and no doubt the thoughts of many were recalling Montgomery's magnetic personality, immense achievements and fearless struggles for what he considered to be Christian Truth.

Neither is it too fanciful to suppose, that on their return home, his young students, the last to receive his blessing, should vie with one another in re-telling stories and incidents they had heard so often from their elders. Certainly the young men had marvelled at the presence that day of Dr. Henry Cooke, Montgomery's able and bitter opponent of former years. There in his seventy-seventh year, having left a sick bed, he stood bare-headed, and as the coffin passed, he placed his hand upon it, and exclaimed with obvious emotion, "Oh Harry! Harry!" (2) Thus in the presence of death old religious and political animosities were forgotten.

Perhaps Dr. Cooke was recalling the closing words of Montgomery's last speech in the Synod of Ulster when it assembled at Lurgan in 1829: "Though my brethren will not let me hold communion with them, I am still ready to stretch out to them the Right Hand of Fellowship. I trust when we have laid aside the garb of frail Mortality we shall meet in that better and happier world wondering at our own sinful folly in having disputed and excited strife where all should have been harmony and love. I am weary of this contest which has been continued from year to year . . . If we cannot live together in peace, in the name of God let us part in peace. For myself I have no fear as to consequences . . . Some of my Brethren may be injured; but He that careth for

the sparrow, will not let the children of the sufferers for conscience's sake come to want." (1)

It was for his part in the contest referred to that Henry Montgomery is best remembered. A staunch believer in Chillingworth's maxim: "The Bible and the Bible only is the religion of the Protestant," and an ardent advocate of the Protestant Principle of the Right of Private Judgement, Montgomery fearlessly opposed Cooke's efforts to reintroduce into the Synod of Ulster unqualified and compulsory Subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith. This resulted in a long and heated controversy which, beginning in 1821, lamentably divided Irish Presbyterianism. In 1829 Montgomery and the Non-Subscribers left the Synod, determined, as they put it "to remain separated until that Body shall have returned to the Scriptural principles and usages of Presbyterianism."

It is impossible here to go into the details of the struggle. Some consider that it "was simply a personal duel" between Montgomery and Cooke, but, as Dr. Robert Allen correctly points out, "such a view ignores the reality of the issues at stake," though even he goes on to concede "had they lived at different times the history of the Synod would not have been what it is." (2).

"Of Cooke and Montgomery it may be said," maintains Allen, "that at no other time have two men of equal calibre opposed each other in the Synod of Ulster. They were alike only in the possession of surpassing abilities." Montgomery was however "the more polished orator, more chaste and classic in his eloquence. He was less keenly alert than Cooke, more lethargic, more the man of peace; but when roused he was never at a loss. The stream of his oratory would flow in language of great beauty, and by persuasive charms of manner and voice he could turn a light-hearted audience to tears, and a tearful one back to smiles" . . . he was possessed of an "ease of manner and a charm of style which captivated even his opponents." His great opponent paid him the tribute, years later, of declaring, "he is one of the most eloquent men of any age. He has more command of the English language than any man I know of." (3). It is not surprising therefore to read that some of Montgomery's greatest speeches in the Synod were based simply upon notes made during the debates. (4).

(1) Address delivered at the Funeral: pub. 1866, pp27-28.

(2) Kennedy, op. cit.

(1) Montgomery's Speech at Lurgan; Appendix F.; J. A. Crozier, "The Life of the Rev. H. Montgomery, LL.D.", pp. 354-355.

(2) Henry Montgomery; Essays in British and Irish History in Honour of James Eagle Todd (1949), p. 271.

(3) *Ibid.* p. 270. See also J. A. Crozier's pamphlet, "Henry Montgomery" 1888, p. 8.

(4) Crozier — "Henry Montgomery" p. 8.

Both men were born in the same year, 1788. Montgomery on the 16th January and Cooke on the 11th May. (1). They were contemporaries at Glasgow University, but were never intimate friends. As J. L. Porter, Cooke's biographer, puts it, "Their mental characteristics were too unlike for this; the radical differences in their principles and modes of thought which began to be early developed prevented the possibility of closer communion and seemed from the first to excite mutual feelings of distrust." (2). Montgomery had been born and brought up in an atmosphere of liberal ideas, both in politics and religion; His father, Archibald Montgomery, a lieutenant in the Irish Volunteers, was a firm supporter of "Parliamentary Reform and Catholic Emancipation," while Cooke was inspired by the staunch Calvinism of his parents "with anti-papacy of the sternest type for their political Creed." (3).

At the age of ten young Montgomery watched his two elder brothers, William and John, in the ranks of the United Irishmen, march to the battle of Antrim. Because of their implication in the ill-fated '98 rebellion the Montgomery home, Boltnaconnel House, Killead, Co. Antrim, was looted and burned by a party of yeomanry searching for the fugitive brothers. However by the aid of influential family connections the house was rebuilt and the family fortunes restored.*

Writing of the rebellion half-a-century later, Montgomery said: "I am not ashamed to acknowledge that some of my own kith and kin fought in the ranks of their country, and I am proud to say that during the last forty years I have found my best, my clearest-minded and my warmest-hearted friends among the United Irishmen of 1798." (4). He further maintained that he could give his hearty assent to almost every principle contained in the early address of the United Irishmen, though, he believed that they should have sought reform by constitutional means. While in later life he certainly opposed revolution there can "be little doubt that the boy of ten, who watched his brothers march to Antrim would not have been a mere spectator had he been ten years

- (1) There is some doubt as to the date of Cooke's birth. Latimer, "History of Irish Presbyterians" (1902), says he was born in 1783, and T. Wilkerson, "Three Prophets of our Own" (1855) gives the date as 1784. I have followed Cooke's son-in-law and biographer, J. L. Porter, who gives the date as 1788, a date accepted by Dr. Allen and Classon Porter.
- (2) "The Life and Times of Henry Cooke" (1871), p. 21.
- (3) Crozier: Henry Montgomery; p. 7.
- (4) Irish Unitarian Magazine, 1847; p. 335.

* It is interesting to note that among the descendants of Archibald Montgomery were the late Lord Pirrie, the late Mr. J. M. Andrews, second Prime Minister of N. Ireland, and Mr. J. L. O. Andrews, present Leader of the Senate. Through Archibald Montgomery's wife, Sarah Campbell, the family was connected with Lord Pakenham. Young Henry was named after his father's uncle, the baronet of Londonderry of that name.

older" (1). It is certain that these turbulent years in Irish history had a profound effect upon Montgomery's subsequent life and career. Despite the episode referred to, his childhood was not altogether unhappy as his own words testify: "Of a family consisting of nine children, I was very much the youngest, being born in my mother's fiftieth year, and the result was unbounded indulgence; so that my earliest recollection of existence is living in an atmosphere of brightness and love. I might have been ruined had there not been some strong country sense mingled with such unceasing affection" (2). His power to cajole a devoted mother is illustrated by a childhood incident. She was entertaining a visitor to tea in the parlour and Henry no doubt anxious to sample the cakes tried every expedient, without success, to gain admission to the room. As a last resort he knelt down and repeated the Lord's Prayer from beginning to end through the keyhole! (3). No mother could resist that. It may be said that many years later he preached on the Duty and Advantages of Prayer!!!

He was eleven before he started school in the house of the Rev. Isaac Patton of Lylehill (the first seceding minister to settle in Ireland). Here he learned the rudiments of Latin from Alexander Greer, Patton's son-in-law, and ironically enough, in view of his later career, repeated every Saturday for two years the Westminster Shorter Catechism with the scripture proofs" (4). On his own request, he was transferred to Crumlin Academy conducted by the Rev. Nathaniel Alexander, where he remained until at the age of sixteen he entered Glasgow University. Having graduated Master of Arts he studied Divinity for a year, and on the 5th February, 1809, along with his great friends James Carley and David White (later ministers of Antrim and Ballee respectively) he was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Presbytery of Templepatrick.* He and Carley (soon to become his brother-in-law) candidated for the vacant pulpit of Donegore. Both were unsuccessful because of their refusal to subscribe the Westminster Confession of Faith. On his return home his brothers "blamed him for having been unnecessarily outspoken" but his honesty was acknowledged with pride by his father (5). On the fifty-first anniversary of his ministry at Dumnurry he recalled this episode: "Under God's general Providence 'honesty is the best policy'. I found it then; I have found it ever since. My refusal at Donegore to be a time-server and selfish hypocrite gave a complexion to the

- (1) Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Magazine, June, 1956; p. 84.
 - (2) Crozier's "Life", p. 6.
 - (3) Ibid. p. 7.
 - (4) Irish Unitarian Magazine, 1847; p. 231.
 - (5) Crozier's "Life", p. 33.
- (* In 1833, Glasgow University conferred upon him the degree of LL.D.

subsequent events of my life, happy for myself and not altogether unhappy for the cause of Christian Liberty and Truth" (1).

On the day following his rejection at Donegore (where incidentally Henry Cooke was successful) he received an invitation to preach at Dunmurry; as a result he accepted a call and was ordained by the Presbytery of Bangor on September 14th, 1809 (2).*

To augment his stipend he acted as tutor to the family of an influential member of his congregation (3). Subsequently, following his marriage in 1812, he opened a school and boarded pupils in his house.

His introduction to the Synod of Ulster, as a constituent member, took place in 1810 when as minister of Dunmurry he travelled to Cookstown. He described the Synod as a "peaceful, happy, assemblage of Christian freemen; worthy of the early and uncorrupted times of Irish Presbyterianism: it realised all my boyish dreams concerning the church of my fathers, and of my own choice. Amidst a recognised variety of creeds there was perfect 'unity of the Spirit,' for every man, whilst rejoicing in his own liberty, respected the rights of his brother. We therefore met in love, continued together in harmony, and parted with regret. We looked forward to our stated meetings as annual jubilees! I gloried in the name Presbyterianism, and rejoiced in my church as the embryo of a Church Universal, in which the Bible was the only standard of Faith, and the conscience of every man was free" (4).

It was this "recognised variety of Creeds" that Henry Cooke found so distasteful and which he determined to

- (1) Crozier, Henry Montgomery: p. 4.
 - (2) Minute Book of the Dunmurry Congregation. Crozier in his Life of Montgomery (p. 39) states that he was ordained on the 24th. This is an error copied by many writers. See also Records of the General Synod of Ulster, Vol. 3: p. 353.
 - (3) Classon Porter, Irish Presbyterian Biographical Sketches (1883): p. 34.
 - (4) Irish Unitarian Magazine, 1847: p. 353.
- (*) In April 1817, the Rev. Wm. D. McEwen, a decided Non-Subscriber, accepted as minister of the influential congregation at Killyleagh to Non-Subscribing Presbytery of Antrim. The Clerk of Session at Killyleagh, Archibald Hamilton Rowan, himself a Non-Subscriber and one of the founders of the Society of United Irishmen, who in his earlier days had been transported, because of his implication in certain insurrectionary movements, wrote to Montgomery on the 29th September, 1817. The letter contained a request "on behalf of all the elders at Killyleagh, to preach there with a view." Montgomery had just been elected Headmaster of the English School of the Belfast Academical Institution, and therefore declined. It is interesting to note however that on the recommendation of McEwen and the Rev. Dr. James Armstrong, minister of the Non-Subscribing Congregation of Strand Street, Dublin, an invitation was sent to Henry Cooke. He accepted and was installed at Killyleagh on the 8th September, 1818. McEwen in a letter to James Carr of Killyleagh, said of Cooke—"he is by no means divided in his opinions, and has too much good sense not to be charitable towards those who differ from him in sentiment." Quantum mutatus ab illo!

disrupt. As an uncompromising Calvinist he could not, for example, countenance the Arianism which, according to an influential Non-Subscriber, was making "extensive though silent progress throughout the General Synod of Ulster" (1). Montgomery was a decided Arian, and remained so all his life, despite the fact that he was later charged by his own followers of having altered his theological opinions.

Writing from his death bed to the Rev. T. H. M. Scott, a former pupil, and his successor in Dunmurry, he maintained that his 'Creed of an Arian' written in 1830 still represented his faith. "It is the belief that has been the support and guide of my own heart through the passage of life, as it is that which imparts to me now, unutterable peace and strength in the presence of death" (2).

Because, as he says in his Creed, "I dare not presume, like my Calvinistic Brethren to use the unscriptural term 'Trinity' he held the Doctrine of God's Unity; believed in the pre-existence of Christ and in the Personality of the Holy Spirit. Acknowledging the Sole Supremacy of Scripture he "devoutly believed in 'One Mediator between God and Man' the glorious being who is called the Saviour and the Son of God." Recognising as of the "highest importance in the scheme of redemption, the sufferings and death of Christ," he none the less utterly disbelieved the theory of vicarious suffering "I utterly reject the Calvinistic Doctrine of imputed guilt as contrary to reason and scripture and as derogatory to the justice and parental character of God." The doctrine of Predestination and Election by which a non-elect infant or idiot must perish eternally he also regarded as "abhorrent to the character of God and the best feelings of humanity. Even were my head convinced I am persuaded that my heart would not allow me to believe that an infant or idiot is the object of the 'wrath and curse' of the wisest and best of beings."

Neither could he believe with the Calvinists in the "utter damnation of the heathen world The justice, the mercy, and the word of God rise up against this awful doctrine. Equity demands that they should be judged according to their knowledge and opportunities"

Neither do I believe that salvation will be confined to the members of any Christian Church or the professors of any peculiar creed. I firmly believe that many of all creeds and all Churches shall be brought to see the Salvation of the Lord The Divine Being is not the God of a sect, or a

- (1) Dr. Wm. Bruce: "Sermons on the Study of the Bible and on the Doctrines of Christianity," as taught by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1824): p. 7. See also R.G.S.U., 1824, pp. 31-32.
- (2) Northern Whig, May 11th, 1870—see also "The Disciple", vol. 3, p. 190.

party, but the Father and the Friend of all. The Lord Jesus is not the redeemer of a few, but the Saviour of all men who will accept of his love . . . I do not say that all theological systems are equally conducive, either to the temporal or eternal interests of mankind, for I am persuaded that they are not; but I do believe that even the most erroneous creed will not shut out a good and sincere man from a humble mansion in the Father's House. In these views I may be far wrong," he concluded, "but I am certain I feel more pleasure in believing that even my opponents and enemies may be saved than they have in believing that I shall be damned" (1).

Such beliefs were incompatible with the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which his rival considered to be the "most Calvinistic book in the world except the Bible!" In Cooke's estimation there were at least two doctrines essential to the Christian system, the Trinity and the Vicarious Atonement, "He who denies these I look upon as fatally in error," he once told the Synod (2).

Despite Montgomery's liberal views and his avowed antipathy to the Doctrines of the Westminster Confession he was elected Moderator of Synod in 1818 at the age of thirty (3). The honour paid to one so young, and one who had been but nine years in the Ministry, indicates that already his commanding abilities were recognised. The fact that he succeeded his old tutor, Alexander, who also shared his views "speaks volumes for the friendly feeling, if not impartiality then generally entertained towards liberal principles" (4).

The year previously he had been elected headmaster of the English School of the Belfast Academical Institution, and with the consent of his congregation he resided there. As a teacher he was very popular, though he was not averse to the use of the rod, by which he himself had been disciplined at Crumlin.* Indeed if the offence seemed to require it Montgomery "flogged severely," so that the oft-repeated school couplet of the time—"The Lord have mercy on us, and keep Long Harry from us"—was not unnatural under the circumstances. He held this post for twenty-two years and his influence was immense. To his latest day,

(1) "The Creed of an Arian" (1830); also the Bible Christians, vol. 1; pp. 68-78 and "The Disciple," Vol. 3; pp. 190-191.
 (2) Forster, "Life and Times of Henry Cooke"; pp. 65-66.
 (3) R.G.S.U.; vol. 3, p. 478.
 (4) Crozier's "Life . . .", p. 63.

(* That the Rev. Nathaniel Alexander punished his pupils severely is authenticated by the evidence of a former pupil, Mr. Mauderson, father-in-law of the Rev. J. Hall of Crumlin. Mr. Hall wrote the following in a letter to the Rev. Principal Alexander Gordon on the 2nd February, 1899: "Mr. Mauderson who attended the school, or academy, gives Mr. Alexander a very bad name for the harsh treatment of his pupils. He has actually seen the blood flowing down a boy's back, but perhaps this was a virtue in those days!"

when he heard of a former student distinguish himself in a profession, he would exclaim in the words of Samuel Johnston; concerning David Garrick: "I taught the boy."

(1). A firm friend of the Institution he defended it on many occasions from the interference of the Synod of Ulster, and Dr. Cooke, whose antipathy towards it was as much political as theological. "A clergyman myself" Montgomery once told the proprietors, "I yet warn you against clerical domination" (2).

The classes in the Institution had been recognised by the Synod in 1815, hitherto Synod Students had received their education at Scottish Universities now they were to be educated at home, but Cooke regarded it as a "stronghold of Arianism." When in 1821 the Rev. William Bruce, assistant minister of the First Church, Belfast, and a member of the ancient Non-Subscribing Presbytery of Antrim, was elected to the chair of Greek and Hebrew, Dr. Cooke opposed the election on the grounds of his Arianism. (3) "Thus began," says Montgomery, "all our angry discussions" (4). An attack on the Arians in the Institution meant an attack on the Arians in the Synod and so, for seven years Montgomery faced the opposition of Henry Cooke who by clever manoeuvring managed to arouse and combine political and religious bigotry thus securing for himself the support of a fanatical mob, who knew nothing about, and cared less for, the principles at stake.

Certainly Dr. Cooke could have made no impression upon the Synod had he contended solely against the principle of Non-Subscription. His attempt in 1824 to have the law of subscription re-enacted was defeated and Subscription was left optional. And, had not he himself declared in 1826 that there were things in the Westminster Confession which neither he nor any other member could subscribe to? (5). How he reconciled this statement with his action, six years after the secession of Montgomery and his party, when he forced upon the Synod of Ulster unqualified and compulsory Subscription to the Confession, is a mystery. But such was the unscrupulous genius of the man, that by great tactical ability he confined the debate to the question of belief or disbelief in the Doctrine of the Trinity. Nor did it matter to him that by his action in 1828 he had violated the laws of the Synod; indeed he and his party

(1) The Book of the Royal Academical Institution, 1810-1910 (1913); p. 109.
 (2) Crozier's "Life . . .", p. 100.
 (3) Book of the Royal Academical Institution; p. 87.
 (4) Speech of a Special Meeting of the Proprietors of the Royal Academical Institution, 13th April, 1841. Also Bible Christian, vol. 12, p. 180.
 (5) The Christian Moderator; vol. 1; p. 144. Also J. M. Barkley, "The Westminster Formulates in Irish Presbyterianism," being the Carey Lectures 1954-1956; p. 16.

ridiculed the idea that they should be bound by "cobweb laws." Thus he managed to force an influential body of Non-Subscribers, who were Trinitarians, to vote with him and compelled many more, to utter "a solemn falsehood before God and the World," because they feared "closed pulpits, starving children and destitute old age."

Montgomery's reply to his opponent was the famous speech on 'Christian Liberty' delivered on the 30th June, 1827, at Strabane, a town where the calls "No Surrender" and "Down with the Arians" were synonymous (1). Three days of debates, which for power, eloquence and intensity had never been equalled in the Body had packed the Meeting House day after day. The pupils of the local Academy were granted special holidays to attend.

"The galleries, the alleys, the very window seats were densely crowded by an eager and angry multitude" wrote Montgomery years later (2). For over an hour he addressed the House.

Deploing human creeds and "other devices of men" he pleaded for unity and peace. "I admit," he said, "that this body has the power to pass any declaration which it pleases, and to demand any submission of its members which it pleases, but I deny that it has any scripture warrant for doing so. And, if Moderator, you should persevere, what will be the consequence? You may make hypocrites of the weak, and the crafty, and the worldly; you may make martyrs of the firm, the upright and the sincere, but every child who hears me must know that you cannot change the conviction of a single mind or alter the feelings of a single heart. Suppose you pass your declaration and I refuse my assent or signature, which as an honest man I must refuse, you will probably say to me 'we can no longer give you the right hand of fellowship,' but if I subscribe your creed, though you know I do not believe it, then you will receive me as a brother in the Lord. How revolting then is this project. You will spurn the hand which is pure as the mountain snow, whilst you clasp, with the grasp of friendship, that which is black with the stains of perjury. Woe be unto the Presbyterian Church, if ever the day shall come, in which falsehood and dissimulation shall be bonds of union, whilst truth and sincerity shall be cast out of her councils" (3).

Cooke's biographer writes: "every hearer hung enchanted on the lips of the orator, when he concluded he was greeted by hundreds of applause" (4).

(1) Crozier's "Life . . ." p. 108.

(2) Irish Unitarian Magazine, 1847: pp. 392-399.

(3) The Christian Moderator: September 1st, 1827: pp. 238-9.

(4) "Life . . ." Appendix A: p. 440. Also Crozier's Porter, op. cit. p. 121.

The leading newspapers of Ireland and the journals of London published the speech. Thirty thousand re-prints were circulated and a bound copy presented to Montgomery. He was also presented with a service of plate weighing a thousand ounces and costing over £600, by the inhabitants of Belfast and the adjoining counties representing various denominations, including Roman Catholics. The address which accompanied it referred to Montgomery's "manly, honest and talented efforts" in the cause of toleration.

The press having carried the debates throughout Ireland enormous interest was aroused and the great opponents were each hailed as champions by their respective supporters.

The Synod meetings at Cookstown the following year were so crowded that 'once seated it was impossible to move' and planks were laid across the aisles from pew to pew. (1).

Opposition to Dr. Cooke's extreme measure came also from an influential moderate party in the Synod, and despairing of winning the Synod over to his point of view he reluctantly adopted a policy which, as it turned out, achieved what he wanted all along, and what the moderates deprecated namely the separation of Montgomery and his party from the Synod.* A Committee was to be set up which would ensure that in future no Arian would be licensed to preach. Montgomery protested against this "heart probing" Committee and delivered "an even greater speech" of which an opponent wrote: "As a display of brilliant oratory, sparkling wit, touching pathos and powerful declamation, his speech had never been surpassed in the Synod." (2). An article in the Belfast Newsletter written many years later spoke of it thus: "Towards the close of his most thrilling speech as he defended himself against the imputation that he was a denier of the Saviour, he repeated with deep emotion: 'Jesus my Lord I know his Name, His name is all my boast, nor will He put my soul to shame, nor let my hope be lost.'" (3).

The Northern Whig reported "This masterly specimen of extempore oratory . . . in one part drew tears from everybody within our view." (4).

His last address before the Synod of Ulster was given in 1829, for two and a half hours he held his audience and in the words of Cooke's biographer: "When the enchanting music of that marvellous oratory ceased, there was for a

(1) Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Magazine: September, 1923: p. 5.

(2) Porter, op. cit. p. 157.

(3) July, 1862, from the Hymn, "I'm not ashamed to own my Lord" by Isaac Watts (1674-1748) as in Scottish Paraphrases, 1781.

(4) July 3rd, 1828.

(*) See Robert Allen, "James Seaton Reid" (1951). pp. 46-67 for details of the Moderate Party.

time a stillness, as of death. Then thunders of applause burst from the assembly. They ceased, but were renewed again and again. Even the warmest friends and enthusiastic admirers of Mr. Cooke, hung their heads. Many supposed his character was ruined; all believed his influence was gone" (1).

However it was not; his equally brilliant reply won the day. Montgomery realising that further resistance was useless left the Synod of Ulster, of which he had once spoken so proudly, never to return. He was accompanied by sixteen other ministers and their congregations; these formed the nucleus of the Remonstrant Synod of Ulster. The first Moderator of the new body, the Rev. William Porter, formerly clerk of the Synod of Ulster from 1816, outlined their aim and ideals:—

"We have come together to lay the foundation stone of a temple dedicated to religious Liberty; a temple under whose ample dome every individual who chooses to enter will be allowed to worship, in his own way, the One God and Father of all. We have come together not merely to profess, but to prove, that we are genuine Presbyterians, assertors of the Right of Private Judgment, and advocates, uncompromising advocates, of the all-sufficiency of the Bible as a rule of Faith and Duty. 'Call no man Master' we regard as the Magna Charta of our ecclesiastical constitution; Christ and Christ only is our King, The Bible and the Bible only, is our credited standard of belief. We do not associate as Calvinists or Arminians, we do not associate as Unitarians or Trinitarians, we are Presbyterians." (2).

When the Remonstrants were derided as "a body of avowed Arians, driven from the Synod of Ulster" (3) Montgomery challenged the remark as untrue: "So far from being a body of avowed Arians," he said, "we have constantly disavowed any such bond of union; and we were not expelled from the Synod of Ulster. Many ministers holding our religious views are still members of that body, and had we been so inclined we could have remained in it until this hour." He went on: "Our opponents raised against us the cry of heresy and when this unjust accusation failed, they truly and more injuriously branded us as Catholic Emancipators. Certain fanatics had the ingenuity to identify Orthodoxy with Orangeism, and thus to array against us the most powerful engines of hostility; religious bigotry and political intolerance" (4).

Yes, Montgomery's politics, like his theology, invited Cooke's opposition.

Asserting, "I did not lose my right of citizenship when I became a minister of the Gospel" (1), Montgomery took an active interest in political questions. It has been pointed out that even as an old man "he would occasionally come out of his semi-retirement to speak on behalf of a parliamentary candidate" (2).

He recognised that religion was not simply one aspect of life, but all of life under one aspect. For him civil and religious liberty went hand in hand:—"Whilst a gracious providence gives me power I shall raise my voice in vindication of civil liberty; for if there be tyranny in the state, there will ever be intolerance in the churches: and I shall also strive for religious freedom, for where bigots reign in the sanctuary there will not long be liberty in the state." (3). Such sentiments, as easily misunderstood then, as now, enabled this staunch and logical Protestant to uphold the rights of his fellow Roman Catholic countrymen who were agitating for emancipation. To this cause he was "zealously attached, on the grounds," as he put it, "of political right, religious liberty, and love of country" (4).

In 1813, when he first debated in Synod, he was the prime mover in passing a resolution in favour of Catholic Emancipation, probably helping to draft its worthy sentiments: ". . . We consider it our duty to declare that from the abolition of political distinctions on account of religious profession . . . we anticipate the happiest consequences" (5). Dr. Cooke, as Moderator, gave evidence in 1825, before a committee of the House of Lords in which he deposed that Presbyterians in Ulster were not in favour of Emancipation. This called forth a contradiction from Montgomery and many leading Presbyterians (6). Doubtless, on the direction of Montgomery, the Presbytery of Bangor, to which he belonged, forwarded a petition to the Lords in favour of the measure (7). Montgomery maintained that Cooke's statement of 1825 "operated like electricity on the multitude, who conceived that their soundness in the faith was involved in their dislike of their Catholic brethren" (8), and that as a result, he, and his followers, were marked out as enemies of the state. In

(1) Speech on Parliamentary Reform, 1830.

(2) Allen, *Essays*, p. 260; also W. D. Killen, Dr. Montgomery and the Pope, p. 19.

(3) Speech on Parliamentary Reform.

(4) Letter in reply to the Rev. H. Cooke, on Synodical proceedings, August, 1828.

(5) R.G.S.U., vol. 3, p. 397.

(6) Northern Whig, April 21st, 1825.

(7) *Ibid.*, April 28th, 1825.

(8) Letter in reply to Rev. Henry Cooke, on Synodical proceedings, August, 1828. Crozier's *Life*, Appendix D, p. 534.

(1) Porter, *op. cit.*; pp. 194-197.

(2) The Bible Christian; vol. 1; p. 246.

(3) Letter to Daniel O'Connell, Esq., M.P., February, 1831; see Appendix I in Crozier's "Life . . ."; pp. 592-3.

(4) *Ibid.*

defence, he declared: "our loyalty is as unimpeachable as it is patriotic and disinterested" (1).

Despite the growing unpopularity of his efforts he continued to work for Catholic Emancipation, and in December, 1828, visited England to plead the cause. Here he was welcomed by the Unitarian Congregations of Greengate, Salford, and Cross Street, Manchester. In London a public dinner was given in his honour at which he deprecated the fact that in his native land political and religious bigotry had been so mingled "that scarce an individual is now held Orthodox who is not also an enemy to the civil and religious rights of his fellow men. Shame upon Presbyterians! the men who make it their peculiar boast that they are free, who pride themselves on being, not merely Protestants, but Presbyterian Protestants" (2).

On returning to Ireland he attended a meeting in St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, Belfast, and in response to repeated calls advanced towards the altar. Here he addressed the congregation which rose and acclaimed him enthusiastically (3). Later, guest of honour at a public dinner, he was toasted by Dr. Wm. Crolly, Roman Catholic Bishop of Down and Connor, later Archbishop of Armagh, who spoke of him as "a man of distinguished talents who has long been regarded as the champion of civil and religious liberty. . . . A gentleman who has done more service to our cause in his late visit to our sister country than the whole deputation of the Catholic body could have effected" (4).

In this struggle, Montgomery successfully defeated Cooke's opposition, and his eloquent appeals contributed to the triumph of the Catholic cause, and helped to obtain from the Government, rights which had been so long, and so unjustly withheld. As a further example of how he sought for others what he himself enjoyed "we have the fact that the Remonstrant Synod, under his guidance, petitioned Parliament in 1845 in favour of an increased grant to the College of Maynooth on the grounds that 'their Roman Catholic countrymen were equally entitled with themselves to follow out their own convictions in relation to their eternal interests'" (5). This broad tolerance, continues Dr. Allen, 'is all the more remarkable when we remember that Montgomery, as a Unitarian, was regarded by Orthodox Christians as being himself beyond the pale!' (6).

- (1) *Ibid.*
- (2) Crozier's *Life*, p. 241.
- (3) Northern Whig, January 29th, 1829 (supplement).
- (4) *Ibid.*
- (5) Allen, *Essays*, p. 265.
- (6) *Ibid.*

His undiscourageable efforts on behalf of Emancipation, and his famous speech on Parliamentary Reform and vote by ballot, encouraged Daniel O'Connell to believe that Montgomery would give him support in agitating for the repeal of the Union. O'Connell referred to him as "my excellent and respected friend, the Rev. Mr. Montgomery," but O'Connell did not know "The Lion of Dunmurry," who had made it perfectly clear that he was no revolutionist. "I am no wild innovator," he had declared, "I wish not to see the constitution overthrown, I would have the ancient and venerable fabric repaired, and such additions made to its structure as are required by our circumstances and times" (1). It was his constant theme that "The friends of Reform were the enemies of Revolution" (2).

When the Marquis of Anglesey was reappointed Lord Lieutenant, Montgomery headed a deputation to Dublin with an address of Loyalty from the Non-Subscribing Presbyterians of Ireland (3). He wrote from Dublin to his friend William Porter, "We created quite a sensation and our address struck terror to agitators, as O'Connell had persuaded the good people, that we, the Liberal dissenters, were all in his train" (4). Certainly O'Connell was exasperated, and six days later he attacked his "excellent friend" of a few weeks before, as "a Paltrey and pitiful slave; a fawning, cringing sycophant" (5). Montgomery in reply launched one of the bitterest attacks that the so-called Liberator ever faced. His letter, filling columns in the Dublin Evening Post, and republished both North and South, held up to merciless exposure O'Connell's weaknesses. It concluded: "You are doubly deceived, first by your own vanity and ambition; secondly by the crawling replies that surround you. You are encircled by men whose interest it is to delude you; miserable satellites who possessing no light in themselves, are fain to reflect the rays of the greater luminary of agitation" (6). By this action Montgomery alienated many Irish Liberals from

- (1) Northern Whig, December 6th, 1830; also Crozier's *Life*; Appendix H, p. 579.
- (2) *Ibid.*
- (3) Crozier's *Life*, p. 425. It is interesting to note that included in the deputation was the Rev. John Mitchel, father of the Irish patriot. The minister of Newry shared Montgomery's views as is evidenced by a letter he forwarded to his Dunmurry colleague congratulating him on his letter to O'Connell.
- (4) 'Irish Presbyterian Biographical Sketches' by Classon Porter; p. 36.
- (5) Crozier's *Life*; p. 429.
- (6) *Ibid.*; p. 589.

O'Connell's cause and came to be "the most respected, if not also the most truly popular man in Ireland" (1).

It is impossible to deal with his other interests, and the numerous causes to which he gave his sympathetic interest: Tenant Right; Education; The Irish Famine; The Poor Laws; The Marriage Laws; and the many affairs connected with the City of Belfast; but mention must be given to his gigantic efforts directed towards the passing of the Dissenters Chapel Act (1844) which safe-guarded the Non-Subscribers possession of their ancient Meeting Houses and Trust Funds. In this he inflicted another crushing defeat on his old opponent, Dr. Henry Cooke. Both men travelled to London when the Bill was passing through Parliament with opposite intentions; one to expedite, the other to oppose. At first he met with considerable opposition from the Government but such was his influence upon Sir Robert Peel and the Home Secretary, Sir James Graham, that he was said to have "mesmerised Peel and galvanised Graham" (2). Indeed Peel's speech on the second reading of the Bill was based, he maintained, on documents written by himself, and on facts and figures which he presented to the Prime Minister. Peel is said to have informed the English Unitarian deputation that their success in this measure was largely attributable to Montgomery's efforts (3).

The "Banner of Ulster," a newspaper, opposed to him in its religious principles, spoke of him on the day following his death, as a man "who wielded immense power, as well with the Irish as with the Imperial Government; but in the exercise of that influence, he never forgot the sacredness of the Trust reposed in him by persons in high places, and, fond as he was of aiding those of his friends who were seeking state honours or ministerial patronage, nothing could ever induce him to swerve from the strict line of truth." Such was the magnanimity of the man that wherever the cause of freedom, religious or political, was to be advocated Montgomery was always ready to assist. "Never did his powers of eloquence shine out more conspicuously than when he was denouncing tyranny, in other lands or in his own; or pleading for the rights of humanity. He contended that a man's religion should never subject him to penalty or inconvenience, and he claimed liberty alike for Protestant and Catholic, for Christian, Jew and Deist" (4). Small wonder then that the Government, following his

(1) *Ibid.*, p. 436. Montgomery again encountered O'Connell in 1841 when, in the Theatre Royal, Dublin, "the paid claqueurs of the Repeal agitator to prevent him being heard, were soon hushed into silence, and the castigation inflicted upon O'Connell was powerfully effective." Crozier: Henry Montgomery, p. 12.
(2) Crozier, Henry Montgomery, p. 14.
(3) Northern Whig, November 4th, 1863.
(4) McAlester's Memorial Sermon, pp. 12-13.

death, in recognition of his services as an advocate of civil and religious liberty, settled a pension of £100 on his widow and daughter (1).

The closing years of his life were shadowed by sorrows and trials: his family: four sons and six daughters, was reduced by death to five in his life time. Then there was the ever increasing pain of disease: how he understood Brownings line on the Grammarian 'Calculus racked him'; but above all there was for him the humiliation of seeing the cause for which he had laboured weakened and almost destroyed by conflicts and divisions among those who claimed with him "The upright and genial spirit of a rational Faith." This surely was the greatest sorrow of all.

It was the direct result of his attempt to curb the influence of Radical Unitarianism within the Remonstrant Synod of Ulster. His younger followers had been influenced by the teachings of Theodore Parker and Ralph Waldo Emerson who called in question the supernatural origin of Christianity and laid great stress on Biblical Criticism. Montgomery could not countenance this and was shocked at the excesses to which such teaching seemed to go. To curb "wild irresponsible spirits" as he called the advocates of this radical theology he inserted certain theological questions in the Remonstrant Synod's new code of Discipline. These questions were to be put to candidates for the ministry in order to satisfy Presbyteries that candidates believed in the Divine origin and authority of Christianity. The result was bitter controversy which led to the secession of several congregations from the Synod. It also split the Presbytery of Artrim.

He defended his position with power and eloquence but he was held up to bitter scorn by English and American Unitarians and by his old opponents in the Synod of Ulster. Dr. Cooke ridiculed him for manufacturing a little creed of his own. Vindicating himself against the accusation that he was violating Christian Liberty he said "Genuine Christian liberty does not consist in casting off the Christian Faith, or in a wild licence to believe or disbelieve the great truths of the Gospel. It authorises both ministers and congregations to think and to act freely within the limits of the Gospel; should it go beyond those limits our liberty might be rational or philosophical but it would cease to be Christian" (2).

The controversy continued up to the time of his death and for many years after it created havoc among the Irish Non-Subscribing Presbyterians, almost destroying their

(1) The Christian Unitarian, vol. 5, p. 103.
(2) Speeches delivered in the Courthouse, Ballyclare, 18th November, 1861.

image and most certainly weakening the influence they could have had.

Towards the end of his life Montgomery stated his views on the "surrounding scenes as neither very bright nor hopeful (1). The broad Christian Church he had envisaged had failed to materialise, yet, though he died exposed to criticism and unmerited censure from the advocates of Unitarianism and Trinitarianism, his influence continued to survive within the Non-Subscribing Bodies and was firmly evidenced in the truly ecumenical Code and Constitution of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland, drawn up in 1910.

"There is a great man fallen in Israel," on this text the Rev. Charles J. McAlester, minister of Holywood, preached the Memorial Service here one hundred years ago. The text was well chosen. Montgomery was a great man; a misunderstood man, a courageous man. In some respects he was a man born before his time. His dream of a Christian Church, under whose ample dome there could be a variety of creeds worshipping together in the unity of the spirit, is a lofty one, going beyond the ecumenical spirit of our day which is still striving for Unity in Uniformity. His dream of an Ireland where the embers of sectarian bigotry and party rancour were forever extinguished, belongs it would seem, still to the far distant future. Such dreams demand a breath of mind and spirit seldom found among the sons of men. They demand a tolerance in fact, based on kindness, magnanimity, and understanding. Alas, these traits are not common, because they are demanding. But Montgomery had them and he had the courage to live for them. Courage is defined by Ernest Hemingway as "grace under pressure." The life of Henry Montgomery is the story of the pressures he experienced in pursuit of the ideals he cherished, and the grace with which he endured them.

Our small denomination acknowledges its debt to Henry Montgomery, but if it would truly honour him it should recall this passage from that memorial sermon preached here on Christmas Eve, 1865:—"More acceptable to our venerated friend than 'storied urn or animated bust' would be the earnest efforts of those who honour him to cultivate with diligence, and guard with jealous care, those principles of Christian freedom, truth and love, which it was the noblest labour of his lengthened life to vindicate and extend."

(1) Letter to John McRobert: Appendix to McAlester's Memorial Sermon.