

Foreword

Ever since I saw and heard Bishop Shanahan speaking at Rockwell College when I was a student there I felt captivated by him. Over the years I endeavoured to discover and collate all the significant material that might reveal the man as he was while in the making as a student and at some later periods of his life for which I had access to documentation. I was fortunate, while occupied with research on other matters in France, to be put in contact with school documents and Shanahan's own letters as a student in France. This enabled me to piece together the eleven years he spent 'in exile' there. The spiritual journal he kept in 1897 revealed the extraordinary personal struggle as he tried to reshape his approach to God and to his vocation. The succeeding five years spent in Rockwell as junior master and later as professor and Dean were not as well documented but from the history of Rockwell at the time it was possible to construct a satisfactory framework of his life there. From journals in the Irish Spiritan communities and from his own letters it was possible to trace his activities while at home in Ireland, especially when recovering from serious illness in 1919 and in the months leading up to his being ordained Bishop in Maynooth College on 6 June 1920. For the years spent in active retirement at Blackrock College, 1932-1938, I was fortunate to be in contact with people who had known him well at that time and his own remarkable letters gave an insight to his inner feelings. Realising that it is the family milieu which is the real shaper of character I set about, rather late, to garner all that was available about that stage of his life.

I had no intention of doing any study in depth of Bishop Shanahan's main life work in Nigeria as I felt that, though there was a rich store of documents available in the Spiritan general archives about that matter, my lack of experience of Nigeria would be a serious handicap in doing justice to these. There was no question at the time of publishing my findings as they were mostly an attempt to put in chronological sequence the flow of Bishop Shanahan's life and thoughts. But after the introduction of Bishop Shanahan's cause for beatification in November 1997 and as the approach of the centenary of his departure for Nigeria on 9 October 1902 approached I decided it was imperative that I attempt to document his first steps as a missionary in Nigeria and try to pinpoint what made people opt for him as head of the mission after but a short three years of work that had little spectacular to show.

As these separate essays were done as independent studies of selected periods of Shanahan's life there is a certain amount of overlap. And as all those matters to do with a great personality take on a special significance, much that might otherwise seem trivial has been retained from these ongoing studies. It is hoped that a more full picture of the human development of this great missionary Bishop may thus emerge from this cumulative approach, and above all that we may have a close view of a saint in the making.

Seán Farragher CSSp

Blackrock College

9 October 2002

Acknowledgements

I am conscious that I am deeply indebted to many people over the years since I first embarked on these special studies – several of whom have been since called by the Lord. To single out some among those still happily with us may well be invidious. I trust that their common wish is that through their efforts Bishop Shanahan may be better known and loved and that one day he may - God willing - be numbered among the official saints of Christ's church.

Two names, however, that must be mentioned are Sister Angela Ruddy of the Missionary Society of the Holy Rosary, which was founded by Bishop Shanahan, for her generous supply of copious and well-researched information, and Caroline Mullan, Blackrock College archivist, for her patient and painstaking proof reading and preparation of the text.

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