Introduction

The year of arrival of the Spiritans on the Niger River (1885) led by Father Joseph Lutz coincided with the Berlin Conference of European powers, designed to open Africa to colonial development, and gave us the modern map of Africa with all its absurdities. In particular, the consequent Act of Berlin (February 1885) recognised the Niger as an area of British colonial interest and declared the area open to free trade. It was not an auspicious time for a group of missionaries, mainly Alsatian, to find welcome from the administrators of the dominant colonial power in the area, Great Britain, whose main rival to colonial ascendancy in West Africa was France.

The Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) had been on the Niger for 40 years, and had built an impressive series of mission stations and schools, whose main purpose was the training of evangelists. Because of their purpose these schools emphasised learning through the medium of local languages, at the expense of English. Coincidentally, the arrival of the Spiritans corresponded with two decades of demoralising internal strife in the CMS missions, which left the Spiritans considerable room for initiatives, which might have otherwise faced greater opposition.

Lutz’s initial strategy was the establishment of ‘villages of liberation’ for redeemed slaves, a strategy which was already discredited and in decline in other Spiritan missions, especially in East Africa. Lutz died in 1895 and was followed by two leaders Joseph Reling and René Pawlas, who died in quick succession
without having the opportunity to leave a significant mark on the development of the mission.

Shanahan's immediate predecessor as Prefect Apostolic, Léon Lejeune, led the mission from 1900 until his death in 1905, during which time mission strategy changed radically. This was partly due to global thinking in the Spiritan Congregation under the superior generalship of Alexandre Le Roy, and partly due to changes in British colonial policy, which from 1902 provided substantial subsidy for the development and running of mission primary schools, on condition of their being brought to a certain standard of excellence. Lejeune was sufficiently insightful to see the potential of these developments for a new mission strategy on the Niger. Lejeune wrote to his superior general, Mgr. Le Roy in 1904: "education is the only way ahead in Africa, there is no other possible way to convert people". Two years previously he had written to Le Roy: "it is perilous to hesitate, the Christian village must go, and all our concentration must be on the schools......"1

In October 1901 Lejeune sent Fr. Xavier Lichtenberger to Ireland to plead for personnel for Nigeria, and it was the same Fr. Lichtenberger whose talk at Rockwell College inspired Joseph Shanahan to seek a missionary appointment. Lejeune's strategy in seeking help from Ireland was more far-sighted than he is often given credit for. The pieces were gradually coming together which would make a grand strategy possible. The Irish Spiritans were already famous, and in some quarters infamous, within their Congregation for their involvement in Irish education. By seeking Irish Spiritans for the mission in Nigeria, Lejeune was simultaneously getting mission staff with experience in educational work, and at the same time getting British nationals who would be more able to deal with the British administration

on the Niger.² This explains how Shanahan, in spite of his juniority, found himself Prefect Apostolic, in charge of the Spiritan mission on the Niger, within three years of his arrival.

The Shanahan Era (1905-1930)

The Grand Strategy

A later myth would circulate in Irish Spiritan Province circles, cultivated by the writings of Edward Leen and Reginald Walker, that little was achieved on the Niger until Shanahan arrived to envision a new strategy.³ The evidence seems to suggest otherwise. The vision was Lejeune's.⁴ What therefore was the contribution of Shanahan? It was to take Lejeune's original embryonic idea and develop it into a grand strategy, whose obvious success would send ripples far beyond the mission on the Niger. He would prove that to approach evangelisation indirectly, and make the development of schools the prime strategy of mission, was the most appropriate and effective ordering of priorities for the purpose of evangelisation in the circumstances in which he found himself.⁵ He had to develop and defend his strategy against the prevailing 'wisdom' of his own Spiritan Congregation and throughout the Roman Catholic missionary world.⁶ In the period from 1902 to 1930 Shanahan had the

⁴ V.A. Nwosu ed., op. cit., p. 130.
⁵ See Daniel Murphy, A History of Irish Emigrant and Missionary Education (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 446-47.
⁶ This had been influenced unduly by the French background of the Spiritans and the unfavourable impression created by the French precedent of the ‘école laïque’. See John Jordan, Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria (Dublin: Elo Press, 1971), p. 29. Working from this precedent, the trend of French Spiritan
satisfaction of seeing his strategy vindicated by the phenomenal growth of the Church in his own vicariate, and in his final years in Nigeria, to see a major swing in mission priorities throughout the whole of sub-Saharan Africa broadly towards the general principles of his own approach.

Mgr. Arthur Hinsley, rector of the English College in Rome, was appointed Visitor Apostolic to the Catholic missions in the British colonies in Africa in 1927. He spent two years (1927-29) touring sub-Saharan Africa and his reports were destined to have enormous influence on the direction of mission strategy throughout the continent. He also kept a diary to record his impressions throughout. He visited Southern Nigeria in September 1929 and recorded the following note: "This is the most flourishing mission in British, if not in the whole of West Africa. Many problems still unsolved, sisters, secular movements...the success of Onitsha is largely ascribed to the schools." It was the final vindication of what Shanahan has fought for.

thinking was to develop Church-sponsored education completely independent of government involvement. Shanahan's experience of Irish education under British administration had no such negative aspects. This friction continued for most of Shanahan's life in Southern Nigeria. The Spiritans working in the area around Calabar, Frs. Lena, Siner, Krafft and Biechy, signed a document of complaint against Shanahan's policies in 1911. In May 1914 this group forwarded their objections to their Generalate, bypassing Shanahan. The main issue was not the desirability of mission-sponsored education, but the acceptance of government grants-in-aid with concomitant government rights of inspection and examination orientation. Shanahan favoured full cooperation with government. Yet the degree of resistance to Shanahan is apparent in the fact that only 17 of the 102 Catholic schools in the vicariate followed the government curriculum (see Colman Cooke, "The Roman Catholic Mission in Calabar 1903-1960", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1977, pp. 71-73). Shanahan's policies were finally vindicated by the Education Act of 1926 which imposed strict standards on all schools. It had a totally devastating effect around Calabar where the Catholics lost most of their schools. from 411 in 1926 to 99 in 1928. (see ibid., p. 86).

8 Quoted in Colman Cooke, _Mary Charles Walker, the Nun of Calabar_ (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1980), p.126. Hinsley as Apostolic Visitor


Mixed Motives on all Sides

Undoubtedly Shanahan was shrewd in his assessment of the Igbo people, both as he found them and as he foresaw they would develop in the future. They were exceptionally talented, ambitious and dynamic. They appear to have mastered the use of iron for centuries before the colonial period, and to have developed a unique pictorial form of writing independent of European influence.

They were also a pragmatic people. If they accepted Western education readily, it was because they were quick to see the use of it for their own purposes. Augustine Okwu claims that the main utility the Igbo saw in western education was the relief it provided to population pressure on the land, a deeply significant consideration in any agricultural economy, but most particularly for an ethnic group inhabiting the most densely populated area on the African continent. So great a factor was the land in Igbo society that it was personified in the most dominant deity of traditional life and worship as Ala (Ani), the earth goddess.

Both Lejeune and Shanahan realised the major obstacles to conversion that existed for elders in Igbo society. A complex cultural structure of status and leadership existed which involved, among other elements, the taking of titles. Most important of these were the "Ozo" title for men (and the parallel title "Ekwe" title for women). These titles involved the investment of considerable funds from the initiate. Titles involved considerable secular and religious cultic responsibilities and functions in the practice of traditional religion. It was not possible to dissociate

addressed a meeting of Catholic bishops and missionary leaders in Dar es Salaam in 1928 in which he said: "Collaborate with all your power; and where it is impossible for you to carry on both the immediate task of evangelisation and your educational work, neglect your churches in order to perfect your schools." In a handbook for missionaries produced in Rome in 1932 the axiom was given "who owned the schools will own Africa". See Roland Oliver, op. cit., pp. 275-276.


10 A.S.O. Okwu, op. cit., pp. 45-60.
the religious and secular elements, and so the renunciation of the cultic elements by a titled person generally involved a loss of status and leadership. In only a few cases, due to the extraordinary strength of the characters involved, did some of the early titled converts succeed in retaining their social status after conversion to Catholicism. This was the background to the advice that both Lejeune and Shanahan got to concentrate their efforts on converting the young, before they got involved in the complexities of social structure and status that made the conversion of the elders next to impossible.\textsuperscript{11}

Shanahan was quite realistic in his assessment of the mixed motives which made mission education acceptable to the Igbo. It can undoubtedly be argued that Shanahan and his Spiritan colleagues used education to manipulate a large section of the Igbo towards their mission's long-term plan for evangelisation and conversion. It can equally well be argued that the Igbo manipulated the Spiritan missionaries away from traditional approaches to evangelisation, towards methods which fulfilled the material aspirations and ambitions of the people.\textsuperscript{12}


\textsuperscript{12} P.B. Clarke, op.cit., 105. The controversy about the effectiveness of education in the pursuit of the goals of mission on the Niger was also a feature of SMA missions on the other side of the river. For years the SMA superior Carlo Zappa resisted imitating what was happening on the east bank, only to be forced to concede in 1911, in the light of government policy. Zappa's reasoned: I believed as still I do, that in encouraging them to be instructed we are pushing our young people towards the European business houses and towards Government employment .... For this reason I have always thought the school method involves a misunderstanding of our mission which is simply an apostolic affair; we would virtually be committing a crime against the souls of these children, if we were to be the first means of leading them into this dangerous situation, without being actually forced to do so. Letter of Mgr. Zappa to Mgr. Pellet (Superior General), 12\textsuperscript{th}. February 1911, quoted in Colman Cooke, “The Roman Catholic Mission in Calabar 1903-1960” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1977), p. 74.
It has been credibly argued that Islam failed to make any significant impact on Igboiland precisely because it presented itself as a purely religious doctrine with nothing material to offer to the believer.\textsuperscript{13} Some of the more perspicacious British colonial administrators had come to the same conclusion. Leslie Probyn, High Commissioner of Southern Nigeria wrote in 1906: "new ideas (including Christianity) are acceptable only when Africans see that they are obviously useful".\textsuperscript{14} While the motivation for accepting Western education among the Igbo in the early 1900s was largely as a path to a better life, economically and socially, from 1920 onwards a dramatic new motive would surface, destined to change the face of Africa forever. A new generation of educated Africans, both in Nigeria and elsewhere, would begin to question the whole basis of colonial domination. In the hands of this emerging elite, Western forms of education would become effective tools of political liberation.

Shanahan's predecessor, Leon Lejeune, even though largely responsible for the movement towards education as a tool for mission strategy, was deeply concerned that it would have a purely secular effect.\textsuperscript{15} Shanahan and many of his colleagues had no trouble living with the mixed motivation of the Igbo villages, because their own motivations were also very mixed.

Thus we find, with the demise of the rule of the Royal Niger Company and the start of formal colonial rule on the Niger in 1900, a curious combination of interlocking interests emerged which Lejeune and Shanahan would use to the great advantage of their missionary project.

\begin{enumerate}
\item Firstly, there was the colonial government and commercial interest which saw African education as a pacifying force capable of producing the administrative and commercial officials to forward colonial plans for
\end{enumerate}

\textsuperscript{13} A.S.O. Okwu, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 21.

\textsuperscript{14} Quoted in Felix K. Ekechi, "Colonialism and Christianity in West Africa: The Igbo Case 1900-1915" \textit{Journal of African History}, XII, 1, (1971), 104.

\textsuperscript{15} Henry Koren, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 412.
economic and political development. Thus, from 1902 onward, financial incentives were put in place to encourage indigenous education, and it was these incentives which Lejeune saw as providing the way forward for a new strategy.

ii) Secondly, there was the Catholic mission interest, which saw the opportunity to promote educational development, using the incentive of employment opportunities now becoming available. The Catholic mission decision to maintain English as the main language of instruction proved vital in the long-term, by contrast with the longer-established Protestant schools’ system which insisted on the local vernacular as medium.

iii) Thirdly, there was the Igbo interest, which in the earlier days saw the Catholic missions and schools as allies against the more violent aspects of colonial expansion.\(^{16}\) Eventually the number and competence of the Catholic schools ensured that Catholic adherents would have an influence on government and commercial life quite out of proportion to their numbers in the population.

The Educational Strategy in some Detail

Shanahan's basic strategy for educational expansion under the aegis of the Spiritan mission is best described by Edward Leen, who went to Nigeria with Shanahan in November 1920, and stayed for two years as director of Shanahan's program for catechists, and by John Jordan, who was Catholic education secretary of the area under Shanahan's successor. The original schools were focused around the parish centres, most of which Shanahan inherited from his predecessors. In these schools the first teachers of the bush-schools were picked from the most promising students. After receiving basic catechesis and teaching methods, these students were sent to newly founded bush-schools as their first teachers. After about three years working in these outlying schools, the most promising teachers were recalled to major centres at Onitsha and Calabar for further training. Each school became a centre from which further rudimentary bush-schools were started. Thus the process developed into a chain reaction, as villages began to compete with each other to have their own school.

The schools at the parish centres became administrative centres for the surrounding bush-schools. The teacher of each bush-school had to report monthly to the central parish school for salary, check of attendance records and for spiritual animation. The central schools were normally of sufficiently high standards to receive government aid and became the model against which the bush-schools measured their progress and development. Bush-school teachers were brought annually to the central school for a religious retreat.

17 Edward Leen, op. cit., 145-157. See also Edward Leen, Catechetical Instruction in Southern Nigeria The Irish Ecclesiastical Record, XX, (1922), 123-137. See also John Jordan, op. cit., pp. 74-90, 150.

18 John Jordan points out that nearly all the central schools received government funds. Government money represented only a small proportion of the total budgets of the Catholic schools, but it allowed a small number of schools to be well equipped and act as a standard of excellence for all the others. The concentration required to improve results in these schools in order
A major feature of Shanahan's strategy was that none of these teachers had a purely secular teaching function. They were simultaneously teachers and catechists. The bush-school served both as an educational and Church centre. The teachers had clearly defined religious functions in their respective villages. As the system developed, the central school-cum-mission became the residence of the chief catechist who had a supervisory role for the bush schools and their teachers. They travelled widely, examining the catechetical work of the teacher-catechists and negotiating with villages wishing to start their own school.

A New Role for the Catechist

Shanahan's approach meant a completely new role for the lay catechist in the missionary expansion of the Church. Previously seen as an assistant to the priest, accompanying and facilitating the work of the missionary, now the catechist was given a high degree of autonomy, with a proper lay ministry to perform. Edward Leen saw the function of these lay catechists as a temporary expedient until the number of clerical vocations became sufficient. He wrote in 1922: "The dearth of priests has necessitated the inauguration of a system which has been found on trial to work extremely well, though it will always remain merely an expedient until vocations for the pagan mission multiply".19 Why a system "which has been found to work extremely well" should remain merely a temporary expedient is not clarified in Leen's article.

Shanahan, on the other hand, appears to have been free of such presuppositions, and saw the function of the teacher-catechist as a proper ministry and vocation within the church, having its own purpose in Church ministry, independently of the number of clerical vocations. In this, Shanahan appears to be far in advance of his contemporaries, being prepared to find a clear
to qualify for government grants was what led to the dispute between Shanahan and his Alsatian confreres in 1911. See ibid., p. 150.

position within the Church for lay ministry. Even among the lay missionaries he brought from Ireland after 1920, he only thought of giving them the structure of a religious congregation when the limitations of their isolated status within the mission, and the insecurity of ensuring their succession became apparent.

**Day-to-Day Function of the Teacher-Catechist**

John Jordan described the typical daily timetable of the teacher-catechist in a bush school. From morning until 2.00 p.m. he/she taught class in the school. Later in the afternoon there were interviews with local leaders, care of the sick, baptisms in danger of death, education of the adult catechumenate.\(^2\) Such was the growing enthusiasm from local leaders for the development of local bush schools that no village was ever forced to accept a school. The Spiritans found little difficulty in getting each village to accept financial responsibility for the development of their schools.

There were understandable weaknesses in such a system which, once initiated, took on a momentum of its own. It was impossible to keep any credible professional teacher-training program operating. The training college opened at Onitsha in 1913, and transferred to Igbariam in 1914, had to be closed in 1918 due to staffing problems. Thus the standard of competence of many teachers left much to be desired. It would take strict government regulations in the 1920s to put some brake on the uncontrolled expansion, and demand improved standards of teacher-training and competence.

**Over-stretched Mission Staff**

It is clear that the educational emphasis in mission strategy diverted the attention of many missionaries away from distinctly ecclesiastical and cultic concerns. The overall management of the

\(^2\) Jordan, *op. cit.*, p. 86.
system became more and more demanding on the time of missionaries. In 1922 Leen informs us that there were twenty two priests available in the vicariate for ministry, which showed very little increase in a decade, and yet the work load had increased enormously. We find more and more concern being expressed from the Spiritan Generalate in Paris about the neglect of direct evangelisation by the missionaries in pursuit of Shanahan's goals. Yet Shanahan, when defining pastoral priorities in the vicariate was unrepentant, stating that the priest's first duty to the apostolate was the training of young teachers.²¹

Curiously enough, in spite of the enormous effort to produce a vast network of bush-schools, and a smaller network of well-established central schools, Shanahan appears to have done relatively little to build up any substantial follow-up by way of a secondary school network. It would be left to his successor Charles Heerey to add the top to the pyramid base, by way of secondary schools and colleges, from the 1930s onwards.

The concentration on a vast network of primary schools, without much emphasis on the next stage, had a curious implication for the development of indigenous clergy. Without some secondary school system it was impossible to have a feed into a senior seminary program, which in retrospect was the obvious solution to Shanahan's desperate need for clergy. It was only in 1924 that the first minor seminary was opened: St. Paul's Seminary Igbariam.²²

**Girls' Education**

During the first fifteen years of the Shanahan strategy the whole emphasis was on the development of boys' education. Whether this corresponded to the felt needs and priorities of Igbo society,

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²¹ See *ibid.*, p. 151.
or to the mission's (and colonial administration's) perception of those priorities is a matter of debate. However, Shanahan became aware from 1920 of a major gap in his system, that of girls' education. His long-term objective was the formation of Christian families as the root of the Church within Igbo society. This required a major effort in the 1920s to redress the balance. He used the time of his sick leave in Ireland (1919-1920) to establish contacts with willing lady volunteers, to form the nucleus of this new effort, parallel to the previous effort with boys' schools. For some years he had been trying to get a female religious congregation to come to his vicariate for this purpose, without success. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, who served in the vicariate up to 1916, were too restricted in their community life-style for Shanahan's plans, and finally left the vicariate with unhappy feelings on both sides. Prolonged negotiations with the Irish Sisters of Charity proved fruitless, with the exception of the extraordinary case of Sister Mary Charles Walker. It is in this context we should understand his recruitment drive for lay volunteers from 1920 onwards. Many of these volunteers would eventually form the nucleus of the new Congregations of the Holy Rosary Sisters and the Medical Missionaries of Mary.

23 Traditional Igbo society had quite a highly empowered role for women, especially in the economic control of the market-place, from which men were largely excluded. Some recent indigenous commentators maintain that the missionary effort to bring equality of access to formal education for women actually resulted in a diminution of the power of women in Igbo society. See Ifi Amadiume, op. cit., pp. 119-35.

24 Shanahan's efforts from 1914 to attract the Irish Sisters of Charity (I.S.C.) to Southern Nigeria is well documented in Colman Cooke, Mary Charles Walker, the Nun of Calabar, pp. 32-74.

25 The Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary were founded in 1924. They opened their first school in Nigeria in 1928. The apostolate of the vicariate would benefit enormously from Shanahan's foresight as the ministry of the sisters in education and medical work expanded in the following decades. By 1954 there were 150 schools opened by the Holy Rosary Sisters, catering for 22000 girls. See Mother Mary Stanislaus, 'Christianity through the Holy Rosary Sisters' Schools in Nigeria' in The Capuchin Annual, 1954, pp. 329-34.
In a letter of 9 November 1923 to a prospective aspirant Shanahan laid down his plans very clearly: "In Africa the sisters will have to create a Catholic womanhood in a country where it does not exist. This object will be attained chiefly through schools...later on the children will grow up to become co-founders of Catholic families with Catholic young men of our Catholic schools...1011 girls' schools have to be set up!" A contemporary critique might note that the implication was the imposition of a Western model of the role of women in the family and society.

Catechetical Method

Edward Leen tells us of the critical role he played at Shanahan's side in the years 1920-1922 in developing a form of catechesis, suitable to the expanding teacher-catechist system. This seems to have closely corresponded to the principles of spirituality which Shanahan brought with him (as did Leen) from his early Spiritan formation. Leen expressed the intimate professional relationship between them as follows: "The Vicar Apostolic, Dr. Shanahan, and the writer of this article, examining together for more than twelve months, almost continually, and daily collating experiences, grew towards the end to have a clear synoptic view of Christianity set out (in the article)."

Leen was highly critical of all the catechisms then in use in the vicariate. He maintained that because of the variable educational standard of teacher-catechists one cannot presume that any lacunae of a catechism will be compensated for by adequate commentary. Nor, in the circumstances, can one assume

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28 Edward Leen Irish Ecclesiastical Record, XX, (1922), 135.
Christian values percolating from family, or from society in general, to the individual. The precise correct formulation of doctrine in catechisms became all the more important in such circumstances.

Leen stressed the importance of communicating the correct emphases in Christian doctrine beginning, not with the commandments or moral living, but with the life of grace and the divinisation of the human in relationship with the divine, which the life of grace implies. He gave the following mode of proceeding for catechetical instruction:

1. Knowledge of the divine life available to the human through the gratuitous gift of God.
2. Stimulation of desire to possess that divine life.
3. Provoke a love of the means of reaching this 'divinised' state and preserving it intact. Only in this latter context may the commandments be discussed in a balanced way.

He stressed that: "the ten commandments occupy an unduly large space, and a space altogether disproportionate to their relative importance...as if Our Lord had not simplified them by reducing them to two, and as if Mount Calvary did not now interpose between our vision and Mount Sinai". 29

At no stage in the article does Leen indicate any particular effort to present the Christian message in a distinctly African context, but it must be remembered that the article was written for the benefit of an Irish, rather than an African audience. The emphasis given by Leen is valuable and valid in any balanced presentation of the Christian message.

**The Rate of Expansion of Catholic Education (1900-1932)**

It might be useful at this stage to have a look at the actual numerical significance of the rate of expansion of Catholic primary education in Southern Nigeria in the period in question, 29 See *ibid.*, 129
to get some idea of the scale of success in numerical terms, and also the enormous problems created for Shanahan by its very success. The following table is drawn from a variety of sources, which sometimes differ in detail, perhaps because of confusion between a 'church' and a 'school', as both were so closely linked in Shanahan's strategy.\(^\text{30}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Catholic Schools</th>
<th>Enrolment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>800</td>
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<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1100</td>
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<td>1906</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>1908</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>1909</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2591</td>
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<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>6578</td>
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<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>13158</td>
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<td>1918</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>22838</td>
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<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>559</td>
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<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>41455</td>
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<tr>
<td>1924</td>
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<td>1925</td>
<td>1200</td>
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<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>1365</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>1403</td>
<td>37275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>1386</td>
<td>30390</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there are some anomalies in the figures due to changing education codes emanating from government, the over-all trend is one of explosive growth right from 1899. The plotting of these figures on a graph more clearly demonstrates the exponential nature of the increase, and the enormous pastoral problems produced by the fact that there was very little increase in the

number of clergy available to Shanahan for managing this unstable expansion.  

From the statistics (above) one can also see that there was a take-off point about the year 1915. Being the second year of World War I, there was very little to be done by way of increase of missionary personnel. At the end of the war in 1918 Shanahan was entrusted by the Holy See with a pastoral visitation of The Cameroons, which had been deprived completely of pastoral ministry during the war by the loss of German missionary personnel. It was during this visitation which lasted into 1919 that Shanahan suffered serious illness which necessitated his return to Ireland. In the late summer he underwent a serious liver operation.

**A New Phase (1919-1930)**

A period in Ireland which lasted through his consecration as bishop and Vicar Apostolic at Maynooth College on 6th. June 1920, until his return to Nigeria on 22nd November of the same year, marked the start of a distinctly new phase of Shanahan’s life and strategy. The eight years from 1919 was devoted to a burst of creative energy as Shanahan grasped at every straw in an attempt to cope with the pastoral problems posed by the run-away

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31 A few figures will illustrate the problem. In 1906 Shanahan had 12 priests, 9 brothers and 10 religious sisters in the Vicariate: a total of 31 personnel, together with 33 teacher-catechists. In 1922 Leen tells us there were 22 priests in the vicariate available for ministry. By 1925 there were 29 priests, 3 brothers and 1 religious sister, a number of lay volunteers, and 1537 teacher-catechists In this period from 1906 to 1925 the number of priests increased from 12 to 29, but baptised Catholics had increased from 1,178 to 47,515 and catechumens from 850 to 114,006, schools from 11 to 1190. In addition, the tensions of the war years had introduced fission among the Spiritans themselves, as the Alsatians declared themselves for Germany. As a result, in the first two years of World War I. Shanahan lost 7 priests and 2 brothers from the mission. See Celestine A. Obi (ed.), op.cit., pp. 166f. See also Colman Cooke, *The Roman Catholic Mission in Calabar 1903-1960*, pp. 64-84.
expansion of the Church in the vicariate. Of these eight year (1919-1927) he was to spend four years and three months in Europe (mostly in Ireland), which would cause much unfavourable comment among his colleagues in the vicariate, but would eventually lead to the formation of new missionary societies and be an enduring part of Shanahan's legacy.

I have not come across any source which links Shanahan's strategy with the contents of the missionary Apostolic letters and encyclicals of his time. Yet an examination of his actions indicate that he was greatly influenced by these documents. Up to his return to Ireland in 1919 Shanahan appears to have been limited in his own mind to finding priests from his own Spiritan

32 In the history of Catholic missions there are few more intriguing narratives than the story of Mary Charles Walker, the Nun of Calabar. It was a sign of Shanahan's desperation for staff and his willingness to consider the totally unconventional that the story began at all, though it was not to end too happily for all concerned. Mary Charles Walker was an English-born member of the Irish Sisters of Charity (I.S.C.), born the same year as Shanahan (1871). In September 1919 she was introduced to Shanahan as he was negotiating with the superiors of the I.S.C. to open a foundation in Southern Nigeria. When these negotiations broke down M.C. Walker continued to express interest and eventually succeeded in getting a rescript from the Holy See transferring her obedience from the superiors of the I.S.C. to Bishop Shanahan. She arrived in Calabar on 3rd. October 1923 and was accepted by Shanahan as a full member of the apostolic team of the vicariate for whom the vicariate took full responsibility. Canonically she remained a member of the I.S.C. She played an important role in girls' Catholic education in Calabar and Shanahan planned that she would found an indigenous congregation of Sisters. This latter plan never got off the ground. To resolve the anomaly of her position in the vicariate, Shanahan wished that she would join the newly founded Holy Rosary Sisters, which she was unwilling to do. Eventually her work, and the foundation of indigenous Sisters, was taken on by the Society of the Holy Child Jesus after 1930. Her arrangements with Shanahan were personal, and it appears that his successor Bishop Heerey was unwilling to allow the anomaly to continue after he took over the vicariate. Mary Charles Walker left the vicariate in 1934. See Colman Cooke, Mary Charles Walker, The Nun of Calabar, pp. 133-166.

33 The periods which Shanahan spent outside the vicariate from 1919 to 1927: August 1919 - November 1920, May 1922 - May 1924, June 1926 - August 1927. It should be mentioned that all departures were in part connected with Shanahan's deteriorating health.
congregation to solve his pastoral and management difficulties. The Apostolic letter of Pope Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud*, was published on 30th November 1919. Among its important recommendations was that missionary superiors should accept help into their domains from wherever it was offered, irrespective of Congregational interests. The Pope also demanded that diocesan bishops be willing to release their clergy for missionary work.\(^{34}\)

Within two months of the letter being published we find Shanahan in consultation with Mgr. McCaffrey, President of Maynooth College, the main seminary for the Irish Church, leading to an address to the Maynooth students and a meeting with Cardinal Logue and a number of other Irish bishops in January 1920. It had become the practice of some Irish dioceses to send their newly-ordained to parishes of the Irish Catholic diaspora in the United States and Australia, before giving them permanent appointments in their home dioceses. Shanahan proposed to Cardinal Logue to allow these priests to volunteer alternatively for periods up to five years of pastoral work in his vicariate, promising them a sound pastoral training.

*The Maynooth Secular Initiative*

This was the start of a long and fruitful interface between Shanahan and Maynooth which would lead to missionary

\(^{34}\) "how reprehensible would be the conduct of one (a vicar apostolic) who should look upon that portion of the Lord’s field which has been assigned to him, as his own property, which no one else should dare touch .... The head of a Catholic mission, for whom God’s glory and the salvation of souls are nearest to his heart, calls in assistants, if need be, from everywhere to help him in his holy task, not caring whether they belong to another nation or to a different religious order so long as Christ is preached." And again to diocesan bishops: "You will do a deed most consonant with your love for your religion if, among your clergy and in your diocesan seminary, you carefully nurse the seeds of apostleship which you may discover in them." See Raymond Hickey, ed., *Modern Missionary Documents and Africa* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1982), pp. 34, 43f.
developments beyond his wildest dreams. The College was the setting for Shanahan's episcopal ordination in June 1920. His meeting with the students earlier that year had already borne fruit in the persons of his first volunteers for the vicariate Frs. Whitney and Ronayne, who assisted as chaplains to the new bishop during the ceremony, and left with him for Nigeria in November 1920.  

In the form conceived by Shanahan in 1920 the initiative with the Irish secular priests could be no more than a stop-gap measure. Its main advantage was that it provided a basic minimum of sacramental ministry in a mission that would otherwise be largely neglected, at a time when Shanahan perceived a vast popular movement towards the Catholic Church which, if wasted, would not be repeated.

There were inherent weaknesses in the strategy, some of them immediately obvious, and some of a more long-term nature. Immediately obvious was the short-term nature of the Secular's commitment which militated against language proficiency and acculturation. In the normal course they would be preparing to return to their dioceses just when they were becoming proficient in their mission work. Such short-term commitments also tended to discourage long-term pastoral or developmental initiatives due to doubt about follow-up. The Seculars inevitably came to be seen as auxiliaries to the Spiritans, partly due to the strong sense of proprietorship which the 'jus commissionis' gave to the Spiritans, or indeed to any similar societies in similar situations, and partly due to the difficulty of giving high responsibilities to one who could be withdrawn at short notice by his home diocese. Even though this argument was used, it had only limited validity.


36 Typical of this problem was the controversy which enveloped Fr. T. Ronayne, Mary Martin and Mary Charles Walker. Within months of his arrival in Nigeria Ronayne was entrusted with a delicate issue of tightening up on abuses within the Calabar Church. This led eventually to major confrontation, suspensions and eventually excommunications in the following years, which might have been avoided by a more experienced person. (c.f. Colman Cooke, The Roman Catholic Mission in Calabar 1903-1960, pp. 108-120.)
as the individual Spiritans could just as easily be withdrawn. In addition tension was bound to arise in imposing Spiritan community life on the secular volunteers in subordinate roles in the missions. It also seems that there was little or no missiological training or induction course for the secular priest volunteers.

Of more long term significance was the possibility that some of the seculars might, during the period of their short-term commitment, feel called to a more long-term, or even permanent missionary vocation. This is what eventually happened in a number of cases.

By the middle of the decade it became obvious that the tensions within the mission called for a radical review of the arrangements under which the initiative had been undertaken in the first place. Augustine Okwu proposes the thesis that from the start in 1920 the secular priests had territorial ambitions in the vicariate and that Shanahan secretly sympathised with these ambitions. He quotes as evidence the precedent of the formation of the Maynooth Mission to China by Fr. John Blowick in 1916. Within a few years they had their own vicariate of Han Yang in central China. Okwu argues that Shanahan, being aware of this precedent, must have foreseen the likelihood of a similar development in Nigeria.37

However there were elements which made the Nigerian initiative unique, as originally conceived, though it would evolve in ways very similar to the Maynooth Mission to China ultimately. From the start the Maynooth Mission to China was physically separated from Maynooth itself and structured as a separate society. In its initial years Shanahan's initiative remained closely tied to Maynooth and established no structures in Ireland to support a separate society. It seems a more appropriate judgment to conclude that the eventual evolution towards a separate society of Irish secular missionary priests in Nigeria

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grew out of the experience in the first few years of the inadequacy of the initial experiment.

On Shanahan's return to the vicariate after two years absence in May 1924 he found a situation of considerable discord and disorganisation among his own Spiritan colleagues. His long absence was resented. His vicar general Fr. Dan Walsh resigned and Shanahan was accused of "weakness, indecision and procrastination." A year later Shanahan, with his health again deteriorating, requested that a coadjutor be appointed, but the Spiritan Superior General, Mgr. Le Roy wished to see the division of the vicariate established as a priority. He proposed a division of all areas east of the Port Harcourt - Makurdi railway as a separate jurisdiction to be entrusted to the American Spiritan province.

In March 1926 Shanahan offered his resignation and left Nigeria in June to attend the Spiritan General Chapter in Paris. While in Paris he attended a specialist who recommended that he should not return to the tropics, but in his audience with Pope

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39 Shanahan appears to have had little confidence in the American Spiritans, two of whom were already working in the vicariate at this stage. He wrote in November 1924: "The Americans have a long way to go before they come up to us. I think that from what I have seen of them that they are not made for the conversion of Africa. If only they settled down to hardship, mortification, unselfishness, obedience and humility, all would be well" (Shanahan to Crehan, 24th. November 1924, quoted in ibid. p. 109, fn 38). There is a certain irony in these comments when seen against the background of the documentation collected by Edmund Hogan which showed, that in the nineteenth century, Augustine Planque (superior general of the S.M.A.), Francis Libermann (co-founder of the Spiritans) and top officials of Propaganda Fide shared a common jaundiced opinion of the potential of the Irish for foreign missions. See Edmund Hogan, "The Congregation of the Holy Ghost and the Evolution of the Modern Irish Missionary Movement" The Catholic Historical Review, LXX, 1 (January 1984), 2 fn 5.

40 Cooke is under the impression that Shanahan intended not to return to Nigeria, but this seems doubtful. His actions in the following month were not those of one who considered himself retired from the vicariate.
Pius XI, just one month later, he was instructed to return to Nigeria and pick his own successor as coadjutor.  

During this state of flux the Maynooth Secular priests moved to stabilise their situation. Up to this point their only arrangements were made personally with Shanahan, against the advice of many of the Spiritans. With Shanahan's retirement seeming imminent, their position was very unclear. Their proposal was to establish their own missionary society and seek the withdrawal of the Spiritans from the vicariate in favour of the new society. Such a proposal was unacceptable to the Spiritan Generalate. It was complicated by Shanahan's sickness and by the fact that in February 1927, Charles Heerey, an Irish Spiritan was announced as Shanahan's coadjutor, with right of succession.

What stands out about Shanahan during this period is that he was faced with a conflict of interest situation between his position as a Spiritan, maintaining loyally the interests of his own religious congregation, and his position as vicar apostolic of Southern Nigeria, responsible for the best possible pastoral care for the people of his vicariate. In resolving this issue in his own mind Shanahan appears to have been greatly influenced by the teaching of the encyclical letter *Rerum Ecclesiae* of Pope Pius XI which was published in February 1926, which demanded that missionary congregations rid themselves of possessive and exclusive tendencies over territories entrusted to them which conflicted with the pastoral wellbeing of the peoples of the territory.

It seems that Shanahan finally came to the conclusion

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41 The letter of his specialist (*Archives of the Irish Spiritan Province*: unfilled letters in box 'Shanahan Papers'): is very definite in its recommendations. Dr. Bourdier diagnosed a partially detached retina in the left eye and a slight infection of the optic nerve in the right eye. "In consequence I take the view without hesitation that you resign yourself to staying in Europe or in a temperate climate, and I advise you to have your eyes looked at least once a month, at least for some time."

42 "In those territories which the apostolic see has entrusted to your zeal to be won for Christ the Lord, it sometimes happens, since they are often very extensive, that the number of missionaries each of you has from his own religious institute is far less than what is needed .... do not hesitate to summon to your own aid as your co-workers missionaries who are not of your own
that his duty as vicar general demanded that he support the proposal of the diocesan priests.\textsuperscript{43}

But it was the visit of Mgr. Hinsley, previously mentioned, as apostolic visitor to the British colonies in Africa, which finally resolved the issue.\textsuperscript{44} It was he who met Fr. Whitney in Rome in November 1929 and encouraged the formation of the new society. St. Patrick's Missionary Society was formally established on 5th. February, 1930, after a meeting at Maynooth between Fr. Whitney, and Bishop Shanahan. The following month an agreement was reached whereby Calabar, Ogoja and the Ibibio mainland would be entrusted to the new society.\textsuperscript{45} The fruits of the new arrangement became immediately apparent as Shanahan received seven new Irish diocesan priests the same year, who were all appointed to the newly arranged area, which became a separate vicariate in 1934.

It became apparent from 1928 that Shanahan was no longer able to manage the vicariate. The tragedy was that he had not been allowed to resign in the full glory of his achievements in

\begin{quote}
religious family, whether they be priests or belong to lay institutes.” See Raymond Hickey, ed., \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 69-70.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{43} A.S.O. Okwu, “The Beginning of the Maynooth Movement in Southern Nigeria and the Rise of St. Patrick’s Missionary Society 1920-1930”, 26-29, mentions that neither the Irish Spiritan Province nor their Generalate had ever approved the Maynooth experiment and the developments in 1925 were quoted as evidence of the lack of wisdom of Shanahan’s original initiative. He quotes archival correspondence to prove the point. Later the Spiritan Generalate challenged Shanahan to justify his support for the new society. Shanahan replied respectfully but unrepentantly: "I, however, think that I am well known in Rome that my report cannot be interpreted as hostile to my missionary colleagues of the Congregation.... Your Grace said that Ireland is firmly and definitely committed to the missions and will as such supply all the personnel we want. Well! In that case I shall have to wait. However, if the Congregation cannot for whatever reason, give me the personnel which I need, I am obliged 'sub gravi' to search elsewhere for this personnel.” (Letter of Shanahan to the Superior General of 6th November 1928, quoted in \textit{ibid.}, pp. 39-40).

\textsuperscript{44} See above, p. 3.

1926. His last few years were to prove ones of extraordinary suffering for him as many of his working relationships dissolved in rancour and dissension. In 1929 an official visitor from the Spiritan Generalate visited the vicariate and reported Shanahan's rule as "burdensome, autocratic, personalised and often in defiance of the congregation's constitutions." In the same year Mgr. Hinsley, while giving great credit to the achievements of the vicariate of Southern Nigeria up to 1929, was highly critical of Shanahan's administration as he found it. The Shanahan Era was clearly coming to an end. In December 1930 Shanahan had the satisfaction of ordaining his first Igbo priest, Fr. John Anyogu, at Onitsha on the 8th. December, the 45th. anniversary of Joseph Lutz's arrival and the 25th. anniversary of the death of Leon Lejeune. Two months later he again submitted his resignation, which was promptly accepted. Charles Heerey succeeded him as vicar apostolic on 21st. May, 1931. What should have been the final lifting of the burden from Joseph Shanahan's shoulders was postponed for some months more by the serious illness of Heerey. Shanahan finally left the vicariate early in 1932.


48 Various other recorded correspondence shows that these comments were not isolated. As Shanahan's health deteriorated, so did his ability to work harmoniously with others. Mother Amadeus of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus (S.H.C.J.) who planned to come to work in the vicariate commented in 1930: "All Mgr. Hinsley said of him is true..... he is certainly holy but there is a decided 'kink' which makes it difficult to get on with him. You never quite know where you are and I have a feeling that he feels we were forced on him by Mgr. Hinsley". (Colman Cooke, *Mary Charles Walker*, 130). Hinsley's opinion comes out clearly in his dealings with Mother Amadeus: "Everything must be ready before Shanahan's arrival in Rome so that he cannot change his mind. Shanahan is broken in body and mind and will be asked to resign."*(ibid, p. 130)*
Assessment of the Shanahan Years

Adrian Hastings writing in 1979, reviewed the overall impact of various strategies used by different missionary societies throughout Africa in the work of evangelisation. The French, Germans, Dutch and Swiss excelled in the quality of their mastery of local languages, study of culture and the excellence of the training given to indigenous priests and catechists. The Irish and the Canadians were remarkable in their emphasis on education. Yet he says:

Buganda, Igboland, Chaggaland, Rwanda and Burundi all experienced mass conversion and an emerging Christian social atmosphere....the dynamics of such movements and the methods of the missionaries varied considerably: the schools race in Igboland between the Irish Holy Ghost Fathers and the British CMS presents a very different picture from the White Father evangelisation of Ufipa with its lengthy catechumenate and the relative absence of schooling .... Yet in many ways the patterns of religion which tended to emerge after some years, with its sacramentals and angels, its relative absence of priests and of regular sacraments, its profound dependence on catechists, was a common one.49

With the rise of nationalism throughout Africa it became obvious that, for ideological reasons, newly emerging states would not allow a monopoly of Church control of education to continue. The prospect of nationalisation of Church schools created tensions in Church-State relations throughout Nigeria from the 1950's until it finally happened in 1970, immediately after the Biafran War. Superficially the event might be regarded as a disaster for early mission efforts. Perhaps a more balanced judgment would be to see the mission school system as an agent which served both Church and State well for over half a century,

simultaneously creating the intellectual and administrative elite which underpinned nationalist aspirations towards self-determination, while at the same time ensuring that Christian influence would percolate into every level of civil society.

It might legitimately be asked whether the different strategies adopted by different religious Congregations and denominations, as regards education, produced patterns of very uneven development throughout Nigeria, leading to eventual domination of civil service and commercial life throughout the country by one particular ethnic group. This would eventually be a contributing factor to the inter-ethnic jealousy and resentment which culminated in violent purges and civil war.

What emerges eventually is a vibrant and creative Church, self-supporting at all levels of ministry, with a strong missionary outreach. It is not necessary to assume that the original evangelisers were better or more zealous than their peers elsewhere, but a strategy was found which resonated with the genius of a people, and released their potential to develop a uniquely successful incarnation of the Christian message in a relatively short period of time. Leon Lejeune and Joseph Shanahan have a specially important role in finding that strategy and putting it into effect. Felix Ekechi sums it up as follows: "What seems remarkable about the Holy Ghost Fathers, from my own point of view, is not that they were ordinarily zealous evangelists, but that they were able, in spite of heavy odds to become strong and influential within a short period of time". 50

Allow me to finish with a comprehensive summary of Shanahan’s impact on mission history in Nigeria by a distinguished Nigerian historian, not otherwise noted for his admiration of foreign missionaries:

Indeed the success that attended the efforts of the only European missionary who based his evangelistic methods upon close understanding of Ibo religion indicates what

might have been achieved by other missionaries. Bishop Shanahan of the Society of the Holy Ghost Fathers was perhaps the greatest evangelist the Ibo have ever seen. This brave Irish priest who arrived in Onitsha in 1902 went from village to village on foot, ate the people's food, shared the same shelter with them and spoke to them in a language they could understand. Deeply impressed by the religious instinct of the Ibo, he saw that what Ibo religion wanted was not destruction but transformation. Hence he made them understand Mass in terms of spirit worship and the supreme being in terms of Tshuku (or Chukwu). Shanahan's understanding of the Ibo religion undoubtedly contributed to the stupendous outstripping of the Protestant missions by the Catholics in the Ibo country, in spite of the fact that the former preceded the latter by forty years.\textsuperscript{51}

AN EXCURSUS ON THE WRITING OF CHINUA ACHEBE

In the immediate aftermath of independence in the early 1960s, the general trend of studies by Igbo authors tended to be highly critical of the effects of missions, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, on the social and cultural fabric of traditional African society. Such an analysis was immortalised in the classic trilogy of Igbo author Chinua Achebe: Things Fall Apart (1958), No Longer at Ease (1960) and Arrow of God (1964).\textsuperscript{52} In this framework Africa is seen as emerging from a prolonged period of humiliation as a result of the colonial experience, and in many cases Christian missions were seen as part of that experience and agents of the cultural humiliation.

In the first novel of the trilogy Achebe portrays and interprets life in Igboland in the last half of the nineteenth century, using the main character Okonkwo to represent the model of a traditionally


successful Igbo male whose pride eventually results in his banishment from his village for sins against Ani, the earth goddess. In his exile he hears reports of the destabilisation of society by the twin forces of Christian missionary expansion and the economic changes brought about by trade. Okonkwo's world of kinship falls apart with the conversion of his son Nwoye to Christianity. On his return from exile he fails to stir his fellow kinsmen to war and eventually his alienation is completed by his own suicide.

Achebe interprets the power of the traditional earth goddess Ani in terms of a powerful female spiritual principle which controls and dominates the materialistic male principle of acquisitiveness. Thus Ani was the binding force which kept things together in traditional society. For Achebe, colonial trade allied with western education released the male principle of acquisitiveness in Igbo society with devastating results.

The remaining novels of the trilogy explore the consequences of this disintegration in future generations of Igbo society. Ezeulu, the hero of *The Arrow of God* is an intellectual traditional priest who is confident he can deal with the new system of government, only to be ultimately destroyed by it. In *No longer at Ease* Achebe explores his perceptions of modern Nigeria through the character of Obi Okonkwo, a grandson of the hero of the first novel. In him we see the full implications of the release of acquisitiveness in Igbo society as the initially idealistic Obi is corrupted by bribery and nepotism leading to his final downfall.

Yet Achebe is too profound a writer to ignore the obvious benefits that came to Igbo society through its interaction with both European trade and missionary activity. He admits a degree of historical inevitability in the consequent evolution. He is also too honest to pretend that traditional society had pristine perfection. The very issues that most disturbed the consciences of Shanahan and his missionary colleagues appear also in Achebe's novels as disturbing questions of conscience e.g. incidents of the casting away of twin babies as abominations on the land.

But there was a young lad who had been captivated. His name was Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son. It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not
understand it. It was the poetry of the religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague but persistent question that haunted his young soul -- the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry plate of the panting earth. Nwoye's callow mind was greatly puzzled.  

53 See *ibid.* p. 122.