

clergy, the more so as so many clerics were unbeneficed and behaved, to all outward appearance, as ordinary laymen.

But even this unscrupulous method of cheating Royal Justice was not always successful, as was proved on one occasion in Radnorshire, where Thomas Bull was charged in 1602 with poisoning. His many friends who had attempted to hush up the case by bribing the whole judicial apparatus—Jury, Sheriff, Justices of the Peace and Gaoler, decided, as a last resort, to claim benefit of clergy for him :

' Hopinge to redeme the liffe of the said Thomas Bull by the benefytt of his clergie, being learned . . . and also the better to assure the saffety of the said Bull by the said benefitt of his clergie, they did bringe hym the said Bull a booke to assaye and to rede upon. Howbeit, the said Bull, beinge a man lettered as before, was so amazed by the secret worke of Nature, and the Judgment of Allmightie God, that he could not reede any Whitt, but said that there was a Miste before his eyes so that he could not decerne the letters or to that effect.'⁵⁵

His unexpectedly defective vision dashed the hopes of his friends, for he was found guilty and executed for the crime.

Law-breaking clerics were rarely admonished, or assisted to mend their ways, by their ecclesiastical superiors. The Welsh bishops and other members of the Church hierarchy, many of them Englishmen or the sons of landed gentry, were too engrossed in their personal affairs to do much more than simulate an interest in the activities of the lower clerical orders. They occasionally, at the request of the Government, compiled reports in which they dutifully lamented the sad decay of Christian decorum and knowledge in their respective dioceses, but took few steps to rectify it. This might explain the incredible latitude allowed to the vicar of Llanrwst, Sir Griffith Kyffin, and to his incorrigible family whose bravado and brutality, about the year 1581, seem to have mesmerised the authorities into complete impotence.

Sir Griffith, blessed with a progeny as reckless as himself, was governed by no recognised or recognisable ethical code. He had appointed one of his sons and a son-in-law to be ministers, entrusted with the indelicate task of marrying couples, whether they favoured matrimony or not, and generally without licence.

Another son was a consummate card and dice sharper, who systematically cheated the servants of neighbouring gentlemen and forced them to pay their debts by stealing their masters' goods. Hunting and tipping were the daily physical exercises of the Kyffin family, and assaults and frays kept them in fighting trim. To meet current expenses, Sir Griffith forged and counterfeited wills and deeds of conveyance, and levied *comorthas* on his parishioners in return for 'saying new gospels,' whatever that may have meant. On one occasion he went so far as to kidnap the son and heir of a deceased gentleman, a boy of thirteen, and, with the threat of corporal punishment, forced him to marry his daughter, a libidinous wench who, moreover, had the unfair advantage of being eleven years older than the lad. Sir Griffith and his tribe might have enjoyed a longer lease of delinquency if they had not untimely attacked a servant of the Gwydir family, and found themselves exposed to the vengeance of Sir John Wynn and the Court of the Star Chamber.⁵⁶

There was some excuse for the omission of the Welsh Church authorities in the matter of discipline, for they were not permitted to devote much time to the supervision and good regulation of their dioceses. The Government regarded the highest dignitaries of the Church quite as eligible for secular duties as any of the landed gentry, and certainly did not differentiate between them in their obligations to the state. The clergy of the diocese of Bangor, for instance, were ordered to provide soldiers and weapons at their own expense for the Irish wars, and made no attempt to evade this liability. In the same way, bishops and other high-ranking clerics were given, and loyally accepted, positions of authority which made them almost as much servants of the Government as of the Church, and interfered considerably with their pastoral and spiritual work.

A canon of Llandaff was a Justice of the Peace, and so were the Bishop and the Dean of St. Asaph. The Bishops of St David's were invariably members of the Council of the Welsh Marches, and were expected to attend its meetings regularly.