

**Bertram Coghill Alan Windle, F.R.S., F.S.A.,
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Sir Bertram Windle, scientist, educationist, and apologist enriched our Canadian culture during the 1920's to an extent which the historian can hardly ignore. Already St. Michael's College in Toronto, where he spent the last ten years of his life as Professor of Anthropology, has acknowledged its debt to him in a public way. On May 8th last, which was the centenary of his birth, a solemn Mass was celebrated in the College chapel, and a commemorative address delivered. Windle's years in Canada were, however, but the afterglow, admittedly a fruitful and impressive one, of a remarkable scientific and administrative career in the British Isles, where accordingly the centenary was also observed. Birmingham and Cork had debts to acknowledge similar to that of Toronto, some account of which must first be given if the significance of his work in Canada is to be made clear. It will then be seen that he came to this country carrying his sheaves for a final harvesting in our midst.

Bertram Coghill Alan¹ Windle was born on May 8, 1858, at Mayfield in Staffordshire, England, where his father was the Anglican vicar. He was of mixed English, Irish, and, more remotely, German ancestry, a circumstance which may account for his life-long interest in Ethnology, which began as a hobby and ultimately became a serious study. He had sufficient Irish blood to boil at the arrogance of assumed Nordic superiority, which was a fashion in pre-Hitler days. In any case despite his English birth circumstances dictated that he should become Irish in sentiment. His father's acceptance of a vicarage in Kingstown, Ireland, when Bertram was four years old, determined that the boyhood associations of his son should be Irish. Even the choice for him of an English public school (Repton), if intended to redress the balance, had precisely the opposite effect, for he disliked the place intensely, and had to be withdrawn and entrusted to private tutors to prepare him for Trinity College in Dublin, where he entered as a freshman in 1875. Among the undergraduates there he found Douglas Hyde and others in whose souls the spirit of a new Ireland was

¹ It seems that originally the order of the names was such that the initials were A.B.C., but fearing to be nicknamed Alphabet Windle, he changed the order. He did not entirely avoid the appellation, however, since it is recorded that Sir Oliver Lodge, introducing him for an honorary degree at Birmingham when he already had a dozen of them, cited him as a man who had the first half of the alphabet before his name, and the other half after it.

stirring. This exciting milieu, though it deepened his Irish sentiment and gave him a knowledge of Gaelic, so useful to him afterwards, prevented him from hitting his stride as a student. Philosophy and Literature attracted him, but his true bent as a scientist did not reveal itself until he entered the Medical School. There, however, it eventually found full scope, and his graduation as an M.D. in 1883 launched him upon a scientific career which was to carry him very far, even to membership in the Royal Society within fifteen years.

Another circumstance of his years in the Medical School entered deeply into his habit of thought and continued to the end. Deprived of his father by death, he had to supplement the diminished family resources by coaching backward students, and by part-time teaching in local academies. Shortage of funds is not an uncommon experience with students. What is uncommon is that one of them should remember it to the advantage of succeeding generations of students. Sir Bertram did remember it. One of the features of his administration at Cork was his move to provide Municipal Scholarships. For the graduates at Cork he proved to be a veritable employment bureau, to the deep gratitude of many of them. At Toronto it was the undergraduates who were to benefit from his generosity. He will always be remembered there through the Windle Scholarships for which he graciously provided in his will.

Windle's active career in the British Isles is divided between Birmingham and Cork. The Birmingham period set the pattern that was resolutely followed to the end of his life — competent scholarship, prolific pen, and boundless energy. What stands out is his drive to get things done. Starting as a resident pathologist in the General Hospital soon after graduation from Dublin, he went on to the chair of Anatomy in the Medical School, later became its Dean, and eventually the chief influence in creating the University of Birmingham, which came into being in 1900.

What Sir Bertram did for Birmingham was, however, more than matched by what Birmingham did for him. That city was, in the 1880's, the home of Cardinal Newman. How could Windle with his inquiring mind and wide interests avoid contact with him! The contact was made through reading the *Apologia*. But it was not made upon a cold muscle. Already Windle had moved away from the anti-Catholicism which was a major sport at Trinity in his undergraduate days. It happens that in Birmingham St. Chad's Cathedral stands across the street from the General Hospital. The young pathologist was attracted by the Gregorian music, and became a frequent visitor to the cathedral. At one visit he heard a sermon on the Immaculate Conception, which aroused his interest. It was at this favorable moment that he read the *Apologia*. But another book did even more for him, paradoxically. It was Littledale's *Plain Reasons for Not Joining the Church of Rome*, sent by a friend who probably suspected the drift of Windle's thinking. Littledale stopped him in his Romeward tracks, but only temporarily. The chance discovery in a bookstore window of an *Answer to Plain Reasons* removed the roadblock, and even served to accelerate his speed. He was received into the Catholic Church on January 24, 1883. His later interest in

the Catholic Truth Society, both in England and in Canada, was born of the experience that a man may read himself into the Church.

In 1904 Windle accepted the presidency of Queen's College, Cork. To appreciate why he did so is to penetrate the man to the core. There was financial loss in that he had to accept a lower salary, but beyond that there was loss of prestige and opportunity. The man behind the University of Birmingham was Joseph Chamberlain who was a powerful political figure, able to get endowments unlimited from the wealthy industrialists of the Midland area. Chamberlain had resolved to make a university that would be respected. He had already secured Sir Oliver Lodge, the distinguished scientist as its president, and he counted upon Windle to be Dean of the Medical School. Why did Windle renounce these prospects and these congenial surroundings to become president of a moribund college in Ireland? There were quite simply two reasons; he was Irish and he was Catholic. Both these loyalties were genuine and both prompted him to go to Cork, but a dramatic incident was to reveal which loyalty was the deeper. The boycott was a new and effective weapon at this time in the hands of the oppressed Irish tenants, but to the dismay of many Irish Catholics Pope Leo XIII unexpectedly issued a rescript in April 1888 ruling that it was contrary to charity and justice. The news broke when Windle, who had made no secret of his views, was preparing to deliver another public speech in support of it. He was actually on the point of stepping to the platform when two of his Catholic friends brought him word. They had debated whether they should tell him or not, so embarrassing did the situation seem to be. But they felt he would want to be told. He pondered the upsetting news for a moment, and then without revealing his plans, he invited them to take a seat in the lecture hall. He began his speech by reminding his audience that he had many times defended the boycott as a legitimate political device. "But," he went on to say, "there is another question which I am much more keenly interested in, about which you probably know nothing — that subject is the teaching of the Catholic Church. I have recently had the honor of being received into that Church. Now Leo XIII, her visible head on earth, has decided that boycotting is against Christian charity, and therefore as a loyal son of the Catholic Church I withdraw anything I may have said against her teaching, and the lecture will not be given tonight."² You can imagine the effect of this announcement, but you will not be surprised to hear that after a moment of stupefaction the audience, stirred by the honesty and courage of the man, burst into thunderous applause.

The inspiring scholarship and administrative drive which did so much to create the University of Birmingham were now transferred to Cork; and with a similar result. Certainly he transformed Queen's College, which was its official name when Windle took over. Hitherto it had evoked but little loyalty or even interest in the people of Munster, whom it was intended to serve, but who were

² *Sir Bertram Windle, a Memoir* – Monica Taylor, S.N.D., p. 33.

not provided with representation on its academic governing bodies, and who did not send their sons there except in limited numbers, because the Church, to which the vast majority of them belonged, had discouraged the attendance of Catholics, prohibiting it entirely in the Arts courses, and tolerating it merely in Medicine and Engineering. Indeed a Catholic chaplain had never been appointed. It is little wonder, therefore, that the people of Munster cherished feelings of antipathy to a College so utterly out of touch with its public. The new president changed all that. His diplomatic skill, and his great influence with men of power and wealth in London and Dublin removed most of the disabilities. The ban on Catholics attending was lifted, and a beautiful chapel and a residence for Catholics were built. Laboratories and athletic facilities were provided, new professional chairs were founded, and the curriculum was revised upwards to university quality. And if he failed to create an independent university for Munster, which he greatly desired, his efforts helped to establish in 1908 the National University of Ireland, with University College (re-named) at Cork as a constituent member. All this, be it said, was accomplished while making an enormous contribution to the Irish national effort on its political, but especially upon its industrial level, about which a whole volume could be written.

The majority of Irishmen today will, however, recognize one flaw in the Irish patriotism of Sir Bertram Windle. He was a steadfast friend of the British connection. He supported the Gaelic League to the utmost of his power, and he was a powerful factor in the Irish industrial revival, but he had no sympathy with the wider aims of the new Sinn Fein party which developed rapidly during the first world war. It became increasingly difficult for a man of his political views and temperament to administer the College in face of the conflict of loyalties, and when at last his plan for an independent university at Cork, never forgotten, and now revived, was successfully opposed by the Sinn Fein party largely because it would be due to favorable action by the British government, he realized that his usefulness to Cork and Ireland was at an end. At this moment a letter arrived from Toronto. Another college under another driving leader was moving to achieve its destiny. St. Michael's College was in the process of being rebuilt as a college within the University of Toronto. Father Henry Carr, its president, was on the search for professors with the prestige of scholarship. Windle's book on *The Church and Science*, recently published, caught his eye. He wrote asking the author to come. An exchange of letters resulted in Sir Bertram's decision to accept the invitation for a year at least. He came on an experimental basis. It was an experiment that did not disappoint him.

It would not be easy to exaggerate the impact made upon the Toronto public as well as the College from the very beginning. Arriving the day before Christmas 1919, he was confronted the following day with a newspaper which carried the headline: "Sir Bertram Windle is here." His mere presence was news. It was a sign that he was not going to be ignored – far from it. He had, of course, his lectures in Anthropology at St. Michael's, but the University itself took immediate steps to provide for him a larger audience. What has since come to

be known as Adult Education was then taking its first feeble steps. And feeble they were. Lectures for the public, limited to six, had been offered for several years but taken by relatively few. But now the prestige of Sir Bertram's name encouraged President Falconer to arrange for twelve lectures on successive Friday afternoons during the winter. The subject that year was *Pre-History in the British Isles*, not exactly an exciting one. But 1,000 people came to the first lecture, and the number did not fall off to the end. And that went on for nine years. Whether the subject was Roman Britain, or Mediaeval cathedrals, or the Religions of Mankind, the lecture hall was always crowded. The *Telegram* published the full text of the lectures, each covering an entire page, and overflowing to a second page. It was, in fact, the editor of the *Telegram* who characterized the Windle lectures as an institution in Toronto. Nothing like that has been seen there before or since.

But Toronto was not permitted to have the learned and popular scholar all to itself. In point of fact, he was invited to lecture at most of the great universities in the United States. The Catholic colleges in particular called for repeated visits. It was the time when interest in the scientific hypothesis of biological evolution was at its height, prompted by the centenary of Mendel (1922), which brought forth a spate of articles on the subject in a hundred periodicals. Now Windle had made biological evolution one of his topics of special interest, his Science and his Religion combining to urge him. It was probably the one topic in contemporary Science on which he had kept strictly up to date. Natural Science had been his first love, to which he was so devoted that his numerous research papers, particularly in Anatomy, had brought him membership in the Royal Society when he was but forty-one years of age. His intellectual interests were, however, too varied, and his pre-occupation with administrative duties too absorbing, to permit him to remain long a specialist in any one field. But on one problem within the field of biology he had kept himself thoroughly informed, that is to say on the evolution of species, and now circumstances had created an audience for him. The State of Tennessee had prohibited the teaching in public schools of theories contrary to belief in the divine creation of man as related in the Bible. In a test case John T. Scopes, a biology teacher, was tried in July 1925 for teaching the Darwinian theory in a Dayton public school. World figures like Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan played leading roles in the trial, and everybody was talking about evolution. At this juncture the Paulist Fathers of New York opened the first Catholic broadcasting station. What more appropriate subject than "Evolution and Catholicism" for the first series. Cardinal Hayes approved the choice of this subject on condition that Sir Bertram Windle be engaged to give the broadcasts. He gave them, speaking to tens of millions. On that occasion Sir Bertram Windle was the voice of the Catholic Church in America.

His plan to revisit the British Isles every summer had to be abandoned. He could not afford the time. In point of fact, it was only in 1921 that he set foot upon his native heath again. He grew used to the idea that he had made a new

home in Canada. Only once was there a flutter of indecision. In the winter of 1924 he was offered the General Secretaryship of the Catholic Truth Society of England with the expression of a hope on the part of Cardinal Bourne that he would accept. He took ten days to think and pray over it. It was a work he loved. Having read himself into the Catholic Church he was eager for that type of apostolate. But his decision was finally in the negative. He had come to love his adopted country, everything about it except the Spring. He used to say, "There is no Spring in Canada." If there was any part of the country he was drawn to more than others, it was rural Quebec, where he saw a Catholic culture uncontaminated by materialism. Through no mere whim therefore did he stipulate that in the awarding of the scholarships set up by his will, preference should be given to students from French Canada. But apart from the country, its climate and its people he had, he felt, a work to do in Canada. He had in fact taken over the presidency of the Catholic Truth Society of this country, and did much to expand its influence as well as to pull it out of debt. He had also become Vice Chairman of the Board of St. Michael's Hospital and was deeply interested in its marvelous growth, which he clearly foresaw. If, therefore, he had pulled up stakes in the British Isles, he had sunk them deep in Canada.

Thus the record is one of bustling activity throughout his ten Toronto years. His regular College lectures, his public lectures at the University, special lectures at intervals anywhere from Winnipeg to Washington, numerous articles and book reviews, the writing of five books.³ Even a more rugged man could not stand the pace. In May 1928 he suffered a slight stroke. The promised summer courses at Marygrove College, Detroit, had to be cancelled. Careful nursing however, brought about a good recovery, and he resumed his College lectures in the fall with some of his old fire. He took up the pen again. He even began to think about his promised summer course at the University of Notre Dame. Even when in February 1929 he took to his bed with the cold that developed into pneumonia and ended his life, he said to the doctor, "I must get rid of this beastly cold, for I have several articles in my brain that are just bursting to be put on paper." Well may we exclaim, "What a man!"

It is a matter of regret that no critical biography of Windle has ever appeared. We have an excellent Memoir⁴ by Sister Monica Taylor, based on a voluminous correspondence and invaluable for its facts and explanatory comment. We have also an able centenary article by Professor Denis Gwynn in the U.C.C.⁵ *Record*. But a definitive study has yet to come. Perhaps the Windle centenary will prompt someone to attempt it.

³ Windle wrote twenty-one books in all.

⁴ *Sir Bertram Windle, a Memoir* – Monica Taylor, S.N.D., D.Sc. Longmans, Green & Co. London, New York, Toronto. 1932.

⁵ University College, Cork.