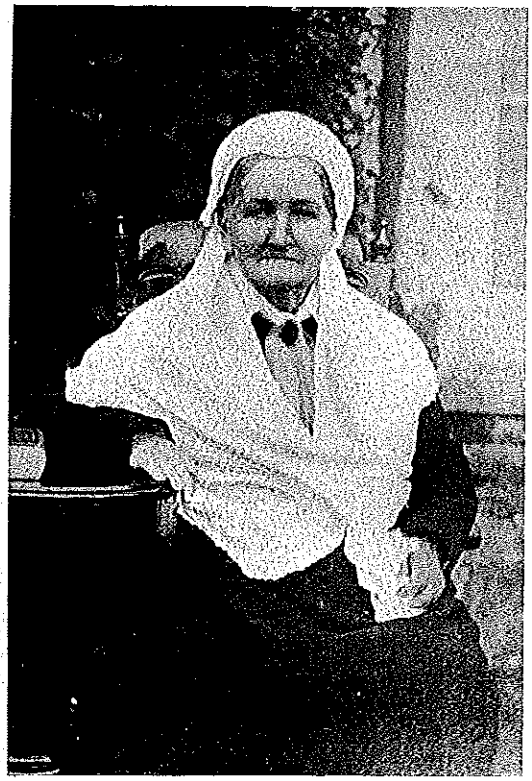

MY MOTHER, AGED 87.

Frontispiece.]

MEMORIES

BY

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oversaw his moral obliquities with a tender and condoning eye. The clergyman who had been to Oxford wrote the squire's letters for him, and it was a common practice for the clergyman to become the estate agent, a practice favoured by Bishop Bagot "as giving the Church added influence in the country." In Bishop Bagot's own time one of the rural deans in Montgomeryshire held two benefices and was agent to three estates.

For an illustration I turn to Llanymawddwy, where there had been three rectors from 1771 to 1834, all non-resident. The Rev. Edward Owen, rector from 1771 to 1791, lived at Ruthin, and was estate agent to Lord Bagot of Pool Park, Ruthin. The duties at Llanymawddwy were taken by a curate. But the collection of his tithe and other parochial business compelled Mr. Owen to journey at stated intervals to Llanymawddwy. This long journey by mountain tracks was made with discomfort, and not without peril. The journey and the parish business transacted with those simple mountain folk cost at each visit several days' absence from the Bagot Estate Office. Bishop Bagot, appointed Bishop of St. Asaph in 1791, at once took cognisance of the loss and the inconvenience caused by this arrangement to the estate interests of his brother, Lord Bagot, and immediately sought for a remedy. Now, the residence and the estate-offices of Lord Bagot were in the parish of Llanfwrog, hard by Ruthin. Forthwith Bishop Bagot took council with the Bishop of Bangor, Dr. Warren, who was patron of the living of Llanfwrog. The two bishops hit upon a prompt and obvious solution

of the problem. The rectors of Llanfwrog and Llanymawddwy must exchange livings. But the Rev. Robert Nanney, Rector of Llanfwrog, said, "No, why should I exchange a benefice of £400 a year for one of £200 a year?" The bishops were equal to the difficulty. The Rev. Robert Nanney was non-resident and lived on his own estate, a long journey from Llanfwrog. Bishop Warren at once informed him that a summons would be issued to compel him to reside at Llanfwrog if he did not do what he was told to do. Mr. Nanney surrendered. The exchange was carried out, and the Rev. E. Owen, the estate agent, took the larger emoluments of Llanfwrog, and Mr. Nanney the smaller income of Llanymawddwy.

The report given to his Bishop of Mr. Nanney, in 1773, by the Rural Dean is as follows: "The Rev. Robert Nanney spent seven years at Cambridge, and has taken no degree. He has an estate of about £900 per annum, part of it in the parish. I wish I could say any other good of him. If your lordship can persuade him to take the benefit of the Act 17 Geo. 3, he may be of service to the Church, but I fear he will never be any credit to it." Mr. Nanney, rector for twenty-eight years, resided on his estate at Dolgelley, a long journey from Llanymawddwy. The duties of the parish were taken by a curate who had been to no university, was married, and had five children. There was no house, and there were no fees. Mr. Nanney paid the curate at first £18 a year, and after protest raised it to £20 a year. The Rural Dean concludes his report of the rector with this caustic sentence, "He (Mr. Nanney)

exchanged portions of the glebe much to his own convenience." Without doubt the two bishops, the agent-rector, and Mr. Nanney—the chief actors in this little parish drama—played their parts openly and would have been indignant if they were censured for performances which their contemporaries in England, as well as in Wales, regarded as customary and defensible.

The practical working of this system was simple and uniform. A clergyman, armed with testimonials from three or more landowners, applied—in person if possible—to the bishop for a vacant benefice. Canon Williams in a report to the bishop supplies the following illustration. When the valuable living of Meifod became vacant (1740), a clergyman procured letters from four neighbouring squires. His suspicions were aroused. He opened the letters and found that, with the exception of one from his own brother, which he had himself written for him, they were of a disparaging nature. These letters he suppressed and wrote others which were duly presented in person by him to the bishop (Maddox), who observed that no young man could have brought a better character, invited him to dinner, and instituted him to the living before his departure. During the fifty-two years (1740–1792) that this man held the living he frequently recounted his exploit with pride. He was a many-sided man. He was an Oxford D.D., a great pluralist, a county magistrate, and Chairman of Quarter Sessions. A keen sportsman, he loved cock-fighting, for which he used his spacious churchyard. "On one occasion he had been unfortunate in his bets

and had lost all his ready money. Being, however, eager to bet upon the issue of another battle, he drew out his watch and offered it as a pledge for £5, upon which a freeholder's wife exclaimed, 'Put up your watch, Dr. Pryce, it shall never be said our vicar pawned his watch for £5. I will lend you £5.'"

The twenty years from 1769 to 1789 were fateful years for the Church in Wales. Dr. Jonathan Shipley was Bishop of St. Asaph during these years. As army chaplain he served under the Duke of Cumberland in 1744 and 1745. In London he mixed much in very fashionable society. He was described "as possessing learning without pedantry, patriotism without faction, and politeness without affectation." He visited his diocese once in every four years, and, like his immediate predecessors and successors, was non-resident. He lived on his own property at Twyford near Winchester. His administration of the diocese and the exercise of his patronage were so typical of the period and the diocese that his record as bishop will supply all the illustration necessary. His son, Mr. William Davies Shipley, ordained deacon by the Bishop of Norwich on March 11th, 1770, and priest by his own father on March 18th, 1770, was appointed by his father on March 19th, 1770, Rector of Ysceifiog; February 6th, 1771, Vicar of Wrexham; April 11th, 1772, Rector of Llangwm; November 13th, 1773, Chancellor of the diocese; January 8th, 1774, Rector of Corwen; May 27th, 1774, Dean of St. Asaph; January 10th, 1782, Rector of Llanarmon. With the exception of

Corwen and Llanarmon he held all these preferments for more than fifty years. He was non-resident from all his benefices. He let out the vicarage at Ysceifiog as a public-house, and the curate, whose salary was £20 a year, was compelled to reside in the adjoining parish. The income of Ysceifiog was £800 a year. He allowed a neighbour to appropriate part of the glebe, observing "that he never would go to law for Church land." When he died in 1826 the church at Ysceifiog had been allowed to fall into such a state of dilapidation that it was unfit for divine service. Canon Williams (father of Rowland Williams the essayist), in his retrospect of the diocese, states that a clergyman named Brown, while shooting with Dean Shipley, received from the gun of the latter a shot which carried off his hand, and that Bishop Shipley gave Mr. Brown the livings of Newtown and of Guilsfield. These instances are luminous and unexceptional. They represent not unfairly the standard in patronage which was acquiesced in by clergy and by laity.

Nor was this standard peculiar to the Church. The example and the influence of Walpole and the Georges familiarised the nation with these methods and practices. It is more easy to criticise than to pass a just judgment upon those so differently situated from ourselves in outlook and circumstance. To the Hanoverian sovereigns the Church was "our happy establishment" and by them and their ministers was treated as a State department. The setting up of the Royal Arms and the Ten Commandments in the churches was regarded as their most significant and essential ornament, and the claims of dynasty and decalogue evoked an equal measure of enthusiasm. The existence of the pluralist and the non-resident incumbent foretold the fact that the divorce of emoluments and duties would soon be made inevitable, while patrons quickly realised that several benefices could be conferred upon the same individual.

The supreme thought altogether absent was the conception of the Church as a divine society. The English prelates who took their titles and their endowments from Wales, in which they did not live, which they rarely, in some cases never, visited, and to which they recognised no obligations, never seem to have regarded themselves as Fathers in God. Ideals have changed. Within the Cathedral there is a life-size and stately statue "Erected by the gentlemen, clergy, and commonalty of the diocese in memory of William Davies Shipley, Dean and Chancellor of this Diocese for more than half a century." Outside the Cathedral there is a plain tombstone to Thomas Vowler Short,* upon which these words, as he desired, are inscribed: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight no man living shall be justified."

* See p. 75.