

Malone, Sylvester

by Andrew O'Brien and Linde Lunney

Malone, Sylvester (1822–1906), priest, ecclesiastical historian, and Irish-language enthusiast, was born in the parish of Kilmally, Co. Clare, son of Jeremiah Malone and Mary Malone (née Slattery). A fluent Irish-speaker since his youth, he was educated at Maynooth and ordained in 1853. He spent eighteen months as curate at Cooraclare, Co. Clare, and was then transferred (1857) to Kilkee, Co. Clare, where he remained for fourteen years. Malone was promoted (1869) to the administratorship of Newmarket-on-Fergus, Co. Clare. He was made (1874) parish priest of Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare, where he built a new church. He was translated in 1884 to Clarecastle, Co. Clare. In 1892 he went to Kilrush, Co. Clare, as pastor and vicar general of the Kilrush deanery. On the reconstitution of the Killaloe chapter Malone was made canon, and on the death of Archdeacon Phelan was elevated to archdeacon. While at Kilrush, he erected a new church dedicated to St Senan in the outlying district of Monmore, raised new schools in the area, including one on Scattery Island, and, at a cost of over £500 from his own resources, built a temperance hall at Kilrush.

Despite the long hours of his daily ministry, and limited access to source material, Malone published (1863) his major work, *A church history of Ireland from its invasion by the English in MCLXIX to the beginning of the reformation in MDXXXII*. At Kilkee he taught Irish classes – his parish priest, Timothy Breen having cooperated with William Smith O'Brien (qv) in establishing the classes in local schools. A visit by Smith O'Brien to west Clare was being planned when he died. Malone, Breen, and other priests attended Smith O'Brien's protestant funeral (June 1864) in a gesture of nationalist solidarity. In that same year, the protestant scholar J. H. Todd (qv) published 'the first real history of Saint Patrick', claiming that St Patrick (qv) was an important figure in an anti-papal tradition which was represented in modern times by the established Church of Ireland. Malone published the second edition of his *A church history of Ireland* (1867), revising the episcopal succession list for Down and Connor, and taking the opportunity to challenge Todd's interpretation of the nation's patron saint as a proto-protestant.

The St Patrick debate continued when Philip Dwyer, vicar of Drumcliffe (Ennis), published his history, *The diocese of Killaloe from the reformation to the close of the eighteenth century* (1878), which elaborated Todd's claims about St Patrick. Malone's two-volume third edition of *A church history of Ireland* (1880) was considerably revised and extended. In the preface Malone, who claimed to write history 'without reference to preconceived notions or theories', criticised Todd for attempting 'to support a tottering establishment', maintaining an 'untenable obnoxious position', and distorting the facts by 'force of prejudice' (Murphy, 323).

Malone again challenged the views of Todd and Dwyer when he published his collection of essays, *Chapters towards a life of St Patrick* (1892).

He was also involved with agitation for land reform. Francis Conyngham, 2nd Marquess Conyngham, owned most of Kilkee, and by the late 1850s plans were laid for developing the resort, with large-scale evictions of poor tenants envisaged. Tension increased in the area, and by the end of 1865 Malone had become the voice of the threatened Kilkee tenants. In February 1866 Conyngham put Kilkee up for sale. In 1867 Malone raised the question of landlordism and detailed the Kilkee dispute in his pamphlet, *Tenant wrong illustrated in a nutshell: or, A history of Kilkee in relation to landlordism*, addressed to W. E. Gladstone, who was then in opposition. Malone's reputation as an historian attracted publicity to the pamphlet and to his views. By the end of 1867 some Kilkee properties had been sold, and the rest were withdrawn in an unsatisfactory compromise. Malone believed that legislation was needed to correct the landlord–tenant relationship, and he welcomed Gladstone's return to government on a reform ticket in 1868; like most other nationalists, he hoped also that the new prime minister would speedily embark on the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland.

Malone strongly supported the Irish language and was a founder member (1876) of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, which was set up following articles in the *Irishman* by Kilrush-born David Comyn (qv). Malone bequeathed £100 to the Society for the best essays in Irish on 'Irish prose' and 'Irish poetry'; Douglas Hyde (qv) and P. S. Dineen (qv) were the successful candidates. In 1899 Malone published *Adrian IV and Ireland*, elaborating on a topic he had raised in the 1867 edition of *A church history* and in an 1898 article in the *New Ireland Review*. He examined the authenticity of the supposed 1154 date of Adrian IV's bull *Laudabiliter* (granting Ireland to Henry II (qv)). He then published *The birthplace of St Patrick* (1900). Malone's books, and essays in journals such as the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, *Dublin Review*, *Hibernian Magazine*, and *New Ireland Review*, considerably raised the standard of contemporary Patrician scholarship, and initiated some important developments in catholic historiography.

Among his other works are the essays 'Iniscathy since the twelfth century' (*RSAI Jn.*, 1874) and 'Mistaken identity as to St Patrick's birthplace' (*RSAI Jn.*, 1889). From 1886 to 1903 Malone published a series of twelve papers in the *IER* on St Patrick, his places of birth and death, and his character. Malone's last historical work, an annotated translation of a twelfth-century Latin text, *Life of Saint Flannan, patron of Killaloe diocese*, was published in 1902. A reviewer (*IBL*, 1903) noted that Malone had given students 'an object lesson as to how ancient lives should be read and appraised'. He published *Irish schools and their management* in 1904. Malone was elected a member of the RSAI (1864), MRIA (1865), and FRSAI (1870).

Towards the close of 1905 he was in failing health. In the spring of 1906 he was treated in the Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Dublin, before returning to the parochial house, Francis St., Kilrush, where he died, aged 84, on 21 May 1906.

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*IER*, iii (1867), 478–80; *Freeman's Journal, Ir. Times*, 22 May 1906; *RSAI Jn.*, xxxviii (1908), 89; *DNB*; Ignatius Murphy, *The diocese of Killaloe 1850–1904* (1995)

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