

Ryan, Edward

by Rosemary Richey

Ryan, Edward (c.1750–1819), clergyman and pamphleteer, was second son of John Philip Ryan and his wife, formerly a Miss Murphy, who were possibly Roman catholic. An Edward Ryan, eldest son of Philip Ryan, farmer, of Cordangan, Co. Tipperary, conformed to the Church of Ireland 26 June 1768, received a conversion certificate 28 June from the court of chancery, and was enrolled 12 November 1768. There is a strong possibility that this is Ryan. After being educated by a Mr Armstrong, he entered TCD 4 June 1765 as a sizar (receiving free education in exchange for performing duties in the college), became a scholar (1767) and graduated BA 1769, MA 1773, LLB 1779, BD 1782, and DD 1789. He was appointed curate at St Anne's, Dublin, in 1776 and vicar of St Luke's and a prebend of St Patrick's, Dublin, first at Tasagart (16 June 1790–5 June 1795) and then Donaghmore (5 June 1795 until his death).

A friend and correspondent of Thomas Percy (qv), bishop of Dromore, in 1787 Ryan was one of the public defenders of Richard Woodward (qv) and his *Present state of the Church of Ireland* (1786) (a vigorous polemic against Irish catholicism in general, and in particular arguing that the Rightboys' anti-tithe protests in Munster were a 'popish' plot intending to subvert the protestant establishment). Ryan wrote his *Remarks on the pamphlet of Mr Barber, dissenting minister of Rathfryland* (1787), a reply to Samuel Barber (qv) who had written a pamphlet attacking the tithe and advocating disestablishment of the Church of Ireland. Ryan accused Barber of stirring up discontent among the presbyterian community in Ireland, defended the tithe (on the grounds of law rather than divine approbation), showed little sympathy for the impoverished peasantry who bore the burden of tithe, and argued that any attempts to disestablish the Church of Ireland would lead to ignorance, irreligion, superstition, and enthusiasm. This was not a new argument in itself, but it was the first time that the Church of Ireland and 'civility' had been linked so forcefully, and was a reflection of the increased confidence of conservative protestants in the later eighteenth century. Barber counterattacked in *A reply to the Rev. Mr Burrow's and the Rev. Mr Ryan's remarks* (1787).

In 1788 Ryan was again an outspoken defender of the Church of Ireland and an attacker of the faith of his forefathers when he published his *History of the effects of religion on mankind* (1788), the proceeds of which were donated to his parishioners at St Luke's. Other works by Ryan include *A short but comprehensive view of the evidences of the Mosaic and Christian codes* (1795); *An analysis of Ward's errata of the protestant Bible* (1808); *Strictures on Dr Milner's tour in Scotland and on Clinch's inquiry with a new plan for obtaining emancipation for the catholics of Ireland* (1809), and *Letter to George Ensor etc. to which are added reasons for being a Christian* (1811). In general he had an intemperate and abusive style, and his words served as

a reaffirmation of an eighteenth-century hard-line protestant position, prompting the leading English Roman catholic cleric John Milner, bishop of Castabala, to write his *Inquiry into certain vulgar opinions concerning the catholic inhabitants and antiquities of Ireland with copious additions including . . . answers to Sir R Musgrave, Dr Ryan, Dr Elrington etc.* (3rd ed., 1810). Ryan died in Dublin, probably in January 1819. His exact date of death is not known but William Cleaver succeeded him as prebend of Donaghmore 14 January 1819. There is no record that Ryan ever married. A complete list of his works is in the BL catalogue.

---

John Nichols (ed.), *Illustrations of the literary history of the eighteenth century* (8 vols, 1817), vii, 106, 137, 149, 183, 825; *Gentleman's Magazine*, i (1819), 92; Henry Cotton, *Fasti ecclesiae Hibernicae* (6 vols, 1848), ii, 163, 185; *Notes and Queries*, 2nd ser., iv (1857), 328; *Alumni Dubl.* (1924), 723; H. J. Lawlor, *The fasti of St Patrick's Dublin* (1930), 108; W. D. Bailie, 'The Reverend Samuel Barber (1738–1811)', *Challenge and conflict: essays in Irish presbyterian history and doctrine* (1981), 80; Eileen O'Byrne (ed.), *The convert rolls* (1981), 248; *BLC* (1984), ccxxii, 193; James Kelly, 'Relations between the protestant Church of Ireland and the presbyterian church in late eighteenth-century Ireland', *Éire-Ireland*, xxiii, no. 3 (1988), 38–56; Thomas Bartlett, *The fall and rise of the Irish nation* (1992), 112; I. R. McBride, *Scripture politics: Ulster presbyterians and Irish radicalism in the late eighteenth century* (1998), 98–9