

A FAMOUS FRANCISCAN HISTORIAN:
FR. LUKE WADDING OFM
(1588-1657)

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The scholarly account of the life of Luke Wadding by Fr. Francis Harold, forms the introduction to his prestigious and voluminous *Annales Minorum*, of which he wrote the first 8 volumes.¹ Luke Wadding was born on 16th October 1588 at Waterford, a town on the south coast of Ireland, looking over the Celtic Sea and St. George's Channel. His parents, Walter and Anastasia Lombard, named him Luke, in memory of the evangelist St. Luke, since he was born close to his feast day, 18th October.

Luke was brought up in a Catholic family. His brother Ambrose became a Jesuit, and he also had cousins who became Augustinian friars and Jesuits. Luke's religious formation was influenced by the post-Tridentine Council spirit among Catholics, and he soon learnt various devotional practices, including the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, the seven penitential psalms, the Office of the dead, and the minor breviary of Pope St. Pius V. He also learned how to read and write in excellent Latin, and studied philosophy. At fourteen years of age he lost both his parents. His brother, Matthew, took care of Luke's education, and sent him over to the Irish seminary in Lisbon, under the care of the Jesuits.

After a short period in the seminary Luke entered the Order of Friars Minor Recollects in the friary of the Immaculate Conception at Matozinhos, near Oporto. He made his solemn profession and received minor orders in 1605. Afterwards he was sent to Leyria, a Franciscan house of studies, to specialise in the philosophy of John Duns Scotus. As a companion during his studies, Luke had Fr. Richard Synott, of Wexford, who was later to become Guardian at the Irish College of Saint Isidore, in Rome, and then died as a martyr in Ireland during the time of Oliver Cromwell.

Wadding studied theology at Lisbon and at Coimbra, having as his lecturers Fr. Diego Limadensis, Francisco Suárez and Egidius a Presentatione, an Augustinian friar. The Benedictine monk Leo a Sancto Thoma also bears witness to the great preparation of Luke in theological sciences.

In 1613 Wadding was ordained priest and immediately was sent out to preach. He accomplished this ministry with great eloquence, and was capable of preaching fluently in Portuguese and Catalan. In 1613 he started compiling a long list of quotations from Scripture, the Church Fathers and the lives of the saints, in order to be handy for preachers. These *sylva* are still preserved in two volumes of a manuscript in Dublin, Ireland. The vicar general of the Order, Antonio a Trejo, sent Luke to the university of Salamanca, where he became a scholar of the Hebrew language. Subsequently he occupied the chair of theology at the College of San Francisco.

Wadding continued to exercise the office of professor until 1618 when, only 30 years old, he was chosen by king Philip III to accompany as a theologian a delegation which the same king sent to Pope Paul V to promote the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. The legate appointed for the purpose was Antonio a Trejo, Bishop of Cartagena, who had been vicar general of the Franciscan Order and teacher to Luke Wadding. The delegation left Spain on 1st October 1618 and reached Rome on 17th December of the same year. Wadding had to prepare the documentary material for

theological presentations. Thus he spent most of his time in the libraries of Rome, and visited also the libraries of Naples, Assisi and Perugia. He left the history of this delegation in a work called *Acta legationis*, in which he summarises the proceedings and the theological questions he had to deal with. Although he had to reside in official quarters, Luke Wadding insisted that he be sent to a Franciscan friary, and was assigned to the friary of San Pietro in Montorio in Rome. In May 1620 Antonio a Trejo returned to Spain, but Wadding was ordered to remain in Rome, where he continued his theological investigations.

While in Rome, Wadding tried to realise a dream he had cherished for a long time, namely that of writing a voluminous work in which he could present the glorious history of the Franciscan Order and of its most eminent representatives. At that time the Minister General of the Friars Minor was Benigno da Genova, who in 1619 wrote an encyclical letter to the whole Order in which he ordered that all provinces should forward to Rome all documents relating to the history of the Order. The documentary material was then handed over to Wadding. The two most distinguished among the collaborators were Bartolomeo Cimareli, who worked in the archives and libraries of northern and central Italy, and Jacobus Polius, who worked in Germany.

The first fruit of Wadding's endeavour was published in 1623 at Antwerp. This is the famous *Beati Patris Francisci Assisiensis Opuscula*,ⁱⁱ which is considered by scholars to be the first critical edition of the Writings of St. Francis.

Wadding also undertook to finish and publish a Hebrew concordance, grammar and dictionary, which had been prepared by Marius a Calasio, a learned Franciscan who had died in Rome. With the permission and financial aid of Paul V Wadding managed to establish a printing press with Hebrew type at the Franciscan friary of Ara Coeli. The preface to this voluminous work was written by Wadding himself: *De Hebraicae linguae origine, praestantia et utilitate ad ss. Litterarum interpretes*, while he was still professor at Salamanca.

Although the publications of Wadding are numerous,ⁱⁱⁱ his fame rests chiefly on his edition of 16 volumes of all the works of the Subtle Doctor John Duns Scotus, published at Lyons in 1639. He corrected the text according to the best manuscripts at his disposal, inserted his own critical notes and *scholia*, and enriched the edition with commentaries. His life of John Duns Scotus, which forms the preface of the first volume, appeared separately in 1644.

Wadding's greatest literary achievement, as we mentioned at the very beginning, was the publication of the *Annales Minorum*, a history of the Franciscan Order from its foundation. He is the author of 8 of the volumes (the total number is 32),^{iv} which were published between 1625 and 1654 and present Franciscan history from 1208 to 1540. After writing 8 volumes Luke was nearing his death, and decided to close the eighth volume with significant words, stating that he now had to lay aside his pen in order to concentrate on the salvation of his soul.^v This work makes of Luke Wadding one of the most famous of ecclesiastical historians of all times. Many critics have shown that there are many historical inaccuracies in Wadding's work, and have also criticised the lack of accuracy and scientific methodology. However, one has to consider the enormous endeavour which Wadding had put into the composition of this history, and the limited time and means at his disposal. Indeed, the famous modern Franciscan historian Herbert Holzappel, author of a manual of Franciscan history, writes: "Only those who have consulted the Annals hundreds and thousands of times can appreciate its true worth."

It is enough to state that Wadding was so occupied with producing works of theology and history commissioned by popes, cardinals, and other superiors, that most of his

literary work regarding the Franciscan Order was done in the hours between sunset and midnight. In the preface to the sixth tome of the *Annales* Wadding writes: "I could only write this work in the early hours of the night, since I was so taken up by many cares during daytime hours." It also seems that Wadding suffered from acute migraine headaches and vomiting ever since he was 22 years old. He often had to suspend his literary activity every time he suffered from this physical discomfort.

Luke Wadding is also famous for his work in favour of his beloved country, Ireland. Wadding, in fact, is the founder of two Irish institutions in Rome, the Irish Franciscan College of St. Isidore and the Ludovisian College for Irish priests. The College of St. Isidore was founded in 1625, with the permission of the Minister General and a special Bull of Pope Urban VIII (20th October). Wadding enlarged the existing building, which had been a Spanish friary of the Friars Minor Discalced, founded during the time of Pope Gregory XV. Wadding enriched this college with a library of 5000 volumes, besides a precious collection of manuscripts, bound in 800 volumes. The college was the centre of education for many young Irish Franciscans, many of whom returned to Ireland and even died as martyrs for the faith. The love which Wadding had for his native land is also seen in his tireless endeavour to celebrate the feast of St. Patrick with due solemnity every year on 17th March, and it is thanks to him that the feast was inserted in the liturgical calendar of the Catholic Church. Thanks to his friendship with Cardinal Ludovisi, protector of Ireland, Wadding founded another college for the Irish secular clergy. The Ludovisi College for Irish priests was opened on 1st January 1628. In 1635 the Franciscans ceded the administration of the college to the Jesuits. With the permission of Pope Alexander VII, given at Castel Gandolfo in 1656, Wadding founded another friary at Capranica, north of Rome, to be the novitiate house of the Irish province.

In 1654 Wadding asked Pope Innocent X to send his personal ambassador to Ireland, with the powers and dignity of an Apostolic Nuncio. Archbishop Rinuccini was sent to defend the Irish cause, during the time of the Irish war. Wadding managed to collect the sum of 26,000 *scudi* towards the Irish cause, and repeated this offer the following year. The end result was O'Neills' victory at Benburb on 5th June 1646,^{vi} when a solemn *Te Deum* was sung in the Basilica of St. Mary Major.

The official career of Luke Wadding was remarkable. He was a *lector jubilatus* of sacred theology and *chronista* of the Order. He was Guardian of St. Isidore's College for four terms, and *praeses* of the Irish College. He was appointed Procurator of the Order in 1630 and declined the office, but was reappointed in 1632 and remained until 1634. He was *quaresimalista*, or Lenten preacher, to the papal household. He was appointed vice-commissary of the Order in 1645, and when he declined the offer, he was obliged to accept it in 1648. Paul V gave him a nomination in the Holy Office, and Gregory XV made him consultor of the Index. Urban VIII made him consultor of the Rites and *Propaganda Fide*, and named him a member of the commission for the reform of the Roman Breviary. It is said that he repeatedly declined the offer to be consecrated bishop and even to attain to the dignity of the cardinalate. The Cismontane family of the Order wanted him to pass over to them from the Ultramontane family in order to be elected Minister General, but he again refused. He used to say that he could serve his beloved Ireland better as a humble Franciscan than as a Church prelate.

After a month-long illness, Luke Wadding died on 18th November 1657, when he had began his 70th year, and was buried in the church at St. Isidore's Irish College in Rome.

NOTES

ⁱ LUKE WADDING, *Annales Minorum seu Trium Ordinum a S. Francisco institutorum*, Tomus I (1208-1220), Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi), Florence 1931, XXVII-CLXXXVIII.

ⁱⁱ LUKE WADDING, *Beati Patris Francisci Assisiatis Opuscula*. Nunc primum collecta tribus tomis distincta, notis et commentariis asceticis illustratae, Antverpiae 1623.

ⁱⁱⁱ Among the numerous works of Wadding we mention the following: the publication of Angelo de Paz's, a friar living at S. Pietro in Montorio, *Commentary on Mark, and Luke* (1623-1628); *The Concordance of St. Anthony of Padua* (1624), *Promptuarium morale* (1624) of Thomas Hibernicus, the Account of the Martyrdom of fourteen Friars Minor in Bohemia; *Legatio Philippi III et IV* (1624); *Apologeticum de praetense monachatu Augustiniano S. Francisci* (Madrid 1625); *The Lives of Popes and Cardinals* by Alphonsus Ciacconius; *The Life of Blessed Peter Thomas, Archbishop of Tarentum* (Lyons 1641); *Oculus moralis* of John Guallensis; *De Sapientia sanctorum* (Rome 1655); *De scandalis in controversia Immaculatae Conceptionis*.

^{iv} LUKE WADDING, *Annales Minorum seu trium Ordinum a S. Francisco institutorum*. Editio tertia accuratissima auctor et emendatior ad exemplar editionis P.J.M. Fonseca ab Eborae, voll. 32, Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi), Florence 1931-1941.

^v LUKE WADDING, *Annales Minorum*, I, LXIX: "Tandem post tot annorum velificationes, vastissimi maris agitatus procellis, quassatae navis cogor vela colligere, et projecta anchora in portu requiescere. Gravis jam premit senectus, et in effaeto corpore spiritus pridem promptus nunc coepit languere, ac circumdantibus undique negotiorum pressuris se demum imparem agnoscit. Tempus itaque est, ut ab omnibus me prorsus expediam, suspensoque calamo illud unum agam, quod potissime necessarium est; animae scilicet procurandae totus incumbam, ab aerumnosae vitae procellis ad portum religiosae quietis accedam, pacatique animi fidae me stationi committam."

^{vi} Benburb is a small village in County Tyrone in Northern Ireland, in the province of Ulster, some 7 miles from Armagh. It is best known for the battle of Benburb that took place there in 1646. This was fought between the armies of Confederate Ireland led by Owen Roe O'Neill and the Scottish Covenanters led by Munro. The battle resulted in a crushing victory for O'Neill's army.