

DR. RICHARD ARTHUR

Doctor Richard Arthur, Bishop of Limerick, a member of the famous Arthur family of Limerick, was born in the City of Cork, where his father had but shortly gone as a merchant, in the year 1560. He was probably educated in Ireland and, as a youth, served in the Dublin Law Courts along with the future great Earl of Cork. On leaving here he worked for a time at his father's trade of merchant-shipper. His business carried him to and from England and there is an apocryphal story of his having made a vow to become a priest during a storm on one of these voyages.

Be that as it may, he went to the Continent to study under the Capuchins. Then he went to Louvain and was eventually ordained. On the death of Bishop O'Boyle, Arthur was appointed Vicar-General of the Diocese and had the satisfaction, short though it was, of re-opening St. Mary's Cathedral to the Catholic public in the early days of King James's reign. When they were expelled again, he foretold that he would live to see it in Catholic hands again—and in fact he did.

Owing to the Reformation and the attempt to enforce it in Ireland the organisation of the Church was in a bad way, and although his predecessor died in 1597, Arthur was not appointed Bishop until the year 1620 and not consecrated for three more years. He spent a most strenuous life, avoiding arrest and performing the work of preacher and catechist, parish priest, vicar-general and Bishop all at once. His helpers were few and most of the work had to be done in secret.

In 1620 he found his health failing and applied for a coadjutor "that an opportunity might be given him, now that he was on the brink of the grave, to atone for the ignorance of his youth, and the faults of a lifetime, and to recall the memory of the past years in the bitterness of his soul, in true grief and sorrow of heart." This request was not granted and when the Confederates took control of Limerick, Arthur was Bishop still, and re-consecrated the churches for Catholic worship.

Eventually Dr. Edmond O'Dwyer was appointed his coadjutor and for the last year of his life Dr. Arthur could examine his conscience. He died on the 23rd of May, 1646, and was buried in St. Mary's Cathedral in the presence of the Papal Nuncio, Cardinal Rinuccini.

A beautiful plate gilt Crucifix, set with semi-precious stones and containing a piece of the True Cross, was presented by him to the Diocese and is still in the possession of the Bishop of Limerick. It is inscribed in Latin:—*Richard Arthur, Bishop of Limerick, partly at the expense of Jane Fox, widow, James Lange and others, had this Cross made to contain some very ancient particles of the Most Holy Cross of Christ, A.D. 1625.*