The Diocese of Limerick in the Twelfth Century

By Rev. Aubrey Gwynn, S.J.

The following notes deal with some of the problems that arise from a study of the Diocese of Limerick in the twelfth century. Writing from Dublin, not from Limerick, I am less concerned with problems of local topography and parish organisation. My aim has rather been to view the changes that came about in Limerick at this time as part of a larger whole: to set the diocesan history of Limerick in its proper background as part of that nation wide diocesan reorganisation which makes the twelfth century so vitally important in the ecclesiastical history of our country.

The collection of St. Anselm's letters includes a short note from Gilbert, "by God's mercy bishop of Limerick" (Lumnicensis episcopus). In this letter Bishop Gilbert congratulates Anselm on his recent victory over "the unconquered minds of the Normans," by which these stubborn warriors had been compelled to accept the rules and laws of the Holy Fathers, and to permit the lawful election and consecration of bishops and abbots. Gilbert gives thanks to God for this great favour, and sends Anselm "a little present from his poverty and devotion": twenty-five pearls, some good, some of poor quality, with a request that the holy archbishop of Canterbury would not forget him in his prayers.

This letter can be dated with fair accuracy to the autumn of 1106. Anselm had fought his second battle for the freedom of the English Church against Henry I for the past three years, and his final victory was won when an agreement was made between himself and the King in Normandy as to the method to be followed in all future elections and consecrations of bishops and abbots. This agreement was ratified by the English magnates at Westminster on August 1st, 1107; but Gilbert would most naturally have written his letter of congratulation to Anselm in Normandy as soon as he heard the good news of Anselm's successful negotiations with the King in September, 1106. Bishop Gilbert's letter was evidently written soon after the news of this agreement. His own election and consecration must be placed before the summer of that year. But not much earlier: for in his reply to this letter Anselm makes it plain that Gilbert's letter was the first news he had got of his friend's new dignity. As was his custom on such occasions, he makes bold to give the new bishop some salutary counsels; but he prefaces his words of advice by a personal reminiscence. "Since we first came to know one another at Rouen... we
have been joined in love for one another." Can we fix the date of this earlier acquaintance in Normandy, and thus confirm the date we have already found probable for Bishop Gilbert's letter?

Anselm was making his way home towards England in the spring or early summer of 1106, and he was present at an ecclesiastical council at Rouen about this time. If Gilbert met him during the sessions of this council or soon afterwards, we get a terminus post quem for his consecration. He was plainly not yet bishop of Limerick when he met Anselm at Rouen: his consecration thus falls within the second half of 1106, or possibly the first six months of 1107. Archbishop Cellach, the newly consecrated Primate of Ireland, made a formal consistory or visitation of Munster in 1106, according to the Annals of Ulster. It is thus possible that Gilbert was consecrated by the Primate himself, or perhaps by Bishop Maelmuire Ua. Dunain, who seems to have held office as Papal Legate in Ireland from 1101 to a date shortly before the Synod of Rath Breasail in 1111. There was, of course, no archbishop of Cashel before the new ecclesiastical arrangements made by that Synod.

Was Gilbert the first bishop of Limerick? In theory at least, there is nothing to prevent us from assuming that there were earlier bishops of Limerick, of whom no trace now survives in any of our extant documents. But such an assumption is most improbable. We know from a letter sent to St. Anselm by the citizens of Waterford in 1096 that this Norse-Irish city had no bishop before that year. It is thus quite probable that Limerick, like Waterford, was without a bishop throughout the eleventh century. Dublin, the principal Norse-Irish city, had secured this privilege some seventy years before Waterford; and the rolls of the Canterbury consecrations include the names of four bishops of Dublin who went to Canterbury or London for consecration in 1074, 1085, 1095 and 1122. Malchus the first bishop of Waterford, was consecrated by St. Anselm in Winchester Cathedral in 1096. If the citizens of Limerick had succeeded in obtaining recognition of their city as an episcopal See, it is thus probable—though by no means certain—that they also would have sent their bishop-elect to England for consecration. Such a procedure must seem strange to us in this twentieth century; but we must always bear in mind the alien origin of these Norse-Irish cities. In the immediate neighbourhood of Limerick there were several centres of ancient Irish monastic and episcopal organisation: Mungréd, Killaloe, Scattery Island are the most obvious names. But none of these ancient monastic sites could claim formal diocesan status until the new hierarchical organisation of the whole country was ratified by the assembled prelates and clergy of Rath Breasail. Any attempt to raise Limerick or Waterford or Wexford or Dublin to a dignity that might rival the prestige of the more ancient monastic sites was not likely to be viewed with favour by Irish ecclesiastics before the new order of things that was introduced at Rath Breasail. The men of Dublin and Waterford turned to Canterbury, so it would seem, as being the nearest centre of hierarchical government to which they could appeal for help. And Canterbury was willing to hear their prayer—on the strict understanding that each new bishop of Dublin or Waterford should take a formal oath of obedience to the ruling archbishop of Canterbury, and to his successors for ever.

That brings us to the most interesting feature of Bishop Gilbert's letter of 1106. Since Anselm knew nothing of Gilbert's elevation to the episcopate until he received the new bishop's letter, it is obvious that Anselm, as archbishop of Canterbury, had nothing to do with this new act. Nor is there any record on the Canterbury rolls of any oath of obedience taken by Bishop Gil-
bert in this or any succeeding year. For that reason I have assumed that this consecration took place in Ireland, and that he took his oath of obedience either to the Irish Primate or (if I am right in my theory about the status of Maelmuire Ua Dunain at this time) to the Papal Legate in Ireland. The important fact is that, three or four years before the Synod of Rath Breasail, the reforming party in Ireland—strengthened no doubt by the accession of Cellach as comarb of Patrick and Primate—were able to establish what seems to have been a new See in the Norse-Irish city of Limerick without meeting with serious opposition.

Yet it would be rash to assume that Gilbert’s consecration as bishop of Limerick was effected without further trouble. The Four Masters tell us that Mungret was sacked by Muirchertach Ua Briain in 1107, and this coincidence of dates may point to an armed struggle for power between the older monastic site and the new episcopal See in the city. Mungret had traditions of sanctity and learning that went far back into the Celtic period. A long line of abbots or enraghs of Mungret can be made out from the various Annals of Ireland. One of them, CATHUSACH MAC CAIRPRE, is given the title ceann cleirech fear Mumhan in his obit (1070); whilst another, Conn Mac Gillebhuidhe, was given the title sauath saonoir Mumhan in 1100. The last of these enraghs, whose name is given as Tuathal Ua Cathail in the Annals of Innisfallen, died in 1106. Did his death leave the way open for a new ecclesiastical policy? Was Limerick made an episcopal city at the request of Muirchertach Ua Briain, who had already supported the citizens of Waterford in their petition to St. Anselm just ten years earlier? Was Mungret sacked by the King of Munster as punishment for the community’s unwillingness to accept the new order? Nothing less than the full force of the powerful King of Munster accounts for the failure of Mungret to hold its own as a separate diocesan centre in the twelfth century.

There is no need to recall the well-known fact that Bishop Gilbert presided over the sessions of Rath Breasail as Papal Legate. I have dealt elsewhere with this episode, and have pointed out that all the contemporary Irish annalists, with singular unanimity, ignore his part in this great assembly whilst they lay exceptional stress on the part played by Bishop Maelmuire Ua Dunain. My own view is that the bishop of Meath must have been recognised throughout Ireland as the true leader of the reforming party; and that he probably held office as Papal Legate until the first session of the assembly at Rath Breasail. Like more than one other reforming prelate of this generation, he then gave an example of unselfish renunciation, and stepped aside in favour of a prelate whom he himself had perhaps consecrated four years previously. Bishop Gilbert unquestionably signed the Acts of the Synod as its presiding Legate; and we have the text of a very curious treatise De Usu Ecclesiastico or De Statu Ecclesie which he wrote as “Bishop of Limerick and Legate of the Roman Pontiff in Ireland”—apparently with a view to explaining an unfamiliar hierarchical constitution to Irish clerks of the early twelfth century. The treatise deals in turn with each of the minor and major orders, and finally with the duties and privileges of a bishop, archbishop, primate and patriarch. It makes no pretence of literary style or eloquence; but is designed as a practical manual for the government of the Irish Church.

The boundaries of the diocese of Limerick are given with exceptional detail in the text of the decree that has been preserved to us by Geoffrey Keating, who copied it from the ancient Book of Clonenagh. They have remained practically unchanged from that day to this: a fact that is the best possible
testimony to the care with which the bishop, backed no doubt by the powerful King of Munster, saw to it that his diocesan boundaries should correspond with local and traditional requirements.

Once the Synod was over, Bishop Gilbert sinks into almost total obscurity. From St. Bernard’s Vita Sancti Malachie we know that he retained his functions as Papal Legate for almost thirty years more; but the Irish Annals tells us nothing of what he did, or tried to do, for the advancement of the Irish Church. There is indeed a singular absence of any evidence for any further advance until we come to the work of St. Malachy in Down and Connor, some twenty years after the assembly of Rath Breasail. Was Bishop Gilbert a failure as Papal Legate? He was certainly unlucky in the loss of his most powerful patron. Muirchertach Ua Briain had been closely associated with every move of the new reforming party for fifteen or twenty years before the Synod of Rath Breasail: so long as he lived, the work of the reformers was sure to prosper. But the king fell ill in 1114, and was dead by 1118. He had no true successor, and Bishop Gilbert’s work must have been gravely hampered by the confusion that followed Muirchertach’s fall from power. The first phase of the Irish reforming movement was over; and Bishop Gilbert was not destined to be the leader of the next great advance.

One casual mention of Bishop Gilbert has survived in an English source; and it suggests a remarkable change of policy. St. Anselm had died in 1109, and the See of Canterbury was left vacant for the next five years. In 1114 Bishop Ralph of Rochester was translated to the primatial See, and in the autumn of 1115 Bishop Gilbert of Limerick is named as one of six “suffragan” bishops who assisted the archbishop of Canterbury at the consecration of a new bishop of St. David’s in Wales. The other five suffragans are the bishops of Winchester, Lincoln, Salisbury, Bath and Glamorgan. What was the Irish Legate doing in this company at Westminster? His presence may have been no more than a compliment to the new archbishop of Canterbury; but the Anglo-Saxon monk, Eadmer, whose Historia Novorum is the source from which this evidence is derived, makes no distinction between the Irish bishop, the Welsh bishop of Glamorgan and the four English bishops of the province of Canterbury. Either Bishop Gilbert was strangely unaware of the interpretation that was being put on his friendly action, or else he was entering on a policy of subordination to the jurisdiction of Canterbury which was wholly out of keeping with his own work, and the work of his brethren of the Irish episcopacy, at the Synod of Rath Breasail.

Apart from this one perplexing episode, we know nothing of the bishop’s activity for the next quarter of a century. Was he resident in Limerick during all those years? If so, why do we hear nothing of the national or provincial councils which mark the period immediately before the Synod of Rath Breasail, or the eight years during which St. Malachy acted as Papal Legate in Ireland, or the twenty years immediately following the Synod of Kells? Whatever the explanation, there is no denying the silence of three contemporary annalistic records: the Annals of Ulster, the Annals of Innisfallen, and the so-called Annals of Tigernach. Even the Clonmacnois Annals, now known as the Chronicon Scotorum, which alone have preserved the record of Bishop Gilbert’s death in 1145, have nothing to say as to his work as Papal Legate.

In 1132 we hear once more of Bishop Gilbert. Malachy had been establishing himself as the true leader of the second great reforming movement; and two of the most venerable bishops of Munster, Malchus of Lismore (who
seems to be the same as Malchus who became bishop of Waterford in 1096) and Gilbert of Limerick urged him to accept the high dignity of archbishop of Armagh. Malachy hesitated for a time, but finally yielded to their urgent entreaties. Seven years later, when it was plain to all that Malachy was the man of the hour, Gilbert resigned his functions as Papal Legate so that the younger man might be chosen in his place. Malachy left Ireland for Rome in 1138; and came back from his long journey with full powers from Innocent II to act as Legate in his name. The next eight years were to be decisive in the whole long history of this Irish reform.

What happened to Bishop Gilbert, once he had ceased to be Papal Legate? It seems clear that he must have resigned his position as bishop of Limerick soon after Malachy's return from Rome, for the Canterbury rolls have the record of the consecration and homage of Bishop Patrick of Limerick for the year 1140. Since Bishop Gilbert lived for another four or five years after this ceremony, it seems reasonable to conclude that the new bishop of Limerick must have gone to Canterbury for his consecration, and must have taken the formal oath of obedience to Archbishop Theobald, on the advice of his predecessor. Once again, we are faced with the problem of an apparent change of policy in the bishop who had once presided in person over the sessions of the Synod of Rath Breasail.

I think we can get some light on these unexpected happenings if we consider the contemporary position in Dublin. Here also there was a Norse-Irish bishop—the future Archbishop Gregory—who had been consecrated in Canterbury in 1122, having first taken his oath of obedience to Anselm's immediate successor, Archbishop Ralph. By good fortune the monk, Eadmer, has preserved for us the text of a letter which the citizens of Dublin sent to Archbishop Ralph soon after the death of Bishop Samuel in 1121. They warn the English Primate that there is an increasingly strong Irish party within the walls of the city. "The bishops of Ireland," so they write in the urgency of their need, "and most especially the bishop who dwells in Armagh, have a great enmity towards us: for we do not wish to obey their orders, but desire to remain always under your rule." They therefore beg Archbishop Ralph to lose no time in consecrating Gregory as bishop of Dublin: otherwise they warn him that he may lose all authority over the diocese of Dublin. The archbishop of Canterbury did as he was asked, and sent Gregory back to Dublin as the newly consecrated bishop of that city. But meanwhile, so Eadmer tells us, the bishop of Armagh had gained more and more supporters within the city's walls; and Bishop Gregory was unable to gain admittance when he appeared before the gates of his diocesan city. When Eadmer was writing his Historia Novorum a few years after this episode, Bishop Gregory was still living in England, dependent on the charity of Archbishop Ralph for his subsistence and for whatever hope he still had of making good his claim to be the canonical bishop of Dublin.

Something of the same, I suspect, was happening in Limerick before and after the year 1140. Bishop Patrick was consecrated at Canterbury in 1140. Five years later we find him witnessing an agreement at St. Paul's in London; and in 1147 Gervase of Canterbury records that Bishop Patrick "of Limerick in Ireland" was one of four assistant prelates at the consecration of a new bishop of Lincoln and a new bishop of Menevia in Canterbury Cathedral. That is all that we know of his activity. His death is not recorded in any of the Irish Annals; and it is quite possible that he failed to secure acceptance as
bishop of Limerick after his consecration in 1140. Meanwhile Bishop Gilbert seems to have left Limerick for Bangor, where St. Malachy had reorganised the ancient Celtic monastic community as a new monastery of Augustinian Canons. In his *De Praesulibis Hiberniae*, a work that contains a mass of valuable material from many sources that have since disappeared, Archdeacon Lynch tells us that Gilbert was abbot of Bangor. This must surely refer, not to the early years before the bishop's consecration in 1107—when Bangor was still an unreformed community, remote from Limerick, but to the last years of Bishop Gilbert's life. Nothing would then be more natural than that the former Papal Legate, wearied by a long struggle against many disappointments, should go north to Bangor, where his friend and successor had created a new centre of fervent monastic observance; and that the former bishop of Limerick should have spent the last years of his life in honourable retirement as abbot of the Augustinian Canons of Bangor.

Mention of the Augustinian Canons suggests a solution to another minor problem. We know from an early charter of the future King John that the cathedral chapter of Limerick was a chapter of Canons Regular in or about the year 1185. Who erected this chapter of monastic Canons in Limerick Cathedral? St. Malachy is known to have been very active in this type of reform during the years of his work as Legate in Ireland; but the fact that Gilbert spent the last years of his life as an abbot of Bangor suggests that it was he, rather than any of his successors, that gave Limerick this type of monastic chapter in the first half of the twelfth century.

Bishop Patrick was still alive on December 19th, 1147—the date of the consecration at Canterbury in which he appeared as assistant prelate. We do not know when he died; but the Four Masters record the death of a Bishop Erolph of Limerick in 1151. Does this mean that Patrick was dead soon after 1147, and that Bishop Erolph had been consecrated and had died within the next three years? It seems to me very much more probable that Erolph is the name of the successful rival bishop of Limerick who succeeded in establishing himself as against Canterbury's nominee in 1140. We know next to nothing of Limerick in these middle years of the twelfth century; but the suggestion of two opposing parties within the city, one in favour of submission to Canterbury and of closer contact with the Norman rulers of England, the other determined to maintain the settlement made at Rath Breasail, seems to me in every way most probable.

Bishop Erolph died in 1151; and his immediate successor was (to judge by the test of their names, thought it is often a misleading test) another Norseman named Torgestius. Early in 1152 Bishop Torgestius was present as bishop of Limerick at the Synod of Kells; and his death is recorded by the Four Masters under the year 1167. We know nothing more of his character and policy. Mungeret is named in a list of Irish dioceses made for Roman use at this period: as at Ardmore, Scattery Island and in one or two other instances (such as Duleek in Meath) an effort was evidently made at the Synod of Kells to secure recognition of some small, but old monastic centres as true episcopal Sees. We may guess that Bishop Torgestius was opposed to Mungeret's claim.

For some twenty years and more after the death of Torgestius, Limerick was ruled by Bishop Brichtius—again, if we may judge from his unusual name, a Norse-Irishman. During those twenty years the course of all Irish history, including ecclesiastical history, was radically altered by the Norman
invasions of 1169-72. Bishop Brichtius, though he is not named in any contemporary and authentic record of the event, is almost certainly to be identified as the bishop of Limerick who attended the Synod of Cashel in the winter of 1171-2, and who, in obedience to the Pope’s orders, took a formal oath of obedience to Henry II in company with the other bishops of Ireland.\(^{(10)}\)

From a date soon after the death of St. Malachy at Clairvaux in 1148 to the coming of the Normans, the Pope’s Legate in Ireland was one of the first Irish Cistercian monks, Bishop Christian of Lismore. Bishop Christian was apparently still Legate at the time of his death in 1186, though there must have been some interruption in his functions during the years 1179-81, when St. Laurence of Dublin acted as the Pope’s Legate in this country. These dates have some bearing on the next mention of Bishop Brichtius, who appears as one of the witnesses to a grant made by Diarmait Mac Carrthuigín in favour of the church of St. John at Cork.\(^{(20)}\) The charter in which this grant is recorded is undated; but one of the witnesses is Bishop Gregory of Cork, who succeeded Bishop Gilla Aodha Ua Muighin in 1172-3. The charter is thus not earlier than 1173. Since Bishop Christian of Lismore also witnessed this grant as Papal Legate, the charter is most probably to be dated as between 1173-77.

Brichtius was thus bishop of Limerick in 1175, when Raymond le Gros led his small band of Norman adventurers to the first sudden capture of the city. He was most probably within the city’s walls during the winter of 1175-6, while Domhnall Ua Briain was preparing to march to the relief of Limerick; and he must have witnessed Raymond’s second triumphant entry into the city on Easter Eve, 1176. Six or seven weeks later news reached Raymond that Strongbow lay dead in Dublin; and he lost no time in evacuating the city which he had twice taken by assault. As the Normans marched back on the long road to Dublin, they could see Domhnall’s men breaking down the bridges over the Shannon and setting fire to the city.\(^{(21)}\) From that day to Domhnall’s death in 1194, Limerick was free from alien occupation.

It seems to me most probable that this destruction of the city by fire in 1176 as a military precaution against further attempts to convert it into a Norman base of operations gives us the clue to the tradition that Domhnall Ua Briain is the true founder of St. Mary’s Cathedral. Quite obviously, there must have been an earlier cathedral for seventy years before this date; and the analogy of other Norse towns would suggest that it was probably a wooden structure. Such a building would almost certainly be destroyed in the general conflagration; and Domhnall Ua Brian, who had ordered the fire, must have felt himself bound in conscience to make good the church’s loss. The absence of any clear tradition as to the site of the earlier cathedral makes it permissible to guess that it stood on the most obvious of all sites, where the present cathedral now stands. What Domhnall did, we may guess, was to rebuild in more permanent form what he had ordered his men to destroy in 1176. Very probably he added some new grant or land, thus making it possible for Bishop Brichtius to plan a noble stone structure in the modern style of his day. Just as Laurence O Toole was busy in these same years on the building of Christ’s Church, Dublin, so also—and in very much the same architectural style—did Brichtius build St. Mary’s, Limerick; and, just as Strongbow ranks with St. Laurence as co-founder of Christ Church, so must Domhnall Ua Briain rank with Brichtius as co-founder of St. Mary’s.

In the winter of 1178-9, Bishop Brichtius is mentioned on one of the English Pipe Rolls as having passed through England on his way to the Third Lateran Council in Rome.\(^{(22)}\) He went in company with the Irish Legate,
Bishop Christian of Lismore, and with St. Laurence of Dublin. The great assembly of Catholic prelates met at the summons of Alexander III in the Lateran Basilica during the first days of Lent, 1179. Laurence O Toole was still in Rome on April 19 of that year, when he obtained the Pope's confirmation of all the possessions and privileges of the see of Dublin. The text of this papal bull has been copied into the earliest Dublin register, now known as the Crede Mihi.\(^{(23)}\) No similar text has been copied into the fourteenth-century Black Book of Limerick; but it is most probable that Bishop Britius secured a similar confirmation of the rights and privileges of the see of Limerick from Alexander III, as a protection and surety in those troubled years.

Six years pass by, of which we know nothing save that Britius was still bishop of Limerick. He next appears as a witness to the charter by which Domhnall Ua Briain granted certain lands to the monks of the Cistercian community of Holy Cross, in the presence of their abbot, Gregory.\(^{(24)}\) This charter is witnessed by Bishop Christian of Lismore, who is here styled Legate of the Apostolic See in Ireland; by M., archbishop of Cashel; B., bishop of Limerick; and various Irish chiefstains, including Ruaidhri Ua Gradi, whose death is recorded by the Annals of Loch Cé in 1185. The date of this important charter can be fixed, with fair certainty, to the year 1185. Bishop Christian of Lismore died in 1186; Ruaidhri Ua Gradaigh in 1185; and Matthew Ua h-Enni did not become archbishop of Cashel until the same year, 1185.

This date has a particular interest for our purpose. The Black Book of Limerick contains the text of another charter by which Domhnall Ua Briain confirms to the bishop of Limerick and to the clergy of St. Mary's, Limerick, the land of Mungret and the land of Ivannacham "from the arch of Mungret to the land of Imailin, and from the ford of Cean to the river Shannon."\(^{(25)}\) Archdeacon Begley identifies these lands as being roughly equivalent to the modern parish of Mungret, which was later held by the bishop as his manor. We may conclude that the King of Munster, who was already a generous benefactor to the new cathedral fabric, here adds yet another grant to his previous donations. The charter is witnessed by Matthew, archbishop of Cashel; and by Ruaidhri Ua Gradaigh. Once again, we may fix its date to the year 1185. The diocese and cathedral of Limerick were enjoying a new prosperity under the joint rule of Bishop Britius and King Domhnall.

Giraldus Cambrensis came to Ireland for his second visit in 1185, and was already preparing the materials for his Topographia Hibernie. If he had visited Limerick, we should almost certainly have had some vivid pen-picture of the city and its buildings in these prosperous years; but Limerick was not accessible to a Norman traveller under the rule of King Domhnall, and it is plain from an analysis of his Topographia that Giraldus never got further west than Mullingar or perhaps Athlone. For him the Shannon was a great river, rising in Lough Ree and flowing in two separate arms to the western ocean: southwards past Limerick to the sea, and northwards to the sea at Sligo.\(^{(26)}\) He knows that the Shannon separates Thomond from Desmond on its southern branch, but of Limerick itself he has nothing to tell us.

A more important visitor came to Ireland on this same expedition, and he has left a document that still survives as proof of his interest in St. Mary's, Limerick. The future King John, then a young stripling of eighteen years, landed at Waterford on April 25. He built a castle at Ardfernna within the next few weeks; and during his stay there he issued a charter, witnessed by Hugh de Lacy and other Norman lords, by which he granted four ploughlands
near Limerick to the church of St. Mary's and the Canons who served God there. This is our first indication that the chapter of Limerick Cathedral was monastic at this period. John's interest in St. Mary's must have been due to some message or promise of help; and we may suspect that Bishop Bricitus had sent one or more of his Canons to meet John at Waterford, and assure him of his good-will. Like Dohnnall Ua Briain himself, and so many other Irish chieftains, the bishop of Limerick was willing to pay court to John in the hope of securing, if not his assistance, at least his protection from further injury at the hands of his Norman companions.

After this year, 1185, Bishop Bricitus disappears from our view; no entry of his death has survived in any of the extant Irish Annals, though it should be noted that the Annals of Innisfallen, which are our main source of information for events in Munster at this period, are defective from the middle of 1181 to the middle of 1189. If Bishop Bricitus died in any of the years 1186, 1187 or 1188 (or early in 1189), there is no reason to be surprised at the silence of our native Annals. As we shall see, he was most certainly dead before 1194, when Bishop Donatus (most probably Donnchadh) Ua Briain was ruling the diocese, and—like his predecessor—was successful in securing the goodwill and patronage of this Norman "Lord of Ireland."

The date of a charter by which John, as Lord of Ireland, took Bishop Donatus under his protection and custody, with all his churches, manors, lands and possessions and men, and all other things pertaining to his bishopric and to the church of St. Mary's, Limerick, is a nice problem in medieval chronology. Since the charter is issued by John, not as King of England, but simply as Lord of Ireland, it must be earlier than his accession to the kingship in 1199. On the other hand, the absence of the title "Count of Mortain" suggests a date earlier than 1189, when John's elder brother, the new King Richard, endowed John with the county of Mortain in Normandy and with extensive estates in England. But a date earlier than 1189 brings us back to the lifetime of Henry II; and John was accustomed to describe himself as "son of the Lord King" during his father's lifetime. This form of words is missing from the text of our charter. Is our text defective in its first clause? Or is there some other clue to its most probable date?

The names of the witnesses do not help us, for John's charter is witnessed by no one save his steward (dipifer) Roger of Dundonald, whose name does not occur on any other charter of this period. But the place at which the charter was granted is given: Rouen in Normandy. We are thus able to exclude the years 1191-4, when we know that John was kept busy in England, during Richard's absence, first on the crusade, then as a prisoner in Austria. From 1194 to 1199 John was almost continuously in Normandy or France; but he was not reconciled to Richard, who was justly indignant at John's treachery during his absence, until the autumn of 1195. King Richard returned to England early in 1194, and John was formally deprived of the honours of Mortain, Gloucester and Eye at a council which met at Nottingham on March 31. From that date to the final reconciliation in 1195, John was still Lord of Ireland, but had no longer any legal right to style himself Count of Mortain. Our charter would thus fit most easily into these eighteen months.

Let us turn to the scene in Ireland. Dohnnall Ua Briain died in 1194, apparently in the first half of that year. Confusion was inevitable once the dead king's strong hand was removed, for there were three sons and several cousins to contest the inheritance. During the confusion of these years, the
Normans, under William de Burgh and Philip of Worcester (who returned to Ireland in 1195), seem to have forced their way once more into the city. The Annals of Ulster tells us that Domhnall, son of Diarmuid Mac Carrthaigh, drove them out of the city in 1196; but they were back again, this time for good, in the following year. And John's justiciar, the ruthless Hamo de Valognes, spent part of the year 1197 in the neighbourhood of Limerick, where his activity is attested by a series of important grants, among them the first known grant of liberties and free customs to the city itself.

How would these changes of fortune affect the new bishop of Limerick? If I am right in my conjecture that Bishop Briciitus had died during the years 1186-9, Bishop Donatus must have known the last peaceful years of Domhnall's rule in Munster. The king's death in 1194 was a sore blow to the city and the diocese; and the terms of John's charter let us see how grave the threat could be to Domhnall's work, once the victorious Normans were again within the city's walls. Having taken the bishop under his protection, John gives orders to his justiciar, bailiffs, barons, knights and other his liegemen, that they are to honour and maintain the bishop, and defend his rights against all men. They are not to permit any man to do him injury; and in particular he forbids them from building a castle or other fortification in any of his churches, manors or lands belonging to his bishopric. The first thing any Norman conqueror did when he had occupied a city such as Limerick was to set about building a castle on the strongest available site; and there was never any doubt as to where the Normans were most likely to build their castle at Limerick. The proximity of this castle to the site of Domhnall's new cathedral must have caused Bishop Donatus the gravest anxiety. We can well understand that he would have sent messengers with all haste to John in Normandy, urging them to secure the fullest possible security against so grave a menace.

What we know, for example, of the action taken by Hamo de Valognes in Dublin, where he seized the archbishop's lands at Hollywood in Co. Wicklow and used them for the erection of a castle that should command the road through the Gap of Wicklow to the sea, helps us to appreciate the real nature of the new danger in Limerick. Hamo may have been the immediate cause of the bishop's appeal for protection in 1197; but I think it is more probable, for the reasons we have already examined at some length, that the first grave threat to the bishop's rights came from William de Burgh and his followers in 1194-5. One phrase in John's charter is worthy of special notice, for the light it throws on the bishop's previous policy. John gives as his main reason for this new charter of protection that the bishop of Limerick "has so often laboured for my honour and love, and for my interests" (pro honore et amore meo et negotiis meis). If this charter is rightly dated to 1194 or 1195, it follows that Bishop Donatus had been shrewd enough to maintain his personal relations with the Anglo-Norman "Lord of Ireland," even during the lifetime of his kinsman, Domhnall Ua Briain. When had these personal relations commenced? Was Dinnchadha Ua Briain perhaps one of those Canons of St. Mary's whom Bishop Briciitus had sent to John at Ardshinnan in 1185? We can only guess; we cannot answer. But the question is worth considering as an illustration of the complexity of life in Munster during these first years of the Norman invasion.

We know nothing further of Bishop Donatus until the date of his own important charter, by which he erected a chapter of secular Canons, apparently thus replacing an older chapter of monastic Canons Regular. The text of this charter has been copied into the Black Book of Limerick, and its date
can be accurately fixed to the year 1205. Ten years had gone by since the bishop had appealed to John for help against the new Norman settlers and conquerors. John was now King of England for the past six years; his first castle now stood proudly overlooking the bridge that linked Limerick with Thomond; and the lands around the city, in all directions, had been partitioned among various Norman adventurers by a long series of royal and other grants. Chief among these new lords of the land were William de Burgh and William de Braose, to whom John granted the honour of Limerick in 1201; but there were also three sons of Maurice FitzGerald, one of the first and greatest of Strongbow’s fellow-adventurers; Hamo de Valognes, who had been justiciary in 1197-8; and Geoffrey de Marisco, nephew to the first Norman archbishop of Dublin and himself destined to be one of the most famous justiciars in Ireland, who held lands at Knockainey and Adare. The scene had changed indeed since the days of Domhnall Ua Briain!

These newcomers had their own immediate interests in the various benefices and other dignities that were attached to Limerick Cathedral. In Dublin John Cumin had been intruded into the diocese on the death of Laurence O Toole by an act of King Henry, John’s father, that lacked all canonical requirements for its validity: yet the King’s will had prevailed, and John Cumin ruled the see of Dublin from 1183 to 1212. Early in his long pontificate Archbishop Cumin set himself to change the structure of the Dublin Chapter. St. Laurence had erected a chapter of Augustinian (Arroasian) Canons Regular in his cathedral of Christ Church. Cumin was not strong enough to abolish this venerable chapter; but he organised a new chapter of secular Canons of St. Patrick’s, giving this former parish church the status, first of a collegiate church then of a fully established separate cathedral, with its own secular chapter distinct from the Canons of Christ Church. In Limerick the development was somewhat different, but the main purpose of the change was almost certainly the same. In a monastic chapter lay patrons have little or no chance of securing the more important benefices, which belong to the monastic community as a whole and to which appointments were made by a vote of the monastic chapter. In a secular cathedral chapter such dignities as dean, archdeacon, chancellor, treasurer, precentor and the like were normally of great value, even from a purely temporal point of view; and the word of the lay-lord could be very much more effective in securing the appointment of suitable candidates, only too often men who were better qualified to win their lord’s good favour than to serve the interests of Holy Mother Church. Ireland was not the only country in which a systematic effort was being made at this time to substitute secular for monastic chapters. A similar, and even more energetic movement was on foot in England during the reigns of Henry II and John; and it was only the exceptional strength of the English monastic, and especially the Benedictine traditions that preserved the monastic character of so many great English churches down to the dissolution of the monasteries in the reign of Henry VIII.

Let us now consider the charter of Bishop Donatus in the light of this contemporary background. On first reading it would seem clear that the bishop of Limerick had set his heart on the organisation of this new chapter from the first day of his consecration as bishop of Limerick. Yet we know that he had been bishop for at least ten, perhaps for as many as sixteen or eighteen years before he set his hand to the work. The terms of the charter make it plain that Bishop Donatus is now organising a chapter on the lines of English, not Irish custom (anglicanam considerantes consuetudinem). Various dignitaries of the chapter are named in the document: there is a dean, an archdeacon,
a precentor, a treasurer. Curiously enough, there is no provision for a chancellor; and the same omission is maintained in the later distribution of prebends as ordained by Bishop Edmund ten or fifteen years later.\(^{(37)}\) The dean and archdeacon are, unfortunately, not named: we know only that their initials were P. and M. The treasurer was a Norman, William of Cardiff; but the precentor was an Irishman, Omelinus. Among the Canons of the Cathedral we find several Irish names: two of the name O Lonergan, one of the name O Conaing; an Omalli and a Macreanachain.\(^{(38)}\) Plainly the former monastic chapter had maintained its predominantly native character up to this date. Ample provision is made for the future maintenance of these dignities, by the allocation of suitable prebends with their revenues. We may guess that it was not long until the Norman settlers had succeeded in obtaining these fat benefices for their kinsmen and supporters.

The bishop's charter is witnessed by so many prelates of Munster that we are entitled to assume that Archbishop Matthew of Cashel was holding a provincial synod in Limerick in 1205. The archbishop is himself the first witness; then the bishops of Cork, Cloyne, Ross, Ardfert, Emily, Kilfenora and Waterford; then three abbots, three archdeacons, two priors, and the dean of Cashel. The bishop of Lismore is the sole absentee; and his absence is most probably due to more than an accident. In these same years the Norman bishop of Waterford was pressing with the utmost violence for the suppression of the ancient see of Lismore in favour of his own very much more recent diocesan centre.\(^{(39)}\) An Irish bishop of Lismore could hardly risk appearing at the same synod as Bishop Robert of Waterford, if we may trust the details given by Innocent III in a very vivid account of these proceedings.

Bishop Donatus was dead within a little more than two years of the date of his charter of 1205. His death opened the way for the last, and decisive step in this record of Anglo-Norman aggression. In Dublin the English King had succeeded in securing the nomination of his own candidate as far back as 1182. In Waterford there had been Norman bishops for at least six or seven years before the death of Bishop Donatus. King John was not the man to let canonical scruples stand in his way, when there was question of securing an appointment on which he had set his heart. His great struggle for control of the primatial see of Canterbury had already begun to disturb his relations with Pope Innocent III, though the Pope had not yet been driven to the extreme measure of his famous Interdict. If a risk could be taken in Canterbury, how much more safely could it be taken in Limerick, where local resistance to the King's will had been very weakened during the past ten years.

On December 5, 1207, the English Close Rolls contain the text of a mandate by which John ordered Meyler FitzHenry, his justiciar in Ireland, to grant the vacant see of Limerick to Master Geoffrey, who is described as parson of the church of Dungarvan.\(^{(40)}\) It is the King's wish that Geoffrey be appointed to the vacant see: the justiciar is to give effect to this wish, and to admonish and induce the clergy of Limerick to elect and receive Master Geoffrey as their bishop. Language could hardly be plainer; but there is no clear proof that King John had his way, at least for the moment. Master Geoffrey of Dungarvan disappears from view; and for all we know the see of Limerick lay vacant for the next five years, as happened to many another Irish and English see during the long years of King John's struggle with the greatest of the medieval Popes. Innocent III proved the stronger of the two contestants in the end, and John was forced to do homage to the Pope for his kingdom in 1213. Two years later we find mention of Edmund as bishop of Limerick.\(^{(41)}\) Of his
antecedents we know nothing, but he stands first at the head of a long line of Anglo-Norman bishops who ruled the diocese of Limerick until English interests were weakened, and Irish hopes revived, during the confusion of the Great Schism in Western Europe. The provision of Bishop Cornelius O Dea to the see of Limerick interrupted, if only for a time, the policy which John had so boldly inaugurated in 1207. In Dublin the action of John's father was even more effective, for no native Irish archbishop ruled the see of Dublin from the accession of John Cumin in 1182 to the breakdown of the whole medieval system of church government under the Tudor sovereigns of the sixteenth century. The Irish Church paid a heavy price for the acceptance of English law and English customs at the synod of Cashel in 1171-2.

NOTES.

1. Printed in Ussher's Sylloge (Works IV), p. 511; with Anselm's answer to Gilbert on p. 513.
4. The oaths of these four bishops are printed by Ussher from the Canterbury Rolls: ibid., p. 564-5.
5. Annals of Four Masters, 1070; 1100. The Four Masters give them the title abbot; but they commonly translate the Irish title abhchinncech in this way for obits of this period.
6. See my article in Irish Eccl. Record (June, 1944), p. 381. foll.
12. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 76.
15. For Malachy's reform of Bangor, see Vita Malachiae, ch.
16. See below, p.,
17. The name is given by Keating as Torgestius in his account of the Synod of Kells; the Four Masters (a. 1187) give Torgeslňk.
19. The list is given in Gesta Henrici II: Luspinacensis episcopus.
22. Calendar Documents (Ireland) I, no. 56.
25. Black Book of Limerick, ed. McCaffrey, p. 34.
27. Black Book of Limerick, p. 103.
33. Black Book of Limerick, p. 116-7. The date is fixed by the numerous witnesses to this charter.
34. For these grants, see Orpen, op. cit. II, pp. 162 foll.
37. Black Book of Limerick, p. 121.
38. The two Canons named O Lonergan may, perhaps, have been the two future archbishops of Caskel.
40. Calendar Documents (Ireland) I, no. 384.
41. Ibid. I, no. 589.