Sylvester Lloyd, O.F.M., Bishop of Killaloe, 1728-1739

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Sylvester Lloyd, a Franciscan of unusual background, was appointed Bishop of Killaloe in 1728, on the nomination of James III after distinguished service as an agent of the Irish bishops. He was the first bishop of Killaloe for many years who attempted to tackle methodically the pastoral problems of a very large diocese, in the process of which he suffered a breakdown in health. His subsequent financial difficulties illustrate the problems of an 18th century Irish bishop who did not have an adequate private income. In 1739 he was transferred to Waterford & Lismore, but was severely hampered by continuing illness until his death in 1747.

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Towards the end of 1971 or early 1972 I was present at a lecture given in Ennis by Fr. Fergal Grannell, O.F.M., under the auspices of the Clare Archaeological and Historical Society. The lecturer was dealing with the life of an 18th century Franciscan bishop of Killaloe, Sylvester Lloyd, who, up to then, had been little more to me than a name in a list of 18th century bishops. My own reaction at the time, which was the general one, was that Lloyd was a very unusual and talented person who deserved to be better known and all present were extremely grateful for Fr. Fergal's fine presentation which was based to a large extent on Roman archival material. Unfortunately, the text of this lecture was never published although a good summary did appear in some local newspapers.¹

Many years later, when I started to do my own research on Lloyd, I found that the only published article, apart from a few brief notes, had appeared as long ago as 1897 in the Journal of the Waterford & South East of Ireland Archaeological Society.² As the author, William H. Grattan Flood, did not have access to the Roman archives, his article is short on specific detail and does not convey the excitement and tragedy of Lloyd's career. However, there was even an error with regard to a basic date. W. Maziere Brady's classic work, The Episcopal Succession of England, Scotland and Ireland (volume II, page 122), gives the date of his appointment to Killaloe as 25 September 1729, when in fact it took place a year earlier in September 1728.³ This error was repeated as late as 1961 in the second edition of the standard reference work, A Handbook of British Chronology.

Over thirty years after Grattan Flood's article appeared, Lloyd was still a largely unknown figure even to his fellow Franciscans. Gregory Cleary, O.F.M., wrote in 1928: "That this Sylvester Lloyd was regarded by his contemporaries as the ablest man in Ireland seems to me improbable. Nobody ever emerges as really great except he has demonstrated his claim to greatness. Where is the contemporary evidence of such greatness in the case of Sylvester Lloyd?" It is hoped that the present article will go some way towards answering this question.

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¹Limerick Leader, 8 Jan. 1972; Clare Champion, 15 Jan. 1972.

²William H. Grattan Flood, "Dr. Sylvester Lloyd". Waterford Archaeol. Soc. Jn. 3(1897), 231-234.

³Brady's work was published in Rome in 1876.

⁴Gregory Cleary, O.F.M., "Silvester Lloyd", The Irish Book Lover 16(May-June 1928), 69-70.

EARLY LIFE

Fergal Grannell suggests that Lloyd may have been a native of Co. Kilkenny. Our remaining information about his early life comes from letters written by the internuncio in Brussels (who dealt with Irish affairs) to Rome about Lloyd when the Franciscan was a strong contender for the vacant see of Dublin in 1724. In one letter Spinelli (the internuncio) said that Lloyd was the son of a Protestant minister. In another he told how he had been informed that Lloyd's father was a Protestant "who was not ashamed to have two wives at the same time". One cannot help suspecting that Spinelli was passing on gossip without checking which portions of it were true. The bigamy charge against Lloyd's father seems very unlikely to be true as the law was severe in this regard. Tyrrell, the notorious priest-catcher, was executed in 1713 for having several wives, despite his services to the state. In his letters Spinelli went on to say that Sylvester Lloyd was reared as a Protestant killed an opponent in battle and subsequently became a Catholic. After his conversion he joined the Hieronymites in Portugal but later transferred to the Franciscans. On his return to Ireland he made many friends "by his charm of speech and pleasant manner". However, according to the internuncio, he did not show signs of holiness and gravity which would merit his appointment as archbishop of Dublin.5 Spinelli succeeded in ensuring that Lloyd was not appointed, although not long afterwards he drastically revised his opinion of the Franciscan. Lloyd's will gives us one further detail of his family background.6 The mention of two half sisters, Jane and Rebecca Lockington, shows that his mother had married a second time. The Old Testament name Rebecca also suggests a Protestant background.

In the winter of 1713 Lloyd was completing a probationary period of six months in the Irish Franciscan college of St. Isidore in Rome and in the following year he joined the Franciscan community in Cook Street, Dublin. In 1716 he was either preaching or about to preach in Cook Street when a major accident occurred. The Weekly News Letter of 3 October 1716 reported:8

On Sunday last two of the loafts in one of the Popish chappels in Cook street fell, by which 4 persons were kill'd, viz. James Farrel a tailor; Mrs. Brown, in Cook-street, widdow; Mrs. Morphy in Patrick-street, widdow; Mrs. Delany, mantua maker in Castle-street; besides a great many wounded, some of whom, they say, will not recover.

THE CATECHISM OF MONTPELIER

In 1717 and 1719 Lloyd was appointed Guardian in Cook Street and in September 1720 he was chosen as one of the four assistants to the Provincial of the Irish province. Clearly he was highly regarded in his own order. There can be no doubt too that the main reason for Spinelli's opposition to Lloyd's appointment as archbishop was not his chequered background or supposed lack of gravity but his involvement in a controversy which was still ongoing at the time. In 1723 the Holy Office in Rome had condemned a French catechism, known as the Catechism of Montpelier. Sylvester Lloyd had already published an English translation of this catechism which was very popular in Dublin. The internuncio

⁵Cathaldus Giblin, O.F.M., "Catalogue of Material of Irish Interest in the collection Nunziatura di Fiandra, Vatican Archives", Collect. Hib. II (1968), 75-78.

⁶Lloyd's will is published in Archiv. Hib. 3(1914), 200-201. ⁷Clare Champion, 15 Jan. 1972 (Fergal Grannell's lecture).

⁸John Brady, Catholics and Catholicism in the Eighteenth-century Press, Maynooth 1965, p. 25; Seamus O'Casaide, "The Anonymous Prefacer, 1722", The Irish Book Lover 16(Jan.-Feb. 1928), 11.

maintained that the translation was also prohibited, at least until it had been examined by the Holy See. In Dublin opinion was divided with some theologians strongly defending the translation, insisting that it did not come under the prohibition as it had been carefully collated with a Spanish translation which had been approved by the Holy Office. The London Post Man newspaper of 27 February 1724 suspected a popish plot behind the controversy:

They write from Dublin, that great disputes are arisen there among the Popish clergy concerning the Catechism of Montpellier, lately translated from the Spanish into the English tongue. It is believed by some men of judgment, those disputes have been industriously set on foot to prevent the government's taking notice of it as a book, that is indeed a complete magazine of refined Popery. Or as others think, perhaps to stir up the curiosity of Protestants to read their doctrines.9

In June 1724 the internuncio noted that many people attributed divisions in the chapter of Dublin diocese to the catechism affair. The situation there was bad as many members of the chapter were refusing to recognise Russell, the vicar capitular, on the ground that he had not been elected in accordance with canon law. Some had accused Lloyd of being the instigator of all the disturbances. Although Spinelli was not fully acquainted with the facts on these last two points he was quite clear about the necessity for a speedy appointment to Dublin and that he did not regard Lloyd as suitable. Indeed the significance of Lloyd and the strength of the internuncio's opposition can be seen in the fact that in his letters he made no positive suggestions about who should be appointed but was solely concerned with ensuring that Lloyd was not made archbishop. The problem was soon solved by the transfer of Bishop Edward Murphy from Kildare to Dublin in September 1724. Not long after this Lloyd's translation of the catechism was condemned by Rome. It would appear that this decision was accepted by him without protest as Spinelli's next mention of Lloyd was a favourable one.¹⁰

DIPLOMAT

While the dispute about Lloyd's translation of the Montpelier Catechism was still going on, the Irish Church was faced with a new wave of persecution. In early summer 1723, while the Irish Parliament was sitting in Dublin, two ships had put into harbour in Ireland, probably in Dublin. Seventeen friars were among the passengers and it was discovered by the authorities that they had a large number of trunks full of religious books. Parliament reacted sharply to this news with "A Bill for explaining and amending the Acts to prevent the Growth of Popery and for strengthening the Protestant interest in Ireland". This bill declared that any unregistered priests found in the country after 25 March 1724, as well as bishops, vicars general and religious, would be guilty of high treason. It was also ordered that anyone convicted of sheltering "Popish dignitaries" should be executed.

After having been passed by the Irish Parliament the bill had to go to London for ratification. This gave rise to intense diplomatic activity as efforts were made to persuade the Privy Council not to give its approval. Pope Innocent XIII wrote to the King of Spain while the papal nuncios in Vienna, Paris, Madrid and Lisbon were asked to do their utmost to prevent the ratification of these "barbarous new laws" against the Irish Catholics. Meanwhile Fr. Lloyd, "a parish priest of Dublin", was sent to Versailles to get French support. This was certainly Sylvester Lloyd, whom we know was also involved in another

⁹Giblin, "Nunziatura di Fiandra", Collect. Hib. 5(1962), 106-109; Brady, Catholics and Catholicism, p. 42. ¹⁰Giblin, "Nunziatura di Fiandra" Collect. Hib. 5(1962), 106-107; Ibid., 14(1971), 39.

diplomatic mission on behalf of the Irish bishops soon afterwards. All the efforts proved worthwhile as the Privy Council in London rejected the bill early in 1724. When Lecky came across a copy of it while researching for his work on 18th century Ireland he was shocked by its severity and wrote that it was "no exaggeration to say that it deserves to rank with the most infamous edicts in the whole history of persecution". 11

Within two years Lloyd was again involved in a diplomatic initiative. In a letter to Rome on 30 November 1725 the internuncio in Brussels referred to the fears in Ireland of a new wave of persecution and how the Irish bishops had sent Sylvester Lloyd to the French court on their behalf. Having received this commission Lloyd travelled via England to Brussels and explained his assignment to Spinelli who then gave him a letter of introduction to the nuncio in Paris. When Lloyd had satisfactorily completed his business in Paris, where the court had decided to send a strong letter to the Duke of Hanover, he returned to Brussels. It is clear that Lloyd made a good impression as Spinelli's assessment of him had radically changed when he described him as a man of great spirit and particularly well versed in matters relating to his brief.¹²

In 1727 Lloyd's involvement in a fresh controversy brought him to the notice of James III, the Old Pretender, in a very favourable light. In that year, on the accession of George II in the United Kingdom, a group of Catholics in Dublin under the leadership of Lord Delvin signed a "Loyal Address to George II". The *Dublin Journal* of 25 July 1727 gives some details of the address including its unequivocal expression of loyalty, "That it is from a principle of religious duty they beg leave to assure his majesty of their unfeigned loyalty, which no power on earth can dispense with, & c.". This was a clear denial of the Stuart cause, which was still supported by the papacy, and it evoked a strong response from Lloyd in "A Few Queries seriously put to the Lords and Gentlemen who lately signed an Address intended to be presented to King George the 2nd in behalfe of all the Roman Catholicks of Ireland". A manuscript copy of Lloyd's reply is preserved in the archives of San Clemente, the Irish Dominican house in Rome. He also wrote a number of letters to the Stuart court on the subject. 13

In 1727 Francis Stuart (no relation of the Stuart royalty) was elected provincial of the Irish Franciscans. On 9 March 1728 he wrote to James III informing him of his new office and promising loyalty. He then referred to the recent attempt to present an address of loyalty to George II and the successful opposition of Sylvester Lloyd. "His behaviour in this affair having made him many powerful enemies, and having reason to believe that they have stirred up some even of ye most eminent of ye clergy against him.... It is, therefore, that I most humbly beg yr Majesty will not listen to their calumny, he being a man who has rendered great service to his country, and who has always behaved as became a good religious and a zealous missionary, as will further appear by ye testimony of unbiassed Prelates and others, which I send to be laid before yr Majesty for his further vindication." In commending Lloyd to James III his provincial was probably doing no more than confirming what the Pretender already believed. It is not surprising, then, that when the diocese of Killaloe became vacant, Sylvester Lloyd was appointed bishop in September 1728.

¹¹Hugh Fenning, O.P., The Undoing of the Friars of Ireland: A Study of the Novitiate Question in the 18th Century, Louvain 1972, pp. 94-99; William E. H. Lecky, A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century, London 1906, vol. I, p. 164.

¹²Giblin, "Nunziatura di Fiandra", Collect. Hib. II (1968), 79-80.

¹³Hugh Fenning, O.P., "Clerical Recruitment, 1735-1783. Documents from Windsor and Rome", Archiv. Hib., 30(1972), 8n-9n.; Brady, Catholics and Catholicism, pp. 45-46.

¹⁴James O'Laverty, The Bishops of Down and Connor, being the fifth volume of An Historical Account of Down and Connor, ancient and modern, Dublin 1895, pp. 533-534.

By this time Lloyd had also acquired a reputation as a historian. In the 1720s he briefly met Thomas Carte when the latter was in exile in Paris. In 1732, when Carte arrived in Ireland to do research on the history of the 17th century, one of his principal Irish friends, Francis McNamara of Moyriesk in County Clare, referred him to Lloyd who at this time was bishop of Killaloe. McNamara expressed the wish that Carte and Lloyd would meet because, as he wrote to Carte, "there is no man in this kingdom, without exception, so clever, Swift excepted". He also described Lloyd as deeply versed in the history of Ireland. The two men did not meet as Lloyd was unable to travel to Dublin. However, he wrote a long letter to Carte commenting on the situation in Ireland in the 1640s and indicating some valuable sources.¹⁵

BISHOP OF KILLALOE

After arriving in his new diocese Lloyd began his work with great energy, so much so that after three years he was, as he himself put it, *laboribus fractus* (broken or crushed by his labours). By January 1730 he was already unwell, referring in a letter to his "constant indisposition". However, when Christopher Butler, Archbishop of Cashel, visited him in the autumn of 1731 he found the bishop of Killaloe seriously ill and particularly troubled by his eyes. In an effort to get some relief Lloyd had spent whatever little money he had on doctors and surgeons and in the process had incurred heavy debts. The pain he had borne while being treated by the doctors and surgeons during the previous four months was indescribable but the bishop had displayed marvellous resignation and endurance. Butler's letter suggests that Lloyd had totally lost his sight at one stage as he mentions that there had been some improvement, enabling him to see a little. However, the treatment needed to be continued and this left him in need of immediate financial assistance.

Archbishop Butler returned home full of admiration for Lloyd, having come to the conclusion that the bishop of Killaloe had contracted his illness because of his untiring labours in his diocese. He reported to Rome that since arriving in Killaloe Lloyd had been working ceaselessly by day and night, preaching, entreating, reproving, administering the sacraments, and travelling through hilly inaccessible districts and rugged inhospitable places. He was very often hungry and thirsty and his life and liberty were frequently in danger. In the archbishop's opinion the very strenuous work done by Lloyd during the previous Lent and after Easter was mainly responsible for his illness. During those months he had confirmed thousands of people in places where the sacrament of Confirmation had not been administered for a hundred years, labouring from early morning to late evening.16 Five years later a report from the nunciature in Brussels to Rome said that frequently after working hard during the day Lloyd had been obliged to spend the night either in a cabin or under the open sky and this had caused the breakdown of his health. The bishop also appears to have been harassed by the civil authorities. In 1733 John Hennessy, former parish priest of Doneraile, swore informations against four bishops, including Lloyd, accusing them of raising money by the sale of indulgences "to restore King James III to his right and put their present majesties and all the royal family to the sword". This is what John Bourke, provisor of the Irish College, Paris, had in mind when in a letter

¹⁵Appendix I to the Thirty-second Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records, 11-12, in Parliamentary Papers 1871, XXXIII.

¹⁶Vatican Secret Archive, Lettere di Vescovi e Prelati, vol. 159, f.424, Lloyd to Pope Clement XII, 7 Aug. 1733; Cathaldus Giblin, O.F.M., "Papers relating to Meelick Friary, 1644-1731" Collect. Hib., 16(1973), 83; Giblin, "Nunziatura di Fiandra", Collect. Hib. 9(1966), 25.

to James III in June 1735 he mentioned that Lloyd and four other bishops "were denounced by unruly priests and obliged to disappear". 17

After his appointment as bishop, Lloyd managed to find time to return to the catechetical field and produced a bilingual (Irish/English) catechism. The only copy which I have seen is in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin, and belongs to an edition printed in Galway about 1823. The title page of this edition, which may not be exactly the same as the original, is as follows-"The Doway Catechism in English & Irish for the Use of Schools, To which is prefixed a method of learning to read the Irish Language without a Master, for the instruction of such persons as have neglected this useful study in their youth; and is a most excellent introduction to the reading and understanding of Dr. Gallagher's seventeen Irish sermons, so universally read throughout the Kingdom of Ireland". The instructions for reading the Irish language are in fact given at the end of the catechism, not at the beginning. The sermons of Dr. Gallagher (bishop of Raphoe and later of Kildare & Leighlin) were published in 1736. A note on the National Library copy by Seamus O'Casaide, who had a unique knowledge of Irish printers and printing, says that the catechism was first published in Dublin in 1738, with later Dublin editions in 1742 (possibly) and 1752. The author can be identified from the following note at the conclusion of the sixteen chapters of questions and answers-"In Usum Clerii [sic] et Populi Laon: S.L." (For the use of the clergy and people of Killaloe diocese, S.L.). Composing a catechism might seem very difficult for a man with Lloyd's problems and particularly because of his state of health. However, according to Fr. Patrick Wallace, who did a doctoral thesis on the Butler catechism tradition, the English version of Lloyd's catechism is a verbatim repetition of a catechism by O'Kenny published in 1725 and entitled The Galway Catechism. Lloyd's Irish text was a literal translation. I am grateful to Dr. Wallace for this information.

A WANDERING BISHOP

After the breakdown of his health in 1731 Lloyd never recovered sufficiently to take up a fully active role in his diocese. During 1734, because of the trouble stirred up by Hennessy during the preceding twelve months, he had to go on the run and there is no evidence that he ever returned to Killaloe diocese after that. In 1735 he was in Belgium, taking the waters at Spa, and from there he planned to go to Aachen for the same purpose. The nuncio in Brussels was very sympathetic towards him, attributing his bad health to the hardships he had endured in his diocese. He noted that Lloyd was almost completely blind, penniless and in debt. This underlines the financial problems experienced by Irish bishops who did not have independent means—and for the next few years finances were to be a continual source of worry to Lloyd. In 1735 the nuncio gave him some financial help and wrote to Rome asking for further assistance, remarking that Lloyd's outstanding gifts and meritorious qualities, as well as his pitiable condition, had induced him to make this appeal on the bishop's behalf. Whatever financial assistance Lloyd got, it was clearly inadequate. In 1737 a new nuncio in Brussels was writing to Rome in the same vein, saying that the high esteem in which the pope held the bishop of Killaloe encouraged him to seek help for Lloyd. The latter was still in Belgium but in such dire need that he could not afford to go to the waters at Spa.18 Some time after this Lloyd returned to Ireland but remained

¹⁷Propaganda Fide Archives, SC (Irlanda), vol. 9 (1728-40), 486v; Maureen Wall, The Penal Laws 1691-1760, Dundalk 1961, p. 40; Fenning, "Clerical Recruitment", Archiv. Hib. 30(1972), 5.

in Dublin. He also seems to have returned to Ireland for a short time in 1736. Fergal Grannell tells us that he smuggled 163 copies of the New Testament into Ireland from Douai via Dunkirk in that year.

POPE BENEDICT XIV AND THE IRISH CHURCH

In 1739 the Congregation of Propaganda began to show considerable anxiety about the state of the Irish Church following the arrival in Rome of two letters which painted a dismal picture of what was happening in Ireland. The first letter, written in December 1738 and signed with the assumed name of "Paulus Benignus", dealt with the lengthy absence of some bishops, including Sylvester Lloyd, from their dioceses, and the danger to the faith of the poor from the recently established Charter Schools. As a follow up to this letter the nuncio in Brussels wrote to someone in Ireland whose identity he did not disclose but whom he described to Rome as "one not inferior by birth, zeal, or doctrine to any of our Irish Catholics, on whom I have chiefly relied to judge the present situation". On 15 October 1739 this Irish correspondent forwarded to Brussels a detailed report on non-resident bishops and on the need for a better system of catechising the young because of the proselytising efforts of the Charter Schools.

In the second letter Sylvester Lloyd was severely criticised because he had been living in Dublin for some time and had no residence in Killaloe diocese. The letter alleged that people who saw him reading, writing and walking unaccompanied in Dublin could not accept that his sight problem was as bad as he had claimed. This would seem to be unfair to Lloyd as all the other evidence points to a serious sight defect and his general health was also poor because of a mild stroke. However, the Roman authorities were left in no doubt that Killaloe diocese had suffered because of not having a bishop in residence. Many people, according to the letter, had fallen away from the Catholic Church and had become Protestants. Two priests had also joined the Protestants, one of whom, Lucius McNamara, was particularly notorious. Unfortunately, no further details about McNamara's exploits are available. His defection from the Catholic Church was also mentioned in two newspapers in 1738. The *Dublin News Letter* reported on 21 November:

On Sunday last Mr. Lucius Macnamara, a Popish priest, lately came from Rome, read his recantation in St. John's Church.

The Faulkner's Dublin Journal first described him as "titular Bishop of Limerick" but shortly afterwards published a correction. The letter to Brussels claimed that if Lloyd had been actively present in his diocese much of what had happened could have been averted.

In August 1740 Benedict XIV was elected pope. Within a short time the new pope began to pay particular attention to the Irish situation and sought more detailed information. However, in the meantime he wrote a pastoral letter, dated 15 August 1741, which was a clear response to the anxiety caused by the non-residence of Lloyd and others. One part of it, which refers to bishops journeying through England, France, Belgium and Germany is an obvious reference to Lloyd and the repetition of a comment about him made in the first letter to Rome. 22 Soon afterwards the nuncio in Brussels commissioned John Kent,

¹⁹Hugh Fenning, O.P., "John Kent's Report on the Irish Mission, 1742", Archiv. Hib., 28(1966), 59-74. ²⁰Propaganda Fide Archives, CP, vol. 88, 21v, 101r, 103r-108v.

²¹Brady, Catholics and Catholicism, pp. 58-59.

²²Propaganda Fide Archives, CP, vol. 88, 78r-83r.

president of the Irish College in Louvain, to go to Ireland and present a report to Propaganda based on his findings.

BISHOP OF WATERFORD & LISMORE

Meanwhile, Sylvester Lloyd was again on the move in 1739 and visited Rome in May of that year. While he was there he was transferred from Killaloe to Waterford & Lismore. John Kent's report on the Irish Church, submitted to Rome in January 1743, makes the curious statement that he was transferred on account of his problem with his eyesight—possibly an indication that Propaganda felt he might be able to cope better with a less extensive diocese. However, his health deteriorated further as he suffered another and more serious stroke soon after his transfer.²³

Although reasonably good relations with the political authorities were the norm as the middle of the 18th century approached, there could still be the occasional problem during times of war or political unrest. One of these periods of harassment occurred in 1744-45 because of the threat of a Stuart invasion. On 14 April 1744 the Mayor and sheriffs of Waterford reported to Dublin:²⁴

In obedience to the order of the Lord Lieutenant and Council transmitted to us by you we have made diligent enquiry within our jurisdiction for the names and places of abode of all persons being or reputed to be Popish Archbishops, Bishops, Vicars-General, Deans, Jesuits, Monks, Friars or other regular popish clergy and of all papists exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

And we find that Silvester Lloyd reputed to be the popish Titular Bishop of Waterford resided in the City of Waterford for some time past but upon search being made for him pursuant to the Proclamation we

find he has lately absconded and cannot be found.

Lloyd probably went abroad at this time when all bishops and priests had to go on the run. He died in Paris three years later in 1747. His will, drawn up in 1743, was an extremely simple one bequeathing a shilling each to his nephews, nieces and other relations. The only other bequest was his gold watch. After that, when his debts had been paid, he left "the remainder of my worldly substance" to his executors.²⁵

²³Fenning, "John Kent's Report", Archiv. Hib., 28(1966), 60, 95; Propaganda Fide Archives, CP, vol. 88, 21v, 101r.

²⁴William P. Burke, The Irish Priests in the Penal Times (1660-1760), Waterford 1914, pp. 369-370.
²⁵Ibid., p. 370; William Carrigan, "Catholic Episcopal Wills (Province of Cashel)", Archiv. Hib. 3(1914), p. 200.