EDITORIAL NOTE. By an error in printing, our last issue was paginated in error as Vol. 6, No. 5; it should have read Vol. VII, No. 1. It is shown correctly on the cover as Vol. VII, No. 1. To avoid confusion we have thought it better therefore to make the present issue Vol. VII, No. 2, while starting with page 1.

The continuation of the Arthur Mss. was not ready for the press for this issue and is being held over to the next.

NOTE—The authors of the various papers and reviews are solely and is being held over to the next.

The Butler Archbishops Of Cashel

By

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The broad limits of what may be called the "Butler Era" in the history of Cashel and Emly may be fixed by dropping the first and last decades of the 18th century. Between 1712 and 1791 three Butler Archbishops ruled the Archdiocese—Dr. Christopher Butler (1712-1757), Dr. James Butler I (1757-1774), and Dr. James Butler II (1774-1791). The choice of the modern town of Thurles as the residence of the Archbishops of Cashel, instead of the ancient city of Cashel, finds its explanation in the fact that three Archbishops belonging to different families of the influential Butler family, ruled the See during the 18th century. Canon William Burke, the historian of Clonmel, says in his book, "Irish Priests in the Penal Days":

"The first Duke of Ormond, kidnapped to England and brought up by the notorious Abbot, Archbishop of Canterbury, was the only Protestant of his family. In some respects, the most fatal enemy the Irish Catholics ever had, his bigotry never extended to his relatives, and when, at the Restoration he became virtual ruler of the kingdom, the Butlers came back to property and power. Accordingly, throughout a great part of the penal era all the great county magnates were strong Catholics. Ormond's brother, Richard of Killcash (ancestor of the present family of Ormond), his half brothers, Toby and George Mathew, his nephew Purcell, baron of Loughmore, his cousins and the Lords Cahir and Dunboyne, the Butlers of Kilmoyler, Bansha, and numerous
others, all lived in the county and at the worst times were able to shelter the priests. The present habitat of the Archbishops of Cashel is traceable to the fact that from the Cromwellian period down Thurles has been in Catholic hands. The Vicar-Apostolic, John Bourke, lived there as an attendant to Lady Thurles (Ormond's mother) who was dispensed from being transplanted to Connaught. During the Popish plot, Archbishop Brennan was hidden at Annfield by Toby Mathew. His successor again, Edward Comerford, lived as parish priest of Thurles under the protection of the Mathews, lords of the manor. When Comerford died at the depth of the penal times the Roman authorities appointed Christopher Butler, of the Kilcash family, in the belief that his relatives would be able to maintain him in the county. But while the loyalty of the old families afforded a considerable measure of protection, it only helped the more to embitter the Cromwellian squirearchy."

An instance of the relations between Cromwellian and Butlers may be found in a letter written by Kingsmill Pennefather, and dated, Cashel, February 1st, 1715: "... I sent Cornet Edwards yesterday to search for arms and seize suspected persons. He went to the house of one Butler of Derrylooney who has two sons who refused him entrance, in order to search for arms. My cornet was intended to carry out his orders, upon which, Thomas Butler, one of the sons, fired out of a window at Edwards, which made him the more resolute. ... He seized the two young men whom I sent to Gaole ...." A Grand Jury which instituted proceedings at Clonmel against a Father John Halley, "late of Killerk," in 1750, included such well-known names as: Maude, Gahan, Lovett, Barker, Massey, Pennefather, Bunbury, Despard, Waller, Carden, Judkin, Jephson, Glitterbuck, Bayly, Damer.

THE PENAL CODE

The penal laws against Catholicism, though enacted at different times, formed a coherent and consistent code. "It was," said Edmund Burke, "a machine of wise and elaborate contrivance, and as well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people, and the debasement in them of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man." Some of the penal laws inflicted civil penalties and disabilities on Catholics; the best remembered of these is probably the law which forbade a Catholic to own a horse worth more than £5, under penalty of its confiscation! Catholics were excluded from Parliament, from offices in cities and towns, and from various trades and professions.

Other penal enactments aimed at the prevention of Catholic worship. These may be grouped under different headings:

1.—Those for the banishment of bishops and others exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and of regulars;

2.—Those for the prevention of foreign education and the coming of priests into Ireland;

3.—Those for registering priests and enforcing the Oath of Abjuration, and

4.—Laws inflicting penalties for marriages between Catholics and Protestants.

Such laws if they could have been enforced, would have banished ecclesiastical authorities from the country and ensured that a new generation of priests would not succeed those who registered. Thus, the statute of 9 William II, cap. 26, provided:

Section 1—"All popish archbishops, bishops, vicars-general, deans, Jesuits, monks, friars and all other regular popish clergy and all papists
exercising any ecclesiastical jurisdiction, shall depart out of this kingdom before the 1st of May, 1698; if any of the said ecclesiastical persons shall be at any time after the said 1st of May, 1698, within the kingdom, they and every of them shall suffer imprisonment until he or they shall be transported beyond the seas; and if any person so transported shall return again into this kingdom, they and every of them shall be guilty of high treason and suffer and forfeit as in the case of high treason.”

Section 2—“From and after the 29th of December, 1697, no popish archbishop, bishop, vicar-general, dean, nor any other papist exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction not established by the laws of this kingdom, jesuit or friar, shall come into this kingdom from any part beyond the seas, on the pain of twelve months imprisonment, and then to be transported shall again return into this kingdom, he and they so offending shall be guilty of high treason and suffer accordingly.”

Registration was prescribed to take place on the 24th June, 1704, by the Act 2 Anne, c.7.

By the middle of the 18th century freedom of worship—at least for unobtrusive worship—had been effectively secured. The laws inflicting civil penalties and disabilities on Catholics were effective for a much longer period.

Such is the background against which we introduce the first of the Butler Archbishops.

ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHER

Christopher Butler was born on the 18th January, 1673, and died on the 4th September, 1757, having reached the ripe age of four score and four, notwithstanding the many hardships which filled his life. He was the third and youngest son of Col. Walter Butler of Garryricken, Co. Kilkenny, and Lady Mary Plunkett. His father was a nephew of James, 1st Duke of Ormond, referred to above, who played a sinister and tortuous part in thwarting the efforts of Archbishop Rinuccini and Eoghan Ruadh O Neill. The Duke’s mother had been Elizabeth Poyntz of Acton Court, Gloucestershire. When her first husband, Thomas Lord Thurles was drowned in December, 1619, Lady Thurles married Capt. George Mathew of Radyr, Glamorgan. On his mother’s side Christopher Butler was connected with the Earls of Fingal. His mother was only daughter of Christopher, 2nd Earl of Fingal, and grand-niece of Dr. Patrick Plunkett, Catholic bishop of Ardagh (1647-1679), who, as Abbot of the Cistercian monastery of St. Mary’s, Dublin, had taught his kinsman, Blessed Oliver Plunkett. Young Christopher Butler was eight years of age when Blessed Oliver was executed in connection with the “Popish Plot.” It is said that Christopher began his education at a school in England. At any rate he went to the Continent at an early age and having completed his theological course at the Sorbonne in Paris he was admitted as doctor of theology and canon law. He was ordained priest for the diocese of Ossory—we do not know the precise date of his ordination. It does not appear that he ever exercised the ministry in his native diocese. In 1710 the clergy of Cashel postulated him as Archbishop. He was nominated by Propaganda in 1711 and was consecrated Archbishop by Cardinal Ferdinand de Adda, Cardinal of St. Clement’s, at Rome, on 18th October, 1712.

The return of Archbishop Christopher Butler to his native land might well be compared to the entry of a prelate into one of the countries behind the Iron Curtain today. His predecessor, Archbishop Edward Comerford, had lived around
Thurles under the protection of the Mathews; he had been supported by an annual pension from the Archbishop of Narbonne and died in great poverty in 1710. He had remained with his flock in defiance of the Act of 9 William III, cap. 26. A contemporary document described him as "an archbishop who sacrifices himself in order to sustain the Catholic religion, so that neither prisons, of which he has often experienced the torments, nor a life sometimes wandering but always hidden, nor the hope of finding in France more comfort and convenience, nor death itself with which he has often been threatened, has forced him to abandon the flock which Providence has confided to his care." A spy had indeed reported the presence of "Doctr. Cumberfoard pretended parish priest of Therlous in the Co. of Tipperary. Ar. Bishopp of Cassel . . . ." but we do not know if any action was taken as a result of this information, or if the spy collected the prescribed award of £100. Archbishop Comerford registered as parish priest of Thurles in 1704 but of course he did not state that he was also Archbishop of Cashel.

"A LIFE . . . . ALWAYS HIDDEN"

Dr. Christopher Butler's entry into Ireland was also an offence against the Act of 9 William III, cap. 26. He soon learned how to live "a life sometimes wandering but always hidden." His movements during the year 1713 may be traced. In February of that year his presence in Cork was revealed by a spy; it was stated that he had ordained two priests in the city. From a document dated Cork, 8th April, we learn that "Amongst the indictments there is one against one Christopher Butler, a popish Archbishop, but he is not be found, so process is ordered against him . . . ." On May 6th a spy reported that the archbishop was in Kilcash "which is the place of his residence since he came from France about six months ago."

On May 16th the Lords Justices and Council wrote from Dublin commanding the High Sheriff of Tipperary "that you forthwith apprehend the said Christopher Butler and John Pierce (bishop of Waterford) and commit them to gaole . . . ." On May 30th, however, the High Sheriff reported failure: "On the 27th I repaired to Kilcash and there made diligent search for Christopher Butler, Titular Archbishop of Cashel and John Pierce, Titular Bishop of Waterford, but could find neither of them. Neither could I find that they or either of them had been there." Yet on August 16th the Archbishop consecrated two bishops, one for Cork and the other for Killaloe, at the house of his cousins, the McCarthy's of Springhouse, near Kilshane.

The portrait of Archbishop Christopher Butler, which is in the Palace, Thurles, is probably from the portrait which led Canon William Burke to remark: "... who that has seen him as he looks out from the canvas, with quiet eye and tranquil countenance, his fingers playing with the pectoral cross, his whole attitude of gracious repose—who could realise that for thirty of the forty-five years of his long episcopate he was a felon and an outlaw and his capture welcomed as an 'honourable service.'" — (Priests of the Penal Days," p.351).

His cousin, the 2nd Duke of Ormond, was attainted for his part in the Jacobite attempt of 1715, so that the Archbishop was greatly under suspicion then and later in 1745. Practically all through his life, he moved about constantly to escape observation. Much of his time was spent at Kilcash; occasionally he can be traced at his home in Garryricken and when the pursuit became particularly close he would seek shelter from other relatives, the Gallways of Cork. Another of his places of refuge was Westcourt, Callan, where his niece Hellen Butler was married to a cousin, Col. Richard Butler. Tradition, mentioned by Canon Carrigan (History and Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory), points
to a quiet spot near the house where under the shelter of the trees the archbishop and his niece would recite the rosary together in Irish as they walked up and down. There is a peculiar fitness in this tradition about the descendants of Walter of the Rosaries.

Mrs. Helen Butler's mother, before she married the archbishop's brother, had been widow of Brian Magennis, Viscount Ivey. The Irish lament for Kilcash recalls the names of Dr. Butler and Lady Ivey:

"An chuirt bhreagh ag sileadh an bhraoin di
'S an gasra seimh go tlath,
Is i leabhar na marbh doleightear
An t'Espog is Lady 'Ivey.'"

In 1723 the Pope gave Archbishop Butler six months leave of absence to consult the doctors in Paris and drink the waters of Plombien. We do not know if he availed himself of this permission.

A HEROIC CHURCHMAN

It is hard to resist the temptation to picture Dr. Christopher Butler in the role of a Scarlet Pimpernel. Like other heroic churchmen, however, he would have regarded his adventures as interruptions in his task of filling the office entrusted to him, that of chief pastor of the archdiocese. The documentation concerning him is meagre but it shows his efforts to maintain the ecclesiastical discipline which was threatened by the penal code. At the beginning of his episcopate he made arrangements for the training of aspirants to the priesthood, by establishing something in the nature of a seminary at Cashel. During the penal days it was not unusual for a young man to be ordained priest before setting out for the Continent to begin his ecclesiastical studies. Dr. Butler aimed at providing a formation and training preliminary to ordination, and entrusted this work first to Very Rev. Edward Saul, Doctor of Canon and Civil Law and P.P. of Cashel, later to Very Rev. Philip Meagher, P.P., Fethard, a D.D. of Paris, and later to Very Rev. John Ryan, P.P., Loughmore. Ordinations held by Dr. Butler are recorded for the years 1731, 1734, 1741, 1742 and 1748 (his last ordinations). Several of these ordinations were held at the Chapel of Thurles and one was held at Rathduff in the parish chapel of Thomastown.

For the guidance of the clergy and laity he issued several pastoral letters and instructions. Most interesting of these is the "Modern Psalter of Cashel." This was a treatise intended for the clergy and dealt rather comprehensively with the obligations of a pastor of souls; it runs to about 60 closely written small quarto pages. Other works are: an Instruction on Penance (8th September, 1737); On Preaching (15th August, 1737); On Matrimony (1737); Instructions in Latin on teaching the necessary articles of Faith, and on Fasting (15th February, 1741); Diocesan Statutes in Latin (7th April, 1737); Letter to Pope Clement XI on the Bull "Unigenitus."

In May, 1750, Dr. Christopher Butler consecrated his coadjutor, Dr. James Butler I, and thereafter left the administration of the diocese almost entirely in the hands of the man who was to succeed him. He was not, however, allowed to spend all his time in the retirement which he so much desired and had so well earned. He was deputed to intervene in a troublesome case in the diocese of Limerick, but after some time his failing health compelled him to leave this also to his coadjutor.

He died at Westcourt, Callan, on 4th September, 1757, and on 6th September was laid to rest in the family tomb at Kilcash.
Dr. James Butler I was, like his predecessor a long-lived man; he died on May 17th, 1774, in the 83rd year of his age. He was the son of Edward Butler of Clare, Killusty, and Catherine Butler, daughter and heiress of Thomas Butler of Woodinstown, near New Inn. He belonged to the Dunboyne branch of the Butlers and his cousin and contemporary was Dr. John Butler, afterwards bishop of Cork, the twelfth and ill-starred Lord Dunboyne. The principal seat of the Dunboyne Butlers in the south of Ireland was Killinan, Fethard, where the Butlers seem to have succeeded the Berminghams as owners of the manor of Killinan in the 15th century. The archbishop's paternal grandparents were James Butler and Janet Cantwell, daughter of Capt. John Cantwell of Moyclarey castle.

Archbishop James Butler was, according to Renehan (Collections on Irish Church History) parish priest of Fethard after or before his consecration and was Vicar General of Emly before his consecration. In view of the available lists of parish priests of Fethard, however, it is doubtful if Dr. Butler was ever P.P. in that parish. It is probable that he acted as P.P. in the Kilbehenney district, having gone there to combat the proselytising activities of Lord Kingston of Mitchelstown Castle. The Brief for his coadjutorship of Cashel and the see of Tipperary was dated January 16th, 1750. He was consecrated in May, 1750, by Dr. Christopher Butler. On May 19th, 1750, he issued a Pastoral in Latin giving regulations for the examination of candidates for orders or jurisdiction; this was a continuation of the "seminary" project of his predecessor for the training of young men for the priesthood.

It is interesting to note that this letter, as well as several other documents from Dr. James Butler I, was issued in loco refugii (in a place of refuge), reminding us that it was not yet safe for the archbishop to give evidence of his presence in certain parts of his diocese.

Other acts of his episcopate show that he and his clergy were taking advantage of the easing off of persecution to bring religion more into the open. A Instruction issued from Fethard chapel on 8th January, 1752, dealt with the Lenten fast, some modification of which was rendered necessary by the scarcity of food and the poverty of the people.

The Lenten regulations of Dr. Butler and his predecessors serve to remind us of the rigorous fast observed by our forefathers. Another matter which required adjustment was the observance of Church holydays; the number of holydays was much greater than it is now and some changes were made to suit Irish conditions. Dr. Butler contemplated holding a provincial council of the bishops of the province of Munster in 1755, but a contemporary narrative informs us that "as the times threatened to be troublesome then, none of the prelates attended."

FROM THE CATACOMBS

In the 1750's Dr. Butler went about the diocese on visitation on several occasions and the reports of these visitations give a picture of the organisation of the Church in this diocese as it emerged from the catacombs. In some cases the names of the parishes are puzzling to the modern reader on account of the use of old names of Pre-Reformation parishes; thus we find such names as: Kilvellane, Kilnarath (Newport), New Chapel (Clerihan), Boulick and Modeshill (Mullinahone). There are descriptions of mud-walled and thatched chapels, often equipped with the minimum of furniture, and careful inventories of tattered
vestments and block-tin or pewter chalices. The archbishop paid special attention to the teaching of the catechism and the training of young men for the priesthood. In several parishes the catechism was taught in Irish and there are references to the "catechism of the diocese" and "the old catechism."

Thurles at this time boasted of a chapel, built—or at least repaired—by Mr. Mathew. This thatched chapel, "the old chapel," was replaced by a larger church, "the big chapel," in Dr. Bray's time. In August, 1763, Dr. Butler issued a body of diocesan statutes from Thurles chapel. Here too he performed numerous ordinations and two episcopal consecrations—of Dr. O'Kearney of Limerick, on 27th January, 1760, and of Dr. Michael Peter McMahon of Killaloe, on 4th August, 1765. (The archbishop was not then parish priest of Thurles).

RELIQUE OF THE TRUE CROSS

When Dr. Butler visited the parish of Holycross the P.P., Fr. John Dorroney, showed him some objects which remained from the great days of the Abbey, including an old mitre, a piece of a brass crosier, the manuscript of the Triumpahasia and a relic of the Holy Cross. The original manuscript chronicle of the Abbey, known as the Triumpahasia is now in the library of St. Patrick's College, Thurles.

THE WHITEBOYS.

The Whiteboys were a source of considerable trouble to Dr. James Butler I and his successor. The Whiteboy troubles seem to have begun in Tipperary during the winter of 1761-2. The principal grievances which gave rise to the formation of these secret societies were the enclosures of the common lands, increases in rents and the collection of tithes by ministers of the Established Church. Thus Arthur Young (Tour of Ireland, Vol. 1) says:

"The Whiteboys began in Tipperary and were owing to some inclosures of commons which they threw down, levelling the ditches. They were first known by the name of Levellers. After that they began with the tythe-proctors (who are men that hire tythes of the rectors), and these proctors either screwed the cottars up to the utmost shilling or re-let the tythes to such as did it. It was a common practice for them (the Whiteboys) to go in parties about the country, swearing many to be true to them and forcing them to join by menaces which they very often carried into execution. At last they set up to be general redressers of grievances; punished all obnoxious persons who advanced the value of lands, or hired farms over their heads, and having taken the administration of justice into their own hands, were not very exact in the distribution of it."

HANGING OF FR. SHEEHY.

The Grand Juries were active in prosecuting the Whiteboys. Three men were executed in Co. Tipperary at the summer assizes of 1762, three more at the spring assizes of 1763 and on March 16th, 1766. Father Nicholas Sheehy of Clogheen was hanged in Clonmel on a charge of murder in connexion with the Whiteboys. Father Sheehy's execution was followed by the hanging of three others on the same charge in Clogheen on May 3rd.

It is not surprising that the story of Father Sheehy should have become part of the folklore of County Tipperary.

Apart from the rights and wrongs of the trial itself and the fact that a priest suffered the death penalty, the people were roused to an extraordinary pitch of
excitement at the time. The Whiteboy movement was spoken of as a popish insurrection in favour of the Stuarts; it was rumoured that there was to be another war of 1641 and a general massacre of Protestants. During an election contest in 1761, between Thomas Mathew and Sir Thomas Maude of Dundrum, a story had gone the rounds regarding four French officers who had landed in the west of Ireland for the purpose of raising a rebellion during which all the Protestants in the kingdom would be massacred.

Off the bench, Maude and others hunted for Whiteboys as an alternative to hunting foxes. Indeed the Whiteboys had the worst of both worlds, for they were condemned as a secret society by the Church also. The Munster bishops condemned the society and in several cases the Whiteboys retaliated against priests who were active in condemning them. Their attitude to ecclesiastical authority will be mentioned again in connexion with Dr. James Butler II.

Towards the end of his life, Dr. James Butler 1st found it safe to live in a thatched cabin in the grounds of the present palace. His sight began to fail and in December, 1772, he asked to have Dr. James Butler of the Ballyragget family appointed as his coadjutor. The request was granted and on May 17th, 1774, Dr. Butler died in Thurles and was buried in the old chapel. His coadjutor and successor arrived in Thurles in September of that year.

DR. JAMES BUTLER II (1774—1791)

Archbishop James Butler II was the third son of James Butler, Esq., of Ballyragget and Frances Dillon, daughter of Robert Dillon of King Street, Dublin, Counsellor at Law. The future archbishop was born while his parents were on a visit to Dublin and was baptised in St. Mary's parish on 6th March, 1742. He died at Thurles on July 29th, 1791, thus falling far short of the octogenarian tradition of his predecessors.

The founder of the Ballyragget branch of the Butlers was the Hon. Edward Butler, son of the 4th Viscount Mountgarret. In 1689 he raised a regiment of dragoons in support of King James II and was appointed colonel of this regiment. For supporting the lost cause he was outlawed and was declared to have forfeited his estates, but the decree of forfeiture was not executed. His wife was Elizabeth Mathew, daughter of George Mathew of Thomastown. The archbishop was a great-grandson of Hon. Edward Butler and Elizabeth Mathew.

The archbishop was educated at Paris, Lille and St. Omer. He was ordained in the seminary chapel, St. Omer, on 25th May, 1771, and two years later on 4th July, 1773, he was consecrated bishop of Germanieopolis and coadjutor to the archbishop of Cashel, being then aged 31 years and 4 months. The postulation of Dr. James Butler I had been supported by Rev. Alban Butler, author of the Lives of the Saints and president of the college of St. Omer.

ARRIVAL IN THURLES.

Dr. Butler arrived in Thurles in September, 1774, as archbishop of Cashel and parish priest of Thurles. The parish priest of Thurles had died earlier in the year and the parish of Thurles was conferred on the new archbishop in August. In 1788 he succeeded to the family estates, having life use of the property in accordance with the will of his elder brother Robert. He reserved about £1,000 a year for his own use and left the management of the estate, and practically its
ownership, to his younger brother George. After George's death the estate passed to the Kavanaghs of Borris, Co. Carlow (McMorrough Kavanaghs). Dr. Butler was then a very wealthy man according to the standards of the time and out of his private means he built a new residence in Thurles. It was a plain, two-storey, brick house, but it was the first comfortable residence that an archbishop of Cashel enjoyed for two centuries. (Dr. Laffan, 1823-1833, added another storey to the palace, as well as the kitchen and library. Originally the palace was approached from East Main Street—now Cathedral Street—through Chapel Lane, that is from the present avenue gates of the palace along the boundary wall of the Presentation Convent. An entrance from Rossa Street at some point near the Monastery schools, was planned and hence the palace was faced north).

FAMOUS CATECHISM.

It would seem incongruous to include Dr. Butler's name among the famous writers of the 18th century, yet none of the famous men of his age produced a work which could rival the modest Catechism of Christian Doctrine issued under Dr. Butler's name, whether we judge by the modern criterion of sales and circulation or by the more fundamental criterion of usefulness and edification. Butler's Catechism soon became well known and was adopted in Dublin diocese as early as 1777; during the last century it formed the basis of the catechisms used in several English-speaking countries. The provision of Catholic education occupied Dr. Butler as it had his predecessors. In 1787 he introduced the Ursuline nuns to Thurles. The introduction of the Presentation nuns to Thurles may be traced to Dr. Butler also; a bequest of £2,000 left by Dr. Butler was used by Dr. Bray in the foundation of the Presentation Convent.

Dr. Butler was described by one who knew him well as "a very elegant little man in person and manners. No prelate was ever more revered and beloved." (Letter of J. Roche, Esq., Cork, to J. W. Hanna, Esq., apud Renehan, p.328). There are many other testimonies to the gentleness of his character and from the correspondence between himself and Dr. P. J. Plunkett, Bishop of Meath, he emerges as one of the most energetic and zealous prelates of his time and a faithful and sincere friend (Cogan, Diocese of Meath, Vol. iii). Half a century was to elapse before Catholic Emancipation reached the statute book but the active persecution from which the earlier Butler archbishops had suffered was now dead. Catholic relief acts were already being passed, containing such large concessions as the "Act for the reclaiming of unprofitable bogs" (1771), and the Act of 1774 which gave Catholics the legal right "to testify their loyalty and allegiance to His Majesty, and their abhorrence of certain doctrines impputed to them. Dr. Butler's episcopate, however, was by no means a comfortable one and his troubles arose mainly from those causes, the controversy regarding the Test Oath and the Whiteboys.

In July, 1775, the bishops of Munster met in Cork and issued a statement as follows: "We, the chiefs of the R.C. Clergy of the province of Munster, having met together near Cork have unanimously agreed that the oath of allegiance proposed by the act of parliament anno regni decimo tertio et quarto Georgii tertii regis, contains nothing contrary to the principles of the Roman Catholic Religion." This resolution gave rise to an unhappy controversy and Dr. Renehan says: "... nearly the whole of Dr. Butler's life after committing himself with regard to the test-oath, was a struggle against the difficulties that followed that imprudent step." The loyalty and good faith of the prelates who subscribed to the Cork resolution of 1775 could not be doubted, of course, and it would ill become those who live in more liberal days to criticise them for their readiness.
to accept the paltry concessions offered to them. (cfr. Irish Ecclesiastical Record, 1892, articles by Rev. T. R. Power and Rev. Ambrose Coleman, O.P. The history of the Test Oaths proposed to the English Catholics at a later period shows the action of the Munster bishops in a more favourable light, cfr. Ward: Dawn of the Catholic Revival in England, Vols. I and II). The test-oath produced disunion among the bishops for some time and led to some controversy between the regular and diocesan clergy. A pamphlet warfare was carried on against Dr. Butler by those who foresaw—correctly and with resentment—what would be the effect of the first breaches in the penal code. Oddly enough some of these pamphleteers accused Dr. Butler of being implicated in conspiracy and of exciting discontent among the people. To appreciate how odd this accusation was we must continue the story of the Whiteboys.

"SIEGE OF BALLYRAGGET"

Robert Butler, the archbishop's older brother, was a thoroughgoing loyalist and no lover of lawlessness and secret societies; it is said that his activity against the Whiteboys made him so unpopular that he went to England for safety. When the archbishop came to take possession of his see, his brother Robert was in England and trouble was brewing in Ballyragget. An anti-Whiteboy league was formed among the prominent people of the neighbourhood; the Government supplied the arms and encouraged the law-abiding to drill and the Whiteboys took up the challenge. In the following February (1775) they attacked Butler House in the town of Ballyragget (not the residence of the Butler family) and were driven back with loss of life. The “Leinster Journal” of February 25th, 1775, said: “The captain of the Whiteboys attempted to rally his scattered forces, but in vain, whereupon he took a book out of his pocket and swore he would return that night fortnight, and burn the whole town. In this attack several of these daring rioters were killed and wounded, who, it is supposed were carried away by the rest of the party, vast quantities of their blood having been traced along different roads” (apud Carrigan, vol. ii, p. 91). Notwithstanding its solemnity the captain’s threat was not fulfilled. The Whiteboys did not come back. Laments were composed in Irish and English following the “Siege of Ballyragget” and in the English version each stanza ended with the line “Cursed Ballyragget, that never gave man relief.”

It is not surprising then that Dr. Butler published a statement against the Whiteboys in 1775; in October of that year he issued a Pastoral in which he referred to “disturbances in that part of our diocese which lies about Fethard and Killenaule.”

DEFENCE AGAINST WHITEBOY ATTACK

The use of force and the existence of secret societies were most embarrassing at a time when the first legal concessions were being made to Catholics. The anti-Catholic pamphleteers were not slow to make use of this ready argument against concessions in favour of the religion of the majority. The bishops and clergy denounced the Whiteboys (then called also “Rightboys”) and the lawless ones retaliated. Dr. Butler contributed a book in his own defence, in which he gave a list of their violent actions, including insults to the bishops of Limerick and Killaloe, manhandling of Catholic priests and closing of chapels. The following quotation is inadequate but it may help to an understanding of his position:

It may be asked (for what may not be asked or said by those who have already said so much?) who were these (Titular) Bishops of Munster, that so anxiously stepped forward to defend their religious tenets, while all the rest of
the Catholic clergy in Ireland were tame spectators of the scene? . . . . But, lest, by dwelling on the active part, that I and my suffragens took in this business, it should seem that I meant to convey any oblique censure on the other (Titular) Prelates of Ireland, or, lest anything I said might be construed that way, it may be necessary to observe, that the Province of Munster was, at that time, much disturbed by Whiteboys; that the disturbances of these infatuated people were then, as the late disturbances have been, attributed to the Tenets of their religion—and that it was alleged that there were Popish Missionaries agitating them to insurrection, and French officers training them in discipline for the purpose of establishing slavery, popery, the Devil, the Pretender, the Inquisition, wooden shoes, and all that variety of mischiefs, by means of which, so many women and children have been frightened at the name of a Papist.” ("A Justification of the Tenets of the Roman Catholic Religion . . . by Doctor James Butler: Dublin: Printed by P. Byrne, No. 108, Grafton-st. MDCCLXXXVII").

The punctilious references to "Titular" bishops and the phrase "chiefs of the R.C. Clergy" recall the legislation against the use of ecclesiastical titles by Catholics.

Informations were lodged against Dr. Butler and some letters passed between him and the Attorney-General; it was a friendly correspondence, indeed there were those who considered that the Attorney-General was too affable in dealing with a Catholic prelate. It is interesting to note that cordial relations existed also between Dr. Butler and Dr. Agar, the Protestant Archbishop of Cashel. The attacks made on Dr. Butler do not seem to have worried him unduly. He referred to them in passing in some of his letters to Dr. Plunkett of Meath.

LAST ILLNESS

A letter written by Dr. Butler in January, 1790, refers to an illness from which he had recovered. In February, 1791, we find him in Dublin, writing to Dr. Plunkett and apparently as busy and as full of energy as ever. In July, however, he was undergoing his last illness. Father Edmund Cormick wrote from Thurles to Dr. Plunkett on July 23rd: "... I could delay no longer from imparting to your Lordship the melancholy news that in a few days he will be no more. A confirmed dropsy, accompanied by an unheard of violence of spasms in the stomach is the harbinger of his dissolution . . . ."

Then came a short note from Father Cormick:

"Thurles, Friday morning, Three o'clock. 29th July, 1791.

My ever dear Lord,

Our dearest Archbishop is no more. He died about half-an-hour since, and will be buried in Thurles. May the Lord comfort us.

I am your Lordship's most afflicted servant,

EDMUND CORMICK."

And Dr. Plunkett turned back the pages of his diary and made an entry:

"July 29th, 1791—Died this morning, at half-past two, Dr. Butler, Archbishop of Cashel."

BURIAL PLACES OF THE BUTLER ARCHBISHOPS

Dr. Christopher Butler was buried in Kilcash. The two Dr. Butlers who succeeded him were buried in the old chapel of Thurles and their remains now lie beneath the sanctuary in the Cathedral, under the choir stalls at the Gospel side according to the tradition of the late Canon Scully.