

BISHOP WEBB'S RENTAL OF THE LANDS OF THE DIOCESE OF LIMERICK, 1641.

George Webb, the compiler of the following account of the lands in the possession of the Protestant See of Limerick, was a native of Wiltshire and a Doctor of Divinity of Oxford. He was appointed Chaplain to Charles I., and while at Court had the reputation of being a 'person of strict life and conversation' and greatly distinguished for his preaching as well as the smoothness and elegance of his style. He was consecrated Protestant Bishop of Limerick in St. Patrick's Cathedral, 18th December, 1634.

He arrived in Limerick at a comparatively quiet period and devoted a great portion of his time and attention in recovering a considerable part of the church lands that had passed into secular hands by various devices.

The Confederate War commenced in 1641, and on the 18th May, 1642, a band of Insurgents, led by General Gerald Barry, Patrick Pursell, Croagh, Co. Limerick, Lord Roche, Lord Muskerry, Lord Castleconnell, Oliver Stephenson Dunmoylan; Sir Ed. Fitz Haris and Dominick Fanning Mayor of Limerick, appeared before the walls of Limerick and the citizens opened the gates to receive them. The Garrison was commanded by Captain George Courtney, a younger son of Sir William Courtney, of the house of Courtney, Earls of Devon, and consisted of sixty men of his company, twenty-eight warders and others to the number of two hundred retired to John's Castle, which they gallantly defended but were forced to surrender on the 22nd of June.

Dr. Webb retired with the army to the Castle where he remained during the siege, and died while the belligerents were arranging the terms of surrender. The following day, 23rd June, the Bishop was interred with every mark of respect in St. Munchin's Churchyard.

In the depositions (1) relating to the massacres of the period, which were taken in 1652, it is related by Ursula Lorry that after the Bishop had been buried some four or five days that he was dragged out of the grave, stripped of his shroud, and his body mutilated, as she was informed by his own children, it is strange, if the story were true, that the children, who were directly concerned, did not appear before the Commission and endeavour to have the perpetrators of such a barbarous outrage punished.

In medieval times the Bishops of Limerick held large manors like the lay Lords in the Diocese. We learn from the Rental (2) of Maurice de Rupeforte, Bishop of Limerick, which was compiled in the thirteenth year of Edward III., and other sources, that their names were Mungret, Kilmallock, Clonshire, Ardagh and Loughill.

The castles that were built on these manors contained a window of stone made in the manner of a cross, and was probably the window of the oratory. Bishop (3) Adams remarks that the formation of the window was a sure sign that the castle was ecclesiastical property, and used as an argument by him for the recovery of them. Bishop Webb calls the window in this document, now for the first time printed, 'a hole like to a crosse.'

During the civil and religious strife of the latter end of the sixteenth century the landed property of the See rapidly changed hands.

When they came into Dr. Webb's possession they were only a remnant of what they were in olden times.

(1) They are preserved in Trinity College.

(2) See Black Book, McCaffrey's Ed.

(3) See his Rental in P. Record Office, Dublin.

He compiled his rental in 1641. as there is mention in the margin of a lease of Tullybracci, which was made August 9th, 1608, for forty-one years, and there was still eight years to run.

The townlands of Ballyquoy and Tower o Deale are somewhat puzzling, but are explained by a map, also preserved in the Record Office, Dublin, which identifies them with Ballykeeffe and Dooradoyle in the parish of Mungret.

Dr. Webb remarks, on the information of a man of good account, that Bishop Lacy was deprived of the See at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. The reference must be to the manors, as he remained and was recognised as Bishop by the Government until 1571. Bruodin (4) confirms this view as he says Hugh Lacy was first deprived of his revenues and afterwards of the Bishopric.

The other details relative to the lands detained and the artifices adopted by those in high places, who were determined to squeeze their grip on them, may be best studied in the rental itself, which shows that some of the methods incidental to the late land war were well known and practised with success in the first half of the seventeenth century.

The Rental of Bishop Webb is preserved in the Public Record Office, Dublin, and well repays perusal.

(4) Propugnaculum, p. 429, also Murphy. Our Martyrs.
