

letters of this period that Paris, Bordeaux, Narbonne, Nantes and Rochelle were frequently visited by him in the course of his business. He was a tireless worker for the cause of his country and commanded the respect of all with whom he came in contact for his politeness and upright behaviour. His patience was sorely tried by the continuous waiting for promised help on the part of the French and of the Nuncio in France, and the refusal of Spain to send some help to his native land upset him greatly. In September, 1642, he had the joy of setting sail for Ireland accompanied by Preston and three hundred officers and men who were returning to fight for the homeland; the six ships in which they sailed were laden with powder and muskets procured mainly as a result of Baron's dogged insistence that France should provide Ireland with aid.

In 1643, it was proposed to the Supreme Council of the Confederation that Baron be made Secretary of State. This was not agreed to but in the same year he was appointed Treasurer to the Confederation. During the siege of Duncannon by Preston in the early months of 1645, he was present on behalf of the Supreme Council (one source says he was in charge of provisions) and wrote a diary of the siege which was afterwards translated into Latin and published by his brother, Father Bonaventure. In October, 1645, Baron was once more back in France as the representative of the Confederate Catholics. At Rochelle he met Rinuccini, who was slowly making his way towards Ireland, and gave him letters from Glamorgan with an assurance of a welcome on his arrival. In a letter to Cardinal Pamphili, Rinuccini refers to Baron's fine appearance, his politeness and his pleasing conversation. Later, Baron was to be an ardent supporter of the Nuncio. In 1647, he took an active part in the negotiations between the Confederates and Ormond, and in the following year seceded from the Supreme Council, of which he was a member, rather than agree to a peace with Inchiquin, which had been condemned by Rinuccini. When in the winter of 1649, Ormond and his Anglo-Irish troops tried to gain access to Waterford, Baron, who was then in that city, strenuously opposed their entry. He was also there in August, 1650, when the Ulster garrison unsuccessfully defended Waterford against Ireton, and was one of those who, on behalf of the defenders, signed the terms of surrender. On retiring from Waterford he proceeded to Limerick and used all his influence there to prolong the siege against Ireton. It is to Limerick, therefore, we must look for any further knowledge of Baron's activities.

Though this city cannot claim him as her own, yet she would do well to cherish his memory, as it was within her walls that he met a glorious death because of his sincere and unwavering devotion to faith and fatherland. For long weeks, Ireton and his soldiers did all in their power to reduce the defenders to submission. Baron was one of the leaders, who, amidst plague and dissension and great suffering, tirelessly urged on those within the walls to continue the fight rather than accept the terms of the besieging forces. These weeks of plague and suffering, coupled with base intrigue, proved what a sterling and steadfast character was Geoffrey Baron's. If he wished to make matters easy for himself he could have sided with the Ormondist faction and thus, perhaps, have saved his life. But being a man of high principle and having a clear conception of the vacillating and lop-sided mentality of Ormond, not alone at this

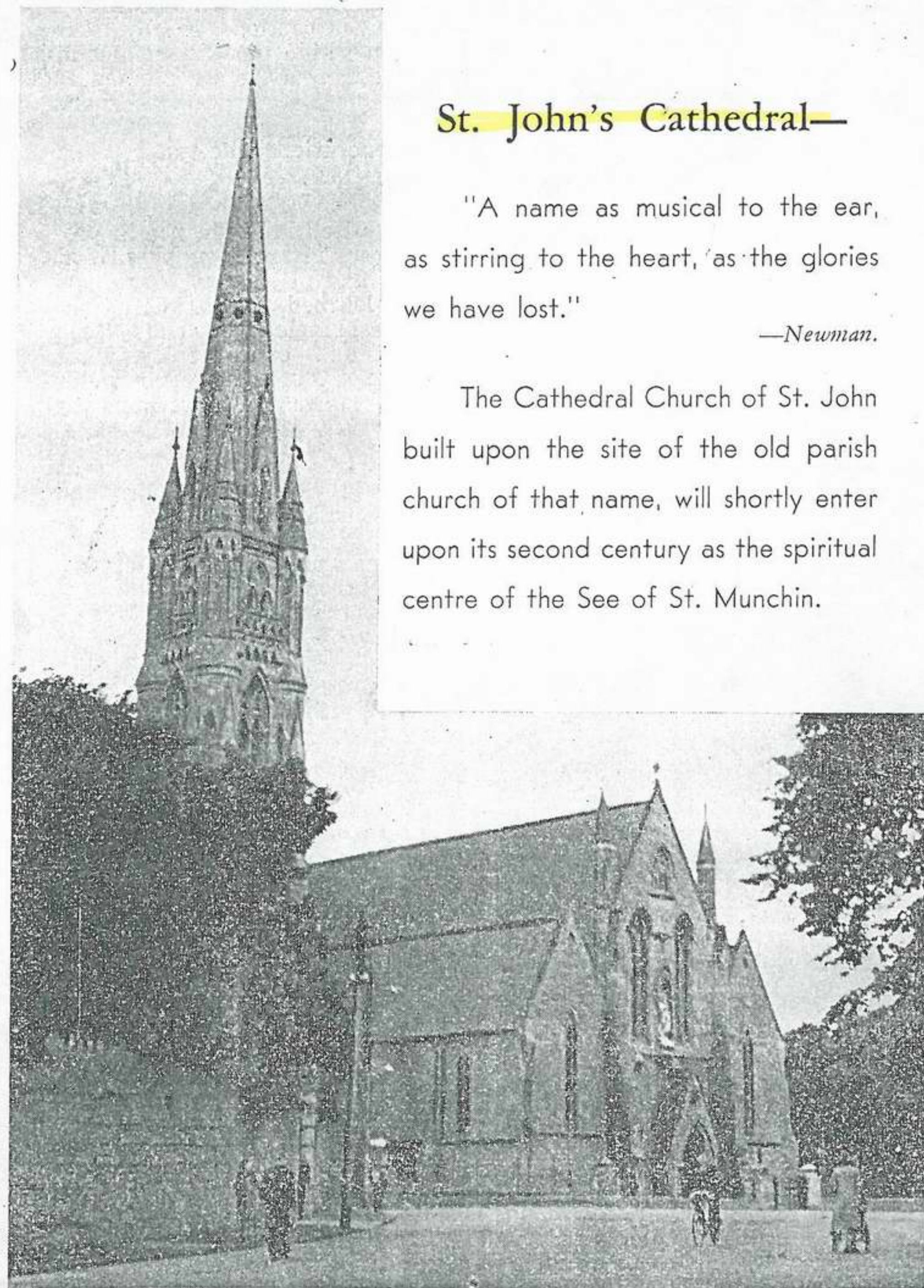
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St. John's Cathedral—

"A name as musical to the ear,
as stirring to the heart, as the glories
we have lost."

—Newman.

The Cathedral Church of St. John built upon the site of the old parish church of that name, will shortly enter upon its second century as the spiritual centre of the See of St. Munchin.



juncture but in the past as well, he decided to maintain his ideals in spite of many overtures from the opposite faction within the city walls. All the Limerick nobility with few exceptions, led by their temporising Mayor, had succumbed to some kind of a financial bait or some hope of future security and thus bartered the city's defences but Baron and certain other chosen souls decided to walk the hard road to martyrdom in order to keep faith with the real definition of faith and freedom as understood by the generations who suffered and died before them.

Ireton had a wholesome respect for Baron. He knew quite well how important this man was. He fully realised his influence in prolonging the defence of Limerick; he knew that Baron was present at the fighting in Duncannon and Waterford and of the part he played in these places on the Irish side; he had learned, too, of his ardent Catholicism and of his attachment to the Nuncio, Rinuccini. Such memories Ireton could not easily forget and, consequently, when Limerick finally surrendered, Baron was one of those whom Cromwell's son-in-law specifically excluded from the terms of agreement as worthy of mercy.

Two short but interesting accounts have come down to us regarding the circumstances surrounding Baron's last hours and execution. About 1686, John Baptist De Burgo published a work of three volumes in Italy, entitled *Viaggio di Cinque Anni in Asia, Africa ed Europa del Turco*, in the first volume of which between pages 94 and 98, he gives us the most detailed account we have of Baron's death. We may ask, what were the sources of De Burgo's information? He tells us himself: his brother, Captain David de Burgo, was in charge of a company of soldiers within Limerick City when the surrender took place and was a witness of Baron's execution, and what he saw he communicated to his brother, the author of the above work. The author got further information for his memoir from Father Bonaventure Baron, Geoffrey's brother, who was lecturer of theology in the Irish Franciscan College of St. Isidore, in Rome, when the account was written. The second account of Baron's death is to be found in Gilbert's edition of *A Contemporary History of Affairs in Ireland from 1641 to 1652*, volume III, part I, page 20. Both De Burgo and the author of the *Contemporary History* agree in many details concerning Geoffrey Baron's execution and the incidents leading up to it. From them and from a few other sources of less importance can be pieced together a fairly reliable account of Baron's last hours and death at Limerick.

When on October 29, 1651 (new style, November 8), Hugh O'Neill handed over the keys of the city to Henry Ireton, Baron surrendered himself almost immediately. He was kept under guard in the house of Thomas Comyn until Ireton and his officers were ready to pronounce sentence upon him. Having been brought before them, Baron was asked what he had to say for himself. To their questions he replied, that it was not just to exclude him from mercy as he had been engaged in the same cause as Ireton and his followers were fighting for, namely, the liberty and religion of his country. Ireton, in answer, said that Ireland was a conquered nation, and that the English, as conquerors, had every right to assert their powers as victors, and that the Irish who murdered and plundered those English who fell into their hands, had been treated far too leniently up to that time. Besides, he

added, as far as religion was concerned, there was a great difference between the Irish Catholics and the Cromwellians: the Cromwellians did not impose their religious opinions upon other men, while the Catholics were never satisfied unless all under them submitted to their impositions under pain of death. Ireton, it seems, felt very happy to be in such a position as to be able to tell Baron this to his face. He had been waiting for this opportunity for quite a while. The records say that he addressed Baron in such a burst of indignation and sarcasm that when he had concluded the Council of War had no option but to regard Ireton's reply as a complete refutation of what Baron had said and thus they duly condemned him to death. The condemned man was not in the least perturbed. He did not plead for mercy or humiliate himself to the dust by showing a cringing subservience to Ireton, as occurred in some instances. On the contrary, Geoffrey seemed to delight in such a sentence as his subsequent actions proved. On learning he was to die, he called to him his secretary, one Thomas Walsh, and asked him if he remembered an incident which happened at a hotel near Paris some years before when he was ambassador from the Confederate Catholics to the King of France. Walsh remembered the incident, and at Baron's request recounted it. "One day Baron had come to his hotel accompanied by many French gentlemen of rank. The owner of the place welcomed the Irish ambassador with every mark of respect, and then retired only to appear a little later with two assistants. One of them carried a silver basin, the other water, and the owner himself a towel which he tied about his waist and insisted on washing Baron's feet. A French nobleman in the company asked the owner the meaning of this ceremony, as it was not a custom prevalent in France, and the owner replied that he had a premonition that his guest would one day die as a martyr for his religion, and because of that, he wished to have the honour of washing his feet." When Walsh had recounted this significant incident Baron embraced him and gave him his blessing, as was customary with those who were condemned to die for the faith in Ireland. Many others, too, came to seek Baron's blessing.

As the hour of death was approaching, Baron asked permission of his guards to return to his lodgings. Accompanied by a guard, he was allowed to do so. He went to one of his rooms, opened a trunk and took forth some of his finest garmets, of which he had a most costly collection. One of them, valued at 500 scudi, he donated to a Capuchin priest, and then choose two in which he attired himself for his execution. First he donned an inner garment of scarlet hue and over it he put a suit of purest white. Thus attired in gorgeous red and white, the symbolic colours of martyrdom and innocence, he returned to the place of execution "so jocund in his behaviour and so careless of both execution and beholders that it was strange."

Such action on the part of Geoffrey Baron was somewhat singular and certainly out of the ordinary and it thus attracted much attention. This, I think, is the only incident of its kind on record in our long history of martyrdom but it only proves that the victim really understood and cherished the beauty of the death he was about to die. On being asked why he dressed thus for his death, he replied that if a man so dressed himself on his wedding morn why should not he, who was shortly to enjoy the eternal nuptials of heaven, dress sumptuously, too. As he went to the place of execution he carried his

rosary beads in his hands. It is said that about 20,000 people followed him in wonder and admiration, urged on, too, by a desire to hear the last words of this brave man.

Before Geoffrey ascended the scaffold, Ireton sent three emissaries to him, promising him his life if he renounced the Pope and dissociated himself from the Catholic cause in Ireland. Needless to say, Baron gave little heed to such a proposal, and asked them to proceed with his execution rather than insult him with such suggestions.

On reaching the gallows he mounted the eight steps and stood before the crowd radiant with joy and firm in the conviction that he was dying for his faith. He looked like a man glorious in triumph and his clothes and countenance were entirely out of keeping with his sombre surroundings, for Baron's mind was fixed on things eternal. Turning to the crowd this distinguished barrister gave his last speech:

"At last I have come to meet my death, a thing difficult and displeasing to others but sweet to me. I embrace it with my heart and thank His Divine Majesty, Who, apart from any merit of mine, has given me the grace of proving my constancy in my holy faith, left by Jesus Christ to St. Peter and to his successors on this earth, the Popes, including the Pontiff now reigning, Innocent X. Christ's Vicar on earth and our spiritual master. I thank God, too, for having given me this opportunity of declaring myself his unworthy servant, before this great multitude of Catholics and Protestants, and of dying solely for the holy faith of Christ. Neither Ireton nor anybody else can accuse me of any other crime than that of being constant in the true faith, loyal to this Catholic state, whose interests I have served with all truth and sincerity. To you here, who belong to the new religion, I declare that I was always loyal to the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman faith, in which I now die, and also to my king as opposed to Cromwell and his Parliament. I beseech all Catholics that they will of their charity say one Pater Noster and one Ave Maria for the happy passage of my soul from this world to the land of eternal glory, which God has promised to whomsoever despises his life and loses it for His honour."

These few words had an electrifying effect on the onlookers. When he had finished a great number of the assembled multitude was in tears, and Protestants were heard to declare that they wondered if salvation was to be found outside the church of which Baron was a member. All was now over and the hangman proceeded with his work. Shortly after the hanging, Geoffrey Baron's body was quartered and his head cut off and spiked on one of the gates of the city. Many took away pieces of his garments as cherished relics and some of the Catholics stole away the head by night and placed it to rest with the mutilated body. Where his body was buried is now unknown but it surely must have been in Limerick City, in consecrated soil. We are proud to think that his sacred dust still sanctifies our ancient town. Thus Geoffrey Baron died as he would have wished to die; noble and steadfast to the last was this barrister and politician, but, above all, this devout Catholic gentleman from Clonmel.

Little wonder he met death so joyfully. During his life he had daily recited the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, and daily, too, he heard at least one Mass. It was his custom to attend sermons frequently and he was to be seen regularly approaching the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. Not even his enemies could question his sincerity and straightforwardness in the service of his

religion and his country. Indeed, it is not surprising that he is numbered amongst those whose names have been sent to Rome for approval as being worthy of the honours of the altar.

To-day, I regret to say, little is heard of this martyr but his spiked head on one of the city gates just three hundred years ago reminds us that though the Siege of 1651 revealed to what depths the Irish character could descend, yet, in all his sombre picture and utter woe, so shining a spirit emerged to keep intact the ideals which redeemed us as a nation. The Siege of Limerick was worth while after all—if only to show us the calibre and the burning faith and tenacity of Geoffrey Baron.

THE ABOVE ARTICLE IS COMPILED FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:

- "Commentarius Rinuccinianus" (ed. Kavangh), 6 vols., Dublin, 1932-1949.
- "Report on Franciscan Manuscripts," Dublin, 1906.
- "History of the Irish Confederation and War in Ireland" (ed. Gilbert), 7 vols., Dublin, 1891.
- "A Contemporary History of Affairs in Ireland from 1641-1652" (ed. Gilbert), 5 vols., Dublin, 1879-1881.
- "Calendar of State Papers," Ireland: Charles I. (1633-1647).
- John Baptist De Burgo, "Viaggio di Cinque Anni," 3 vols., Milano s.a.
- C. P. Meehan, "The Rise and Fall of the Irish Franciscan Monasteries and Memoirs of the Irish Hierarchy in the 17th Century," ed. 5, Dublin, 1877.
- Rev. William P. Burke, "History of Clonmel," Waterford, 1907.

—F. ATHANASIOS.

DIOCESAN CLERGY OF THE CITY (1641-1651).

John Warren (alias Wareing and Vuarring): Dean of Limerick, 1632, July (Begley, II, p. 436). Dean of Limerick, May, 1642 (Begley II, p. 438). Dean of Limerick, 1648, June (Spicil. Ossor. I, p. 311).

Jordan Bourke: Archdeacon of Limerick, July, 1632 (Begley, II, 436). Archdeacon of Limerick, May, 1642 (ibid., 438).

John Creagh (S.T.D. & Notary Apostolic): Vicar-General of Limerick, 1630 (Begley, II, 470); postulated for as co-adjutor bishop, 1630, July (I.E.R., 1866); again postulated for by the clergy, 1632, July (ib.); again postulated for by the citizens, 1643, March (Begley, II, 536); Vicar-General, 1648, August (Begley, II, 460); went to Rome with the Bishop's RELATIO, March 26-August 2, 1649 (Archiv. Hib. V, 115-118) (with Rinuccini at Rouen, 1649, April: IV, 175, Comm. Rin.). He visited the holy shrines of Italy after August and returned to Rome, intending to spend his last days there (Begley, II, 470). At Rome, hearing of the death of Bishop Moloney of Killaloe in the 1651 siege, he applied for the vacancy, but unsuccessfully (Begley, II, 470). Created Papal chaplain (Comm. Rin., IV, 640, and Begley, II, 472). Died in Rome 1663, and buried in St. Isidore's. (He was brother of Mayor Peter Creagh fitzPeter).

Philip O'Dwyer: Brother of Bishop Edmund O'Dwyer. "Exempted from mercy" by Ireton, but died of the plague before surrender (Begley, II, 461).

Laurence Welsh: An army chaplain, executed by Ireton, Nov., 1651 (Gilbert "Affairs," III).

Philip Harrow: P.P. St. John's and St. Laurence; died July, 1643; entered Irish College, Salamanca, 1613 (Arch. Hib. II, 30); 2nd V.G., Limerick, in 1624 (Begley, III, 595); V.G. and P.P., St. John's, 1632 (I.E.R., 1866, and Begley, II, 436).

John Molony: P.P., St. John's, 1644, April (Begley, III, 595); petitioned as bishop of Killaloe, 1651 (Begley, II, 470), but unsuccessfully; Banished by Cromwellians and died abroad.