

THE PRIMATES OF IRELAND.

ONE of our old and very learned annalists gave it as his opinion, that no investigator of Irish antiquities does not touch solid ground till he comes to the times of Cimboath. In this opinion he is followed by many; but he would be followed by far more, if he were to say that since the days of Cimboath, a period of more than two thousand years, no historical field exhibited a greater number of avenues ending in intricate labyrinths than Ireland. Mystery shrouds the origin of many a custom in full force among us; and the moral Sphynx rests guarding many a memorial of the past.

We must not be understood as implying for a moment that the use of the term "Primate" in the Irish Church runs back to a dateless period; but we are inclined to believe that though there is no ecclesiastical dignity on which so much has been written as on the primatial dignity in Ireland, there is not another on which so little, generally speaking, is known with certainty. Happily, at present, we can coolly approach a subject which, once on a time, roused the most sluggish, and quickened the zeal of the calmest and holiest. Perhaps there are few who do not know that now there is no real primacy, and that there has not been for many years. All know that the Archbishop of Armagh is styled Primate of all Ireland, and the Archbishop of Dublin Primate of Ireland—a distinction without a difference. But all persons, in all likelihood, are not aware when and how this very impalpable distinction arose, and least of all are they aware that disputants who inherited a contest waged with intermittent fury for well-nigh 600 years, at last had to acquiesce in a decision founded, in all probability, on an unauthentic document drawn up by one of the rivals.

After a great deal of talk and lengthy correspondence during centuries on the subject, the Most Reverend Dr. Plunkett, Archbishop of Armagh, wrote a treatise in proof of its primacy over the Irish Church. A reply styled "Primacy of Dublin" came from its Archbishop, the Most Reverend Dr. Talbot. In the following century, in the year 1727, an octavo volume of moderate size entitled *Jus Primatiale Armacanum*, and indeed the

ablest defence of the Primacy of Armagh, came from the pen of i's Archbishop, the Most Reverend Dr. M'Mahon. The contents of these several treatises on the primacy, and the most striking details of the contests which it involve, are given concisely and clearly in the eighth chapter of Malone's Church history of Ireland. It has often been asked, was there ever a recognized primate in the Irish Church? The opinion of the learned author of *Hibernia Dominicana*,—as expressed in cap. i. num. xi. lit. a.—who outlived the faintest murmur of contention on the subject in the last century, is that the Archbishop of Armagh or of Dublin was neither acknowledged as primate, nor addressed as such, by Popes, the real sources of legitimate ecclesiastical jurisdiction and dignity, unless agreeably to the tenor of a document to which they replied, and whose wording they, as a matter of form, had borrowed. This opinion we must dissent from; and if we adopt any part of it, it must be with some modification.

Now, in the first place, the famous Fitz-Ralph, Archbishop of Armagh, owing to the poverty of the see, applied for the annexation of four benefices to his revenue. In yielding to his request, the Pope styles him "Primate of Ireland." This does not appear wonderful, because in the petition Fitz-Ralph very probably so styles himself; but it is exceedingly improbable that, if he spoke of his successors, he thought of styling them Primates of Ireland. And yet the Sovereign Pontiff styles them Primates (*Veter. Monum.* p. 295)

Again, Pope Clement V., in appointing Walter Joyce to the see of Armagh, calls him Primate of all Ireland (Theiner, 176). In doing so he was not repeating the words of a document in reference to the election, received from the chapter; for if I am rightly informed, he received no such document. There had been no need of writing to the Pope about the death of the last Archbishop, because he had died in Rome; there had been no need of getting information from the chapter of Armagh, relative to the merits of the future Archbishop, because he was brother to Thomas Joyce, Cardinal of St. Sabina; furthermore the Pope states that it was by provision he appointed to the vacant see, without mind.