

## ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF IRELAND.

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### CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY—MISSION OF PALLADIUS—SUPERSTITION OF THE IRISH BEFORE THEIR CONVERSION, &c.

INTERCOURSE with foreign nations is assigned as the medium which Providence employed in conveying the tidings of Redemption to Ireland; and as such intercourse rests on unquestioned authority, the simplicity of this hypothesis recommends it to attention. To determine, then, the precise time in which our Island has been enlightened with the heavenly light of faith, we have no means; nor is it matter of surprise, as the early history of Christianity in other countries is involved in similar obscurity, that in an Island into which the arms of the Romans never penetrated, a similar inconvenience should affect its ecclesiastical records. Tertullian informs us, that in his time the name of Christ reigned in places which Britons inhabited, and which the Romans did not explore. Eusebius even asserts, that some of the Apostles proceeded beyond the ocean to the British Isles, and Stillingfleet would maintain that St. Paul preached in Britain. Be this as it may, the annalists and ecclesiastical writers of our country do not claim it, the honor of having been visited by an Apostle, or by any of their immediate disciples. If, then, Irish Christians received the precious gift of faith from Apostles, we must suppose that they lived in foreign countries. In the wise and merciful economy of the new dispensation, it is remarkable that the nations which were first gladdened with the tidings of salvation, were by the bonds of commerce, or the influence of policy, linked with other distant regions; and hence an opportunity was given to persons interested in civil or commercial affairs to inquire into the origin of a religion, which miracles authenticated, and which the Deity sanctioned and approved in its wonderful propagation, despite the resistance of Paganism, and the storms of persecution, which the votaries of the ancient superstition had excited to extinguish it. Considering, then, the holy