

PREFACE.

To every lover of religion and of the country which gave him and his ancestors birth, lengthened prefatory observations are not necessary to recommend a work which furnishes him with the records of those holy and sanctified men, through whose labors the national church of Ireland has been nursed in its infancy, watched over as its growth advanced, invigorated in its adult state, adorned when in its splendor and when tried in the crucible, by whom the virginal faith of the Irish Church has been bequeathed, despite the efforts of persecution, pure and untainted as the virtue of Him who has redeemed us, by whom the sacred deposit of faith has been defended with their blood—that blood giving to the evergreen tree of faith the wholesome growth and vigor of life.

The Church of Ireland enjoying its season of calm during that early period of her existence, which may be called her Apostolic age, sainted missionaries went forth from her bosom to distant regions to raise the standard of the cross over the ruinous structures of error and superstition. Other countries, in the horrors of deadly strife and warfare consequent on the fall of the Roman Empire, religion and her handmaids, science and literature, found an asylum in the peaceful "Isle of the West," an isle into whose arms of the Romans never penetrated. But a season of continued tranquillity was not destined for the church of Ireland. She, too, had to endure tempestuous weather. The Danes, who were the enemies of progress, unceremoniously the light of faith shot its beams over their intellects, ravaged the country and devastated the shrines and sanctuaries of religion. Yet the incursions of those savage barbarians and their ruthless attacks on everything sacred have not been without their advantages to religion, as many of the ecclesiastics of Ireland having sought safety in foreign countries, rendered essential service to the people who inhabited those regions, and who by their genius, the purity of their lives, the example of their virtues, created an oasis in the desert of error and corruption. Mysterious indeed are the ways of Providence, which even lead the pagan and the robber to the very door of the sanctuary, in order that his conversion be effected. Though the Danes were frequently repulsed, yet their plundering disposition prompted a return to the shores of Ireland, until finally overthrown, their conquest to the faith and to the kingdom of God was effectually accomplished. Nay, even Olaf Trygvesson the king of Denmark and the royal apostle of that nation became a Christian in Ireland, while probably a captive.