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ANNUAL MEETING

RICHARD FITZRALPH OF DUNDALK.

By Rev. JAMES MACCAFFREY, Ph. D.

THE Annual General Meeting of the County Louth Archæological Society was held on Wednesday evening, 15th January, 1908, in the Free Library, Dundalk, before a large and appreciative audience,—Mrs. C. S. Whitworth, Vice-President, occupied the chair.

Dr. MacCaffrey came forward, and in the course of a very interesting address said—I feel it an honour, as it is indeed to me a real pleasure, to be present to-night. The Louth Archæological Society though young in years has already more than justified the most sanguine hopes of its organizers. By its publications, discussions, lectures, and excursions, it has already done much for the elucidation of the history and archæology of the county and district, and even now Louth can boast that they have in their midst a Society, which, judged by whatever standard one may care to apply, is fully equal to anything of its kind in Ireland.

Nor is it strange that this should be so. Louth can boast of peculiar historical associations which must ever awaken the interest of Irishmen, and claim the attention of all who are interested in the story of our country. Its legends, its historic tales, its monuments, its place-names, the records of the deeds done within its borders, and of the deeds done by Louthmen far beyond its borders, must always prove a fascinating subject for Irishmen, and particularly for Louthmen. Recalling as these associations do the story of the civilization and culture of Celtic Ireland long before Christianity had begun to influence the history of our country, bringing back to our

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minds the labours and preaching of St. Patrick and of his faithful disciple St. Mochta, the Danish invasions, the princely munificence of the Celt and the Norman alike, the later songs of war and bloodshed which has given the Boyne such a prominent place in our history, they are sufficient to make the history of Louth in a certain sense the minature history of Ireland.

It is my purpose to speak to you to-night on the life of a man whose ability, learning and influence have been justly appreciated long since by students of Middle Age history in Germany, England and America, while here in Ireland, the land of his birth, and the scene of his active and restless career, his name is almost unknown—I mean Richard Fitzralph, the distinguished Archbishop of Armagh.

It is specially fitting that this subject should be dealt with at a meeting of the Louth Archæological Society assembled at Dundalk. For it was here, in this very town, according to the most reliable authorities, that he was born; it was from this place he has taken the name by which he is best known to students of history, Richard of Dundalk; it was in this diocese of Armagh that he exercised his functions as Archbishop, and in the district, Dundalk, Drogheda and Trim he preached those sermons which remain to the present day models of pulpit oratory; it was here in Dundalk, after his death in exile, that his remains were reverently transported by De Valle, the bishop of Meath, and laid to rest in the old church of St. Nicholas; and it was round the tomb that the faithful people amongst whom he had laboured, and who knew him best, flocked in loving pilgrimage, and where the popular verdict had already accorded him a place in the Calendar of Saints, for here, as the old 17th century rhyme expresses it, it used to be said:

Many a mile have I gone,
And many did I walk,
But never saw a holier man
Than Richard of Dundalk.¹

It is nowadays generally accepted that Richard Fitzralph was born in Dundalk. It is true that some writers, relying on the authority of Prince,² here put forward the view that he was born in Devon, but the arguments in favour of Dundalk are so conclusive that we may safely neglect the probabilities which are urged in favour of Devon. In the first place, it is absolutely certain that one branch of the family of Fitzralph was settled in Ireland in the thirteenth century when Richard Fitzralph was born; while, in the second place, the very name by which he was known amongst his contemporaries—Richard of Dundalk—points to the fact that Dundalk was his birthplace, for, as is well known, it was the custom of the time, to call a man by the name of the town or district in which he was born.

This view is borne out by the distinct statements to that effect found in such reliable authorities as the *Chronicum Angliæ*,³ the *Annals of Ireland*,⁴ the *Cartularium* of St. Mary's, Dublin,⁵ and the *Annales Minorum* of Luke Wadding.

1. Prince, *Worthies of Devon*, p. 367.

2. *Idem* l.c., p. 364 ff.

3. P. 48.

4. Ad annum 1337.

5. Gilbert II., pp. 487-8.

It is, indeed, admitted that the tradition in favour of Dundalk as the birthplace of Fitzralph is almost universal ; and, therefore, against such a tradition very striking arguments should be advanced before it ought to be abandoned.

Now what are the arguments put forward by Prince and by those who support the claims of Devon ? They are principally the facts that the Fitzralphs were settled at Devon, that Fitzralph himself was educated at Oxford, that he was Commissary or Chancellor of the University, that he held the Archdeaconry of Lichfield, and, finally, that in his controversy with the Mendicant Friars he was supported principally by the bishops of England.

Now these statements, though they may seem to point to a close connexion with England, must appear of little value to anyone acquainted with the state of affairs in England and Ireland at the period at which Fitzralph was born. I have already pointed out that besides the Devonshire branch of the family of Fitzralph there was certainly another part of the family settled in Ireland in the thirteenth century,¹ and therefore the connexion of the family with Devon does not militate against Dundalk as the birthplace of the future archbishop.

That he was educated at Oxford we freely admit. But how does that prove that he was born in England ? A glance at the records of Oxford University at this time is sufficient to prove that many of our Irish students flocked there for their education ; and we can point to the names of several distinguished Irishmen who were at that time resident in its walls. Indeed, some of the older writers refer to the fact that it was customary for Irish students to go to Oxford, and it is this very reason which is advanced in Papal documents as an argument for the necessity of founding a University in Dublin.² Since, then, it was customary for Irish students to pursue their studies at Oxford, the fact that Fitzralph had been a student there, and afterwards a high official of the University, can hardly be accepted as a sufficient proof that he was born in England.

Nor is it strange that though an Irishman he should hold a benefice in England. Anyone who will take the trouble of examining the Papal Registers³ for the period will find many examples of Irishmen holding benefices in England, just as he will find many Englishmen or Italians holding benefices in Ireland. Nor is it difficult to understand why Fitzralph should have been so strongly supported by the English bishops in his controversy with the Mendicant Friars, since it was in England the grievances alleged against the Friars were most pressing, and Fitzralph on account of his associations and well recognised ability was regarded as the spokesman of the hierarchy in the British Islands.

Fitzralph was born about the end of the thirteenth century, and was sent to make his studies at Oxford. The University was then a busy centre of intellectual life. The Humanist movement had already begun to make its influence felt, while in philosophical and theological departments a sharp divergence of opinion on many points led to warm discussions between the professors and the supporters of the rival

1. I. E. R. Vol. I., p. 487.

2. Theiner's Monumenta.

3. Papal Registers (State Paper Series).

professors amongst the students. The philosophic theories that had been reduced to a definite system by St. Thomas, were not then universally accepted at Oxford. The Realists, as the supporters of St. Thomas were called, were warmly opposed by the Nominalists, the system generally favoured by the Franciscans.

Nor was this dispute a mere war of words as is often assumed and stated by those who have never taken the trouble of examining for themselves the works of a single Middle Age philosopher. It involved what must be for every educated man the central question of all philosophy—namely, the value of human knowledge; and it was in substance the very question which is being so warmly discussed to-day in the Universities of the world. The philosophers of the Middle Age may have been right or wrong, but one thing, at least, deserves to be recorded in their favour, and that is the fact that they grappled with the essential difficulties, and they endeavoured to give a consistent answer, and a consistent system.

Fitzralph, young and ardent as he was, naturally revelled in such a conflict. He threw himself into the controversy on the side of the Realists, and this early opposition to the Franciscan party may account in some measure for his subsequent attitude towards that body. He graduated at Oxford first as a Master of Arts, and afterwards as a Doctor of Theology. His career at Oxford did not end with his student days. He became a professor there, and as an old writer puts it, he was so versed in theology and the laws that the whole University flocked to his lectures as bees to a hive.¹

Later on, in the year 1333, he was appointed Chancellor of Oxford, though Wood claims that the records mention his name only as *Commissarius* or Vice-Chancellor. This apparent discrepancy can be explained by the fact that the Chancellor of the University had been before this time usually appointed by the Bishop of Lincoln, within whose jurisdiction the University was situated. But in the fourteenth century a movement had been on foot to secure that the Chancellor should be an academical and not an episcopal official.² The period was therefore a period of confusion between the two styles; and it is, therefore, quite intelligible that though Fitzralph had been appointed Chancellor of the University by the bishop his name might appear on the records of Oxford only as *Commissarius* or Vice-Chancellor. It is certain, at any rate, that in the year 1333 Fitzralph was appointed Chancellor of the Diocese of Lincoln,³ and later, Dean of Lichfield.⁴

The See of Armagh became vacant about the year 1346, and Fitzralph was selected by the unanimous vote of the Chapter of Armagh, and confirmed as Archbishop by Benedict XII.⁵ He was consecrated at Exeter on 13th July, 1347, and in the same year he received the pallium from the hands of the bishops of Ardagh and Cloyne who had been deputed by the Pope.

The time of the appointment of Fitzralph to Armagh was a troubled one in the religious and political world. In politics the Imperial views that had dominated

1. Leland. *Comm. de Script. Britt.*, p. 372.

2. Rashdall *Universities of Europe II.*, Part II., p. 364ff.

3. *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae I.*, p. 561.

4. *Anglia Saera I.* 443.

5. *Theiner Monumenta*, p. 288.

the statesmen of the Middle Ages were fast disappearing, and were being replaced by the spirit of Nationalism. The political power of the Popes, which had reached its highest point at the beginning of the thirteenth century under Innocent III. was rapidly on the wane, especially since the days of Boniface VIII. A spirit of scepticism and of opposition to current philosophical and theological views had already begun to threaten the religious unity of the western world, and even to question the very foundations on which the Christian system was hitherto supposed to have been based. The intercourse with the Saracens and the Jews brought about by the Crusading movements had exercised a dangerous influence upon many of the European centres of learning; and able defenders were required if the traditional philosophical and theological views were to be maintained.

It was in these difficult times that Richard Fitzralph received his appointment as Archbishop of Armagh. The Papal Brief declared him to be a man of prudence and foresight in temporal as well as spiritual matters, a description which was justified by his subsequent career as Archbishop.

Before his appointment to Armagh he had been specially remarkable as a preacher, and during the time he held the Archbishopric he preached often at Drogheda, Dundalk, Trim and London, and with such success that while he was on a visit to the Popes at Avignon in 1349 he was selected to preach before the Papal Court. The manuscripts of his sermons are happily preserved in the Libraries of Oxford, Cambridge, Trinity College, Dublin, and the British Museum. It is to be hoped that a day may come when they shall be given to the public. Most of the sermons are written on the same plan, and though like the generality of discourses at the time, a little too scholastic in form, yet they are never merely cold intellectual arguments, but full of life and spiritual unction.

With his work as Archbishop of Armagh this is not the place to deal; but there is one point which may well be touched upon. You are already aware that since the days of John Comyn, the first Norman Archbishop of Dublin, a dispute had been going between that See and Armagh regarding the Primatial rights in the Irish Church. The Archbishop of Armagh naturally claimed the Primacy as the successor of St. Patrick; while Dublin, having become the capital of the country, and the seat of government since the Norman Invasion, its Archbishop was unwilling to recognise the spiritual supremacy of Armagh. Popes and Kings had intervened on different occasions, at one time in favour of Armagh, at another in favour of Dublin, but still no definite settlement had been effected.

During the reign of Fitzralph as Archbishop the dispute broke out once more, this time with De Becknon, the archbishop of Dublin. In 1349 Edward III. sided with Fitzralph, but in the next year he changed his attitude and forbade Fitzralph to exercise Primatial rights within the confines of the See of Dublin. The King also appealed to the Pope at Avignon to uphold this prohibition. But Fitzralph was not daunted by such powerful opposition. He continued to exercise what he believed to have been his rights, and the case was carried to Avignon for an authoritative decision. Apparently no definite judgment was given, for the dispute continued to rage for centuries afterwards, but it is curious that in 1529 Allen, archbishop of

Dublin, states that he found a letter of Innocent VI. in Rome which decided that the archbishop of Armagh should be styled the Primate of All Ireland, while the archbishop of Dublin should bear the title of Primate of Ireland. Whatever about the authenticity of this letter—and its authenticity is not above suspicion—this is the origin of the present titles of the archbishops of Armagh and Dublin.¹

It is sometimes said that Fitzralph was appointed a Cardinal, and that he has the honour of being the first Cardinal in the See of Armagh. The authority for this statement is an Italian writer named Volterra,² and until comparatively recent times his statements were not supported by any other evidence. But since the publication of Theiner's *Monumenta*³ a new argument for this view has been found in the shape of a consistorial process relating to the diocese of Ardagh in the year 1517, in which Richard, the Cardinal archbishop of Armagh, is referred to as one of the glories of the Irish Church.

Unfortunately, however, in spite of these statements, we can hardly hope to sustain the claim of Fitzralph to the title of Cardinal. The very complete record of the College of Cardinals drawn up by Pauvinio and Ciaconnius in which no reference is made to Fitzralph, the absence of all reference to such an appointment in the other able works of the College of Cardinals, and especially the fact that in all the Papal documents of the period he is never once spoken of as Cardinal, make it clear that Volterra must have been mistaken. Nor is the additional testimony of the document given by Theiner of any weight with anyone who has examined the subject, as the portion of it referring to Fitzralph is a mere quotation from the book of Volterra. Hence it is of no more authority than the source from which it was borrowed.

Fitzralph, as I shall point out later on, was one of the most distinguished Scripture scholars of his age. He was selected by the Pope as the exponent of the position of the Western Church in its controversies with the Armenians, and as these rejected most of the arguments adduced from authority he was forced to rely mainly upon scriptural proofs, and in this sense he may be said to have initiated an entirely new style of conducting religious controversy. No man since his time has displayed a more complete and ready acquaintance with the Scriptures, the Old Testament as well as the New, as did Fitzralph, and no man more clearly recognised that in the changed circumstances of the time recourse must be had to new methods and lines of defence. It was he, too, who first amongst Scripture commentators strongly emphasised the view that the Holy Ghost did not shape the expression of the inspired writer, but that the Divine assistance merely guaranteed the substance of the sacred volumes.⁴

In connexion with his work on Scripture it has been often stated that Fitzralph translated the Bible into Irish. Fox, in his *Acts* and *Monuments*,⁵ testifies to the existence of the Irish translation, and adds that many Englishmen who were then alive had seen it. Bale also supports this view. It is said that Fitzralph had it

1. Wilkin's *Curelia* IV., p. 81ff. J. E. P. III. Series X, p. 422. IV. Series, VIII., p. 183.

2. *Comment Urban lib.* 3.

3. p. 521.

4. Kaulen *Geschichte der Vulgata*, p. 294.

5. II. 766.

attached to one of the walls of his church with the inscription : "*cum hic liber inventus fuerit veritas toti mundo manifestabitur vel Christus orbi non apparebit*,"¹ and that when some repairs were being made in the church in 1530 this Irish version was discovered.²

In the absence, however, of any reliable confirmation of this story, and in view of the fact that the translation of it ever existed must have quickly and completely disappeared, it is difficult to maintain that Fitzralph translated the Bible into Irish. The authorities for the story are not such as we could safely rely upon ; and, besides, it would be exceedingly strange that while so many of Fitzralph's works have been so carefully preserved his Irish version which would have been the most important of all should have completely disappeared, and have been forgotten.

During his period as archbishop he did his best to maintain peace between the Irish and Norman settlers. In 1348³ he received from the king full powers to make peace between the English and Irish, and later still, in 1355, when he was engaged on his archepiscopal visitation in the diocese of Meath, he was suddenly recalled to Dundalk by order of Edward III. in order to treat for terms with O'Neill, who was then advancing on Dundalk with a large force.⁴

In his visits to Avignon the learning and ability of Fitzralph attracted the favourable notice of the Pope, who was then engaged in an attempt to effect a re-union between the Eastern and Western Churches. Two distinguished Armenian prelates, Nerses of Melasgerd and John elect of Khilat, were at that time at Avignon, and Fitzralph was selected to confer with them, and to place before them the views of the Western Church.⁵ As the results showed, no better selection could have been made. He entered into a full discussion on all the points of difference between the two churches, and in connexion with this discussion he wrote his famous work, which is usually cited by title of the first book, "*Summa de erroribus Armenorum*."⁶ This work of Fitzralph's remains a standard authority on the subject till the present day. It covers the whole range of controversy with the Eastern sects ; and, besides, furnishes a notable defence of Christianity against the attacks of Jews and Mahomedans. It may seem strange that Fitzralph should have devoted so much attention to this subject, but anyone acquainted with the influence exercised in Christian centres of thought during the thirteenth century by the Jewish and Arabian philosophical literature, cannot be surprised that the archbishop of Armagh should have felt it necessary to attack their position.

But Fitzralph's most serious controversy was with the Mendicant Friars, especially with the Franciscans. The Mendicant Orders that sprang up in the thirteenth century were the natural outcome of the circumstances of their time. The old Feudal ideas had begun to pass away, to be replaced by a more democratic spirit. The Church had become deeply involved in the Feudal system, and, as a consequence, its influence with the lower classes was considerably endangered. The sectaries of the period were not slow to utilise their advantage ; and to meet them,

1. Fox. l.c. 766.

2. Ussher's Works XII. 345.

3. Ed. III., Cl. R. 29-30.

4. Pat 29 Ed. III.

5. Bellesheim gesch. der Kirche in Irland, I 525.

6. Edited by John Sudoris, and published in Paris, 1511.

it was felt that a body of clergymen were required who would be as poor as their critics, who would labour amongst the people, and depend for their existence on the charity of the faithful. This led to the establishment of the Mendicant Orders. The Franciscans, according to the will of their founder, were to have no property in lands or houses; their only support should be the alms of the people amongst whom they laboured.

With the disappearance of the circumstances which had called the Mendicant Orders into existence, the principles which underlay the rules of their order, especially the principle of poverty, were questioned by clever opponents. The fact that in many places, in the University as well as in the pulpit, the Mendicants had supplanted the Secular Clergy tended to increase this opposition. In England the movement was particularly strong, and Fitzralph on account of his ability, learning, and position, was looked to as a leader by the opponents of the Mendicants. In 1349 he was commissioned by the English clergy to bring the matter before the Pope at Avignon. He presented a memorial in 1350,¹ and was urged by one of the Cardinals to undertake a thorough examination of the principles of the Mendicant institutions. This treatise was completed about the year 1353, and is known under the title "*De Pauperie Salvatoris*." This work consists of seven books, the first four of which were published by Poole in his edition of Wycliffe's "*De Dominio Divino*."² It is evident from a glance at the work that Wycliffe owed many of his ideas to the treatise of Fitzralph, especially his ideas upon the relation between grace and ownership. Ownership, according to him, was founded by divine grace, and the sinner, therefore, lost all title to ownership by his sin.

In 1356 Fitzralph went to London on business, and while there was invited by the opponents of the Mendicants to expound his views on the whole controversy. In response to this invitation he preached a course of seven or eight sermons in English in which are embodied his famous nine conclusions against the poverty of the Mendicant Orders. The Franciscans promptly appealed to the Pope, and Fitzralph was summoned to explain or defend his theories. He went to Avignon in 1357, and gave a long exposition of his views in a work entitled "*Defensorium Curatorum*."³ It should be noted that on his arrival at Avignon he made it clear that he did not wish to defend any thesis opposed to the doctrine of the Catholic Church; and that, though he had attacked the Mendicants, he never desired the total suppression of the Orders, but only that they should be reformed. For three years he remained at Avignon while his case was under discussion, and though no official decision was ever given, the opponents of Fitzralph seem to have triumphed.

In 1360, according to the best authorities, Fitzralph died at Avignon,⁴ though Wadding, in his "*Annales Minorum*," states that he returned from Avignon and died in Belgium. Ten years later De Valle, bishop of Meath, brought back his remains to Dundalk, and deposited them in the old church of St. Nicholas.⁵ The memory of his works and of the sanctity of his life was strong in Dundalk, and the

1. MS. Bodleian Library.

2. London, 1890.

3. Edited, Lyons, 1496.; also in Goldhast's *Monarchia S. Rom. Imp.*, Frankfort, 1614.

4. Gilbert's *Chartularies* II. 393. Ware-Harris I. 83.

5. Ussher wrote to Camden, 30th Oct., 1606, that the monument to Fitzralph had been defaced by the soldiers.

people flocked in pilgrimage to his tomb. He was generally revered as a saint, and people themselves began to refer to him, as St. Richard of Dundalk. Moved by the representations made to him from Ireland Boniface IX. appointed a commission, the president of which was Primate Colton of Armagh, to inquire into his claims for canonisation. The result of the process is not known, but Fitzralph continued to be regarded as a saint.¹ At a meeting held at Drogheda in 1545 it was ordered that the Feast of St. Richard of Dundalk should be observed on the morrow of SS. John and Paul (27th June).² As late as the seventeenth century Paul Harris tells us that Fitzralph was commonly spoken of as St. Richard of Dundalk.³ Three of his works, "*Defensorium Curatorum*," "*De Pauperie Salvatoris*," and the "*Summa in questionibus Armenorum*" have been published. But the greater part of his writings are still buried in the manuscripts in the Libraries of Oxford, Cambridge, the British Museum, and Trinity College, Dublin. Had Fitzralph belonged to any other country his works would long since have been carefully edited, and his name would have been inscribed on the roll of the national scholars. Let us hope that the rise and development of associations such as yours, will do much to remedy the neglect and the labours of our own countrymen.

In a lecture like this I can refer only to the leading events of Fitzralph's brilliant career. But I have said enough to stimulate your interest in a great Irishman, one of your own county and your own town. Perhaps some of you may find time to undertake further investigation of the subject. Fitzralph lived at a critical period in the history of the world. The Middle Ages and their ideals were passing away to make room for new developments of thought. It was a time of change and unrest. The old and the new were in deadly conflict. Many brilliant men took part in the transition struggle, but no more remarkable figure appeared, and no man exercised a greater influence on his own generation than did Richard Fitzralph, Richard of Dundalk.

1. Ware-Harris I. 83.

2. Lives of the Irish Saints I. 528.

3. Admonition to the Fryars of Ireland, pp. 15, 34.

