

THE ROMANCE OF CAHERELLY CASTLE.

BY JAMES GRENE BARRY.

INTRODUCTION.

Fitzgerald in his "History of Limerick" (p. 284), states that "in the reign of Charles I., there was not a gentleman living between Ballynagarde and O'Brien's Bridge that was not a Bourke, except Hynes of Caherelly Castle, and Clanchy of Ballyvorreen." Now, both Hynes and Clanchy got their estates through intermarriage with the Bourkes. The following story told me several years ago, by old John Hynes, who was then over eighty years of age, and who heard it from his father, relates the way Hynes got Caherelly. Mr. Westropp in his "Ancient Castles of the County Limerick," records fifty-six Castles in Clanwilliam, practically all belonging to the Bourkes. The O'Heyne (Hynes) were a powerful clan whose territory extended along Galway Bay, adjoining the O'Shaughnessy's country. That the following romance is founded on fact there can be no doubt, and documents in the Record Office show that William, the last Bourke of Caherelly, died there in 1583, and that his successor, Teige O'Heyne, died there in 1599. Teige's son, Conor, died in 1622, and his sons or grandsons, Teige and Donal, had possession of Caherelly East and West in Cromwell's time, when their castles and lands, about 1200 Irish acres, were granted to Sir W. King. According to the Furnell papers, Surgeon Owen Connory was in occupation of Caherelly West in 1677. He sold to Patrick Furnell, who died in 1750, and whose "table" tomb is to be seen in Caherelly graveyard.

As the Friary of Ballynabratherbeg was granted to Rob. Brown in 1544, the date of the romance must be before that year, so we have the very remarkable fact that, for some 350 years this story has come down from father to son.

THE ROMANCE.

“ Long ago in the time of the great wars, one William Bourke lived at Caherelly Castle. The Bourkes, by all accounts, were big men in the county in those days, and William, of Caherelly, was related to the biggest of them.

“ Whatever the cause was they took sides against the Desmonds. Now, the Camoge River was the boundary between the country of the Bourkes and the Fitzgeralds, and Caherelly Castle was the nearest to the stronghold of the Fitzgeralds, at Loughgur, only two-and-a-half miles away, across the ford of *Ath-fhada*, now Longford Bridge.

“ William Bourke, was a great fighting man, and had lost his two sons in the wars, leaving him with an only daughter, as likely a young maid as there was to be found within the ‘four walls’ of Ireland. Now, in the old times it was the custom for Connachtmen to come into Munster for learning the classics. They were known as ‘poor scholars,’ and travelled from monastery to monastery picking up the learning from the monks, and by teaching the children of the gentry, got their board and lodging free. One, Teige O’Heyne, a poor scholar, who had found his way from Galway to the friars of Ballynabratherbeg, now Friarstown, on the banks of the Camoge, was at this time living in Caherelly, and teaching the young mistress. He was, by all accounts, a quiet, well-featured young man, who spent all his time over his books. Now, it happened in the autumn of the year, the master and his followers were called away, with the Bourkes of Ballynagarde, Ludden, and Caherconlish, to help their kinsman of Castleconnell, in a quarrel with the O’Briens, of Thomond. Everybody knows that the lands of Caherelly are prime for fattening, and William left after him as fine ‘a bunch’ of fat bullocks as you would find in a day’s walk. Now, the Fitzgeralds were noted robbers, and used to drive cattle of their neighbours whenever they got the chance ; but, at this time, they had gone on a raiding expedition into the Roche country beyond the Galtees, and Bourke thought his fat bullocks were safe for the few days he and his men would be away. It happened, however, that the Fitzgeralds came back ‘empty-handed’ to Loughgur the night after Bourke left home, and such a chance of ‘lifting’ Bourke’s bullocks was not to be lost.

“In the early morning the old watchman who was left behind to guard the women, saw, from the battlements of the castle, a body of horsemen making their way across the moory lands at Coole, that separated the castle from the Long ford. He ran down the stairs shouting to the great hall where ‘the woman of the house’ was, and gave the alarm, crying out: ‘Seven of the Fitzgeralds are close by to drive the master’s cattle, and all the men are away. What is to be done? The mistress said: ‘Sure we must do something to save the cattle; there is my riding mare and the plough garrons, if we had only the men.’ At that moment the two old herdsmen rushed in with Shaunbuoy, the dog-boy. The old servant said: ‘Mistress, if we only had a good man to lead us we might yet stop them at the ford.’ Now, the poor scholar was in the window seat, poring over his book, and never lifted his head. The ‘woman of the house’ turned on him with ‘a bitter tongue’ saying: ‘If you were a man and not the making of a monk, you would not sit there and see the master’s cattle lifted before your eyes without a blow struck.’ The poor scholar answered: ‘I am not used to fighting, but I learned to use a sword before now in my own county, and what is worth spilling blood for, is worth the asking.’ Then the mistress, with soft words and blessings, asked him to lead the men, and that he should have her own riding mare and the best arms in the hall. Well, the three old men, the boy and the scholar, armed and mounted, and he led them round under Knockcorragh, to a ford known to himself, under Cahercorny church, and making their way with difficulty through the meadows, and up the craggy slope where the ruins of the old court are now, hid themselves in a clump of trees over Long ford at the Loughgur side.

“Now, in those days, it was not possible to drive heavy cattle across the fields as the low lying lands were deep and marshy, and there was a pretty big stream then flowing between Ballybricken and Ballyblake into the Camoge, so the Fitzgeralds had to drive the bullocks along *Boherduff*, and west across *Ahavackic* (the cripples’ ford), until they met *Boherliagan*, on the high ground leading straight to Long ford. This ford was pretty deep and nearly a hundred yards across. When the robbers, with the cattle driven before them with the points of their swords, were in the middle of the ford, my bold scholar drew out his

men from the trees, and clapping spurs to their horses galloped in a body down the slope into the ford, shouting 'Garach-aboo,' the war cry of the Bourkes, and halloaing to frighten the cattle. When the horsemen came suddenly upon them there was great scattering of the cattle, and the robbers trying to drive them across and get on their own side, so the men in the ford were taken at a great disadvantage, and two of them were overthrown by the force of the charging horsemen, and the rush back of the frightened cattle. The scholar, with one sweep of his sword, cut off the head of the leader who was unhorsed, and, to make a long story short, three of the robbers were killed in the ford, and another wounded, who, with the three left, made for Loughgur as hard as they could gallop, never crying halt until they reached Knockadoon, leaving the cattle behind. There was, I can tell you, great rejoicing when the scholar and his men returned without a wound among them or a beast missing. Nothing was too good for the brave scholar, who planned and carried out the ambush so well. When the master heard the story next day on his return, he insisted that the scholar should stay on at Caherelly like one of the family. Nor was the young mistress behindhand in her thanks, and they became great friends, and used take walks together along the river and through the woods, and learned many things that were not to be found in the scholar's books, so that in time they became lovers. Now the Bourkes were a proud race, and they did not consider a poor scholar from Connacht a fit match for their daughter, as she was intended for young Bourke of Ballynagarde. So the scholar was sent back to the Friars, and the lovers were separated; but, no doubt, they often met on the sunny side of *Knockatighaun* over there, overlooking the Friary. After a time, when William found his daughter pining after the scholar, and that she would not marry young Bourke, he sent for him and agreed to give him his daughter if, at the end of a year and a day, she was not married among her own people. So, Teige O'Heyne went back to his people, who were a good old stock in their own country. Bourke took his daughter about among his friends, and there were all sorts of amusements got up for her, as all the young blades in the county were courting the rich heiress; but, all was of no use, she stuck to her 'poor scholar,' and would have none of them. So when Teige returned, there was nothing for Bourke to do,

as he was a man of his word, but to consent to their marriage, and married they were in due course, in St. Aille's Church close by; and, by all accounts lived happy, and left many children after them. So that was the way O'Heyne got Caherelly."

The scribe said: "Well, John, and how did they lose Caherelly?" "Sure everyone knows 'twas that noted thief Cromwell, who ruined all the castles in the country that belonged to the old stock, and gave the lands to his soldiers. It was 'Hell or Connacht' for them."

"Well, what happened O'Heyne of Caherelly?" "Cromwell gave the castle and lands to one of his soldiers, who afterwards sold it to the Furnells, who own it now, and O'Heyne went with all the dacent people to Connacht, and left the other place free to Cromwell and his soldiers."

NOTE.—There were two Castles at Caherelly—Caherelly W. still standing, was built on a gentle slope, over what was formerly a small lake, and some three hundred yards west of the church. Caherelly E. was commonly called "the black castle," and has long since disappeared. Its site was half a mile to the East of the church. The west castle was repaired and roofed by the late Mr. Michael Furnell, D.L., some sixty years ago, and is still in a good state of preservation.—Ordnance Sheet No. 23, Co. Limerick.