

REVIEW.

“ST. MARY’S CATHEDRAL, LIMERICK.” *

Readers of the Field Club Journal are already familiar with Rev. Mr. Dowd’s contributions on the subject of Limerick history and archæology. The present work, though modestly styled a sketch, is more comprehensive than the limits of that description would indicate, and in matter and execution it is a worthy successor to Mr. Dowd’s previous publications—“Limerick and its Sieges” and “Round about the County of Limerick”—both of which won the praise of discriminating criticism. The method adopted by Mr. Dowd, in this as in the books just quoted, shows that he possesses the true instinct of the historian. Patient and penetrating in arriving at facts, he narrates them in the most unbiassed spirit, which is the rightful office of the historian ; and added to this is a gracefulness of literary execution that unfailingly awakens the interest and sustains the sympathy of the reader. Indeed, it is an apt judgment to say of Mr. Dowd’s books that they are always distinguished by the particular merits of good history and good English, two qualities rarely found in combination, and as often marked by their total absence as by the pre-eminence of one above the other. Always governed by a truthful regard for statements of fact, Mr. Dowd writes with a natural clearness that is the virtue of the best composition ; and to those desirous of cultivating, side by side with a knowledge of history and archæology, the invaluable facility of clear expression, no better models could be presented than Mr. Dowd’s books. “St. Mary’s Cathedral” is well written ; so is “Limerick and its Sieges” and “Round about the County of Limerick.” In all three there are passages in abundance, than which no better are to be found in the works of the best masters in the language.

St. Mary’s Cathedral is unique in respect to its foundation. There may be some older churches in Ireland, but of none probably can it be

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said, as of St. Mary's, that it was the gift of royalty to religion. Its founder, Donald Mor O'Brien, exercised kingly sway over Limerick, and despite the continual conflicts which distinguished his reign, he found time, as Mr. Dowd tells us, to establish churches and abbeys in many parts of his dominions. Not only is the Cathedral of Limerick a monument of his piety and liberality to the Church, but the abbeys of Cashel, Clare, Suir, Inchicronan, Corcomroe, Holy Cross, and Conan Island, though now in ruins, all bear witness to the religious zeal of the last King of Limerick. The site of the Cathedral had been the centre of the civic and religious life of the Danish colony, which formed the nucleus of the City of Limerick ; and when the O'Briens deserted Kincora, and when the old Paganism had lost much of its hold, the palace of the Kings of Munster was erected on the spot, and later this was the site Donald assigned for the Cathedral, which was destined to be his most enduring memorial. "The History of St. Mary's Cathedral," in reference to the building itself, covers a period of about seven hundred years. The date of its foundation by Donald is fixed at 1172. There is thus a great interval of actuality in the building itself, and associated with it is the record of stirring events which have marked the intervening centuries down to the present time. Mr. Dowd, however, widens the historical development proper of the Cathedral by taking the reader back far anterior to the time of its founding, and giving him a sketch of the earlier ecclesiastical history of Limerick, and thus provides a sequence of events from a very remote period to a comparatively recent date in our own nineteenth century. By this arrangement Mr. Dowd has supplied a continuation of most readable chapters. The first is devoted to the state of Christianity in Limerick previous to the foundation of St. Mary's Cathedral. The next gives the history of the Cathedral from the foundation to the Reformation period. The third gives the history since the Reformation period, and the fourth is devoted to a description of the building at present. The merit of this arrangement is, that each chapter covers a specific period in the history of the Cathedral, and to each is assigned a very comprehensive statement of events within that period.

In the first three chapters there is amplified historical detail, which exhibits great research, and places before the reader information at first hand, divested of the archaic style that distinguishes early records, but without the slightest divergence from facts. The sub-divisions of each

chapter show the variety of information brought together. The first chapter, in dealing with the origin and growth of Christianity in Limerick, gives a *resume* of the events of St. Patrick's visit to the district. Sites are identified as associated with the work of the Saint, of which the ruined church of Donoghmore is ascribed by good authority to belong to this period; and in Singland and St. Patrick's Well we have traditions of the Saint's visit, and also in the founding of Mungret, and of his blessing of the territories around Limerick to the west and the north, and his prophecy of the founding of Scattery. A few instructive pages are given to Limerick and St. Munchin; the founding of the city by the Danes, and their conversion to Christianity; the succession of Bishops, commencing with Gille or Gilbert, in the twelfth century, and extending to Briccius, whose episcopacy was marked by events of the highest importance, both as affecting the City of Limerick and the fate of the kingdom at large. Now arose Donald Mor O'Brien and the struggles with the Normans, against whom Donald led his last campaign in 1192, and died in 1194, after a reign of twenty-six years of almost continual conflict, in which, however, as already stated, he found time to establish churches and abbeys in many parts of his dominions. The founding of the Cathedral was amongst these works. The second chapter deals generously with the successive efforts to bring the Cathedral to a finished state, and which efforts left it complete in its structure, beautiful in its decoration, and perfect in its details, on the eve of impending mighty changes. With this portion of the history of the Cathedral is inseparably associated the name of Bishop O'Dea and the Arthur family, the name of the latter being still preserved in the portion of the city known as Arthur's Quay.

The third chapter continues the narrative of events very much interwoven with the general history of the country, but connected with the Cathedral because of the part religion played in the contests of the time. Out of the havoc thus wrought commenced a period of restoration that has extended almost to the present time, and during which nothing has been left undone to preserve the fabric of this remarkable and historic building, whilst the work of beautifying the interior has been continuously carried on at the same time, so that it can with truth be said that the structure will now be handed down to future generations as sound as when it left the hands of its original builders.

Chapter four is an invaluable archæological guide to the interior of the Cathedral. This portion of the book, more than any other, exhibits the minute care devoted by Rev. Mr. Dowd to the execution of his task. Proceeding round the circuit of the interior in the direction of the hands of a watch, every portion of the building, with its monuments and antiquities, is described with a minuteness of detail which could only come from the most painstaking interest in this remarkable temple. It is impossible not to appreciate the exceptionally interesting style in which Mr. Dowd has performed this portion of his work, particularly because of the obscure and technical material he had to work upon. The chapter deals with the tower, the beautiful Romanesque doorway directly under the tower, the Arthur Chapel, King Donald's monument, the statue of Bishop Jebb, the Thomond monument, the Galwey and Budestone monuments, St. George's Chapel, the carved Misereres, and the bells and tower. Any detailed references to these and the numerous other antiquities in the Cathedral, as well as the deciphering of the inscriptions, many in Latin, and others in old English, on the monuments, would inadequately convey an idea of the completeness of this portion of Mr. Dowd's book without a personal inspection of the interior of the building, aided by Mr. Dowd's descriptive pages. Indeed, one cannot entertain the suggestion of even the casual visitor, much less the archæologist, visiting the Cathedral without the accompaniment of Mr. Dowd's book. The whole interest in the magnificent pile and its antiquities is lost without a knowledge of the historical and antiquarian detail which Rev. Mr. Dowd has supplied in this most interesting publication. Photographs of the more remarkable memorials, by Rev. W. Bentley and Dr. George Fogerty, enhance the book, which is excellently brought out by the publishers, Messrs. McKern & Sons, Limerick, in two styles—cloth, 2/6, and board, 1/6.

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