Reviews of Books.


With this Volume Professor Curtis brings his edition of the Mss. in Kilkenny Castle down to 1564. Another Volume now in preparation will conclude the series to 1569, leaving, however, more or less untouched, the large amount of 17th and 18th century material in the same repository. The general reader will hardly appreciate the amount of skilled labour which has been necessary to get these volumes into print. They have had to be read from a variety of mediaeval scripts in three languages, transcribed and often translated, while the proof reading and the preparation of the Index were each of itself a vast and detailed piece of work. The results so far achieved, however are such, that one can say without hesitation that the series constitute the most valuable contribution to the materials for Irish mediaeval history in its most intimate and most interesting aspects which have ever been given to us. The present volume contains 372 documents of the most varied kind, preceded by an introduction in which the editor discusses their general import and leaves us as well a valuable pedigree of the Desmond and Ormond dynasties around which most of the material in the volume is woven. Any review of the material itself would require an extended paper. Here it can only be written that the local historians of Munster will find a quarry of almost unlimited extent and variety. For example, from the papers in this volume alone it ought to be possible to reconstruct a most detailed survey and history of the County Kilkenny and of the town of Callan which would be most valuable to the general historical of this difficult 16th century. In addition there is a vast quantity of material for the history of Carlow, Wicklow, Tipperary, and some items dealing with Limerick, Clare, and Meath. Genealogists will discover information of much use in elucidating family problems. The occurrence of the name "Cormacan" in Carlow at this time for example, may help in the tracing of the connection between the MacCormans of Cahermurry in Coora balsacain and their progenitors in Carlow, or of the now extinct form "Cormacan," which occurs in the early clergy lists of Killala diocese in the Troica Ced Ui Mhloic. For readers of this Journal there is much material dealing with the Abbey of Owney and the O’Muirains and the fate of the Abbey lands after the dissolution. There are references to the Priests of Limerick, to its Mayor, and to some of its clergy, as well as to the adwoysions of some of its churches after the dissolution of the monasteries. There is, in addition, a précis of the will of Mr. James Goghe (Gough) made in 1653 in London in the presence of Sir (i.e., the Revd.) Denis Cahissie, Chancellor of of Limerick, and Mr. John Neylans, Physician, of Limerick, while all three were in the train of the Earl of Desmond. The references to Clare include one to a Mr. Dowly (Dooley) of "Tyrconnal," Co. Clare—a place which escaped the Indexer and which is not easy to identify. There is also a reference to the O’Briens of Annaghmore (Clonlara), part of the property of Athassel Abbey, which appears in the 1314 Taxation and has been wrongly identified by Westropp as Neagh. It will also be found in Thomond in the ‘Composicion Book of Connaught.’ For the Ormond area of North Tipperary the references in the Taxation are numerous and of great interest. The two Mac An Gown Brecon Law Deeds are a find of the greatest interest, as are some of the native O’Kennedy Deeds prepared according to Irish law and signed in Gaelic script. It may be noted that the form “Mac An Gabhann” for this family given by the papers must seem to open to some doubt. The modern form in Lower Ormond is ‘Guinane,’ but in the Civil Survey and in earlier sources a Christian name ‘Genan’ is found (e.g., Genane Mac Genane), while the pedigree of Oengus gives us ‘MacOengabhan’ and at least suggests that this famous scribe was of the old Ormond family of historians. For the student of Architecture in its mediaeval aspects, the volume has most valuable matter. The building of a wooden castle is described in detail, as is the roofing of a house ‘with lath pin and slate.’ For social history there is here a huge amount of the most varied material. The will of the 10th Earl of Ormond shows that even the highest nobles had no hesitration in providing for their illegitimate offspring nominatum. There are many lists of household furniture and personal effects, and many accounts of farming and husbandry and the implements thereof. One may perhaps doubt the editor’s reading of ‘unum ferrum secus’ as a ploughshare (p. 72). The term (sock) is still in use in Munster for a small piece of the plough iron. The rolls of Aysay at Clonmel also provide material of interest. The common offence was horse or sheep stealing, and the offender was nearly always hung. It is, perhaps, a commentary on the manners of the age that a woman was hung in 1551 for stealing a hive of bees, while a man who killed his wife with a stick was pardoned. The larceny of Rosaries of much value (e.g., coral, etc.) many years after the Reformation may be noted, while the agriculturalist will note with interest that at that period a goshawk was considered the equal of four good beeves (No. 194). The lack of an Index of Matters and Things such as distinguishes Mr. Newport White’s edition of the Episcopal and Monastic Deeds from the same source is a distinct loss to the work. For the general historian this volume provides much material to clear up the complicated story of the Desmond wars and the interrelations between Black Tom the 10th
Earl of Ormond and Queen Elizabeth. More intriguing but more tantalising are the many references to priests, parsons, and churches throughout the Deeds. Few of them are of any help to understand the situation as to church matters which existed in Munster in this critical period just after the Reformation. It is true that the distribution of the lands of the dissolved Abbeys is mentioned in several Deeds. Perhaps the most valuable of these relate to the possessions of Holy Cross. Here (No. 193) the Earl of Ormond allows 'John Monk als John O'Mulrian' to reside, and gives him a Lease for 21 years. He dwells in a chamber of the old Abbey and is to repair it with 'slates, skins, timber, lethes and pins.' This was in 1571, while four years later the Earl grants the alterages to John Cantwell, he to find 'a sufficient and lawful curate to serve the cure to the parishioners thereof with all sacraments and sacramentals from time to time' and to keep the chancel and choir in repair. It will also be noted that the witnesses to the Earl's will include four clerics, three of whom bear Irish names. The Earl himself lived through the reigns of Philip and Mary as well as those of Elizabeth and Edward VI, and apparently was 'either Papist or Protestant as the Queen wished.' According to the "Description of Ireland in 1598," ex the Jesuit Archives, he was reconverted into the Catholic Church by Father Wall in his old age "non sine tensione Hibernicae gaudi." But throughout all the references to the Church in this Volume, there is nothing to indicate whether the various clerics mentioned served the Pope or the Queen, or were required to undergo any test or give any bond—which, of itself, must be a fact of some considerable historical significance. The working out of this and kindred problems must be greatly assisted by a close study of these papers hitherto unavailable, and the whole volume makes a most distinguished contribution to Irish history. The question whether more notes of the type provided by the Editor himself or by Mr. Liam Price for the Wicklow deeds, ought to be given may, perhaps, be already decided by the Mss. Commission. One may suggest that they are of much value to the general reader, especially for place name variants, and that a panel of local historians ought to be assembled to help general editors in this regard for works of this kind. The print of the volume is good, and the paper and binding as satisfactory as one could hope for in these difficult times.

D. F. G.

CALENDAR OF THE OREERY PAPERS; edited by E. MacLysaght. Stationery Office, 21/-.

The documents in this volume extend from the Restoration to the outbreak of the Williamite wars, and cover the lives of three Earls of Orrey. Most of them are of social rather than historic interest, although there are many official documents for the period when Orrey was Lord President of Munster, and many others dealing with his property in Limerick City and County.

The Orrey establishment at Charleville must have been a magnificent one, and the inventory of its contents, and the census of its inhabitants, together with the daily menus for a whole week, all of which are in this book, give an excellent idea of the mode of life of the aristocracy of the period. For example, breakfast at this period was unknown, there being but two meals, dinner and supper. The dinner for Saturday, 5th of July, 1679, consisted of one shoulder and rack of mutton, one fillet of veal, baked pudding and could chime of beef; and the supper for the same day, of one line and breast of mutton, harty chokes, calves foot, stewed ducks and beans.

Other interesting references are to travelling and its costs, shipping, the state of the roads, inns, doctors, funerals, clothes, etc., etc.

Dr. Jeremy Hall, the founder of the Limerick Charities, is prominent in the documents. He seems to have been an agent of Orrey's as well as to have sold him some of his property in Limerick City. In one letter to Orrey he is described as "as cunning as he is malicious and false," but, the documents here prove him to have been both an honest and efficient agent of Orrey's. In several of these Orrey's property and tenants in the City are detailed.

A letter from Sir Francis Poulke to Orrey in 1673, referring to the building of the City Exchange by Alderman York, then Mayor, establishes the fact that Francis Whitmore's Inn was situated opposite the Exchange (a spot long afterwards used as an inn on account of its proximity to this Exchange), and not in the old Castle, now recognised to have been once occupied by the Fanning family.

The calendar is a very useful reference book to all Limerick historians and is indispensable to any Irish 17th century historian. The price is rather high, but the editing is well done and the book well produced. The Index of persons and places is faultless, but again, the complaint must be made, particularly as the documents are so inevitably more social than historic, that the lack of an index of matters renders research into these topics extremely laborious.

R. H.