
In this book Dr. Hayes makes a most valuable and interesting study of the personalities and events of the struggle between the Franco-Irish forces and the English in the West in 1798. It covers the period from Humbert’s landing, in early autumn, at Killala to the last stand of the Insurrection in the same town in the later part of the season; and it takes in the dreadful punitive aftermath of the collapse of the attempt.

The study views the period in a clear perspective. The evaluation of character and events is keen and balanced. The national significance of the Insurrection emerges as the main interest and unifies the narrative. Individual heroism, failure, tragedy are the light and shade of the picture. This book is beautifully written—strong and quick-moving prose admirable for historical narrative. The style is austere in its economical, almost bare, clarity. Many passages in the episodes of heroism and tragedy have high literary value, and owe a great deal of their power and poignantness to the austerity of the writing.

Specialist knowledge and a judicial attitude towards the materials of history have gone into the shaping of this work. Dr. Hayes’ approach to his subject is that of a scientist. He has overlooked no source of information. He is critical in his use of contemporary narratives, and with them he collates the material from other sources—documents and official papers in Irish collections and in the archives of France and England, and traditional accounts of happenings during the Insurrection which he has collected in the West. He has drawn upon contemporary, and nearly contemporary, ballads and verses which show the impact of the Insurrection on the imagination and feeling of its time; and he has made pilgrimage along the route of the Franco-Irish army and set the findings from his collections of materials precisely and vividly into the scene.

Of the contemporary accounts some are from French officers serving in the allied forces. These, quite naturally, are more concerned with the deeds of their own countrymen and tend to minimise, if not to ignore, the part played by the Irish. There are also narratives by “members of the dominant and alien class which despised, when they did not hate, national aspirations.” From the Irish themselves there is no similar record. Post-Insurrection Connaught gave little opportunity to those who were the real “losing sides” to recollect their emotions in tranquillity. Dr. Hayes has already done fine work—in book form and otherwise—on this period. The present study may well be regarded as the best thing he has done. The prevalence of contemporary accounts of the events being as it is, it is his great achievement to have presented his subject in all its facets, and to have evoked the national significance of the Insurrection and the “epic quality” of the insurgent effort.

The book has been long looked for and will be eagerly read. For the ordinary reader it has the absorbing interest of stirring events vividly presented. For the student of history it has its high informational value, and its perspective, sensitive way with historical material. It is greatly to be hoped that it will find its way into the hands of all connected, in any capacity, with education, and into the libraries of all our schools and colleges. Its warm national “pietas” and its same impartiality are formative influences of the highest value for young Ireland.

M. O'D.

THE FARM BY LOUGH GUR. By Lady Carbery. London: Longmans. 1937. 10s. 6d.

How few changes of overlord these farms by Lough Gur have known. In the dawnlight of our record the lands of Aine and For Éi, who breed over this book, pass to the race of Engham; a thousand years later they are the dowry of a Kirby bride, heiress to the Lords of Engham-aire Éine, who weds an O’Grady from beyond the Shannon. The family are subordinate to the great House of Desmond, whose romantic ears live in the folk-tales of Lough Gur—tales collected by David Fitzgerald and published in the River Colophone as long ago as 1879. Then came the forfeiture of the Darmonds, and the Elizabethan grantees whose heirs and assigns held this rich, rolling country until the Land Purchase Acts.

From the same corner of County Limerick hailed the stock of Standish Hayes O’Grady, who was to write the terrible epitaph of the last generation of Irish landlords: “rotting from the land . . . without one brave deed, without one brave word.” In his breed were met the strains of Gaelic magnate and Tudor planter; like elements went to the collaboration which gave us the present book.

The farm by the lake was the holding of favoured tenants of a kind lord. There is a background, indeed, of human wreckage left by the Famine clearances, but they are outside the limits of the happy tale with its exotic culture, its genealogies and respectability and pleasing social round. Fairies throng this magic landscape where it is always summer:

Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadow’d, happy, fair with orchard lawns.

No wonder this glimpse of a lost Eden has bewitched the London critics and all the jaded race of towns men. Over it all is the fascinating ritual of milking bawn and dairy that linked the centuries until the hum of the creamery in our day drowned the harping of For Éi and banished half the fairies.
Even winter was gracious by the lake, and there is a vivid picture of these still remembered weeks in the winter of '78 when Lough Gur was frozen, and "landlords and Ferians played hockey in the grass and fellowship." Through this idyll of squire and poor relations the horde skated into the glade of the shy cavalier who was to be her husband. That same hard winter of '78 Davitt founded the Land League, and wrote the doom of that feudal world, so picturesque in retrospect—if only in retrospect.

For all the unusual angle of vision, and the mellow afterglow inevitable when age remembers youth, we have here the authentic rural scene. In one publishing season the Irish country-side has given us the gracious courage of this book, and the stark strength of This House Was Mine. They may be heralds of a second spring after the vogue of the morbid peasant beloved of the Liffey School. Mary Carbery and Francis MacManus do well to remind us that if in the farmyard cesspit strange creatures of the darkness brood and burrow, up in the clear air the lark still soars and sings.

M.M.

THE STORY OF SAINT CARTHAGE. By Father Carthage, O.C.S.O. Browne & Nolan. 1937. 4s.

Father Carthage of Mount Melleray, a native of Lismore Diocese, has written this life of his patron for the congregation of a brother priest in Australia whose parish church is dedicated to the patron of Lismore. By a happy coincidence the publication falls on a centenary of the Saint, for St. Carthage passed to glory one May day in the year 637, on the slope above the Blackwater where as a young monk, forty years before, he had seen a Jacob’s ladder of angels ascending and descending. That was his first glimpse of Lismore, where he was to return, in old age, to found his famous monastery, where his mortal remains awaited the Resurrection. Most of his days were passed at Raham, in that placid land of cloistered peace, this lowland corridor fragrant with memories of Connac our, Darrow, and Raham, of Kilnitty, Sean-Ross, Seirrissan, of Lorrha and Terryglass. Through it ran the troubled frontier of the active dynasties of Mass and Cashel, and questions of high politics led at last to the expulsion of Carthage and his Munstermen.

The Midlands are likely to remain a "hidden Ireland" for the ordinary tourist, but readers of this book may be enticed to fare as pilgrims to Raham and the neighbouring shrines. Father Carthage throws a welcome light on those ancient haunts of prayerful toll. And what better guide could one seek to that age of heroic austerity than a monk of Melleray. In his study of the Irish monasteries, and for the travels and foundations of his patron in particular, Father Carthage has secured the cooperation of the best authorities available. Revd. John Ryan, S.J., has written a valuable introduction, and helped with advice and suggestion.

The story is at its most vivid point when St. Carthage tolls over Sliabh gCuin, crosses the Blackwater dry-road at Affane, and follows Bothar na Naomh to his journey’s end. Here the loving familiarity of Father Carthage with his subject is most manifest, and here, too, the erudition of such scholars as Professor Power and Canon Burke is at his service. There are excellent maps to help the reader at this stage.

No one has ever gazed on the noble setting of Lismore but must long to revisit it. Before one has finished with this book, the longing will be irresistible.

B. M.

ECONOMIC HISTORY OF CORK CITY FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES TO THE ACT OF UNION. By William O’Sullivan, M.A., Cork University Press. 1937. 1s. 6d. net.

There is a general resemblance between the fortunes of the Norse townships founded in the south just over a thousand years ago. The Danish settlers are expelled by the English merchants who came in the wake of Norman lances: these hold sway through four medieval centuries until the Cromwellian conquest brings in planter townsmen, who share the control of their borough with local magnates—a system which ended with Municipal Reform only a century ago.

The Cork Danes were driven to Shandon, and appear to have left little trace in their old marsh settlement unless we are to accept a recent view which holds them responsible for the Cork accent. The medieval English are almost as great a puzzle. In New Ross, the town built by Strongbow’s heirs served river valleys strongly held by the Anglo-Irish, and its leading position in the trade figures is intelligible enough. But how could the Cork burgheers exist at all if they attended to their government’s veto on trade with the King’s enemies, when for centuries these very forces filled the whole horizon? Our author’s industry has gathered particulars of the scanty trade of those years, of the licencees to parley with their neighbours, of the necessity to import the very food-stuffs from abroad. Farming in the Liberties can hardly have been productive with raiders ever on the alert, and we are not surprised to read of inhabitants who fled from the harassed city.

Our author might have told us more about those old Cork families: one might say in criticism that there is not enough of the human element in the book—after all, the first economy is man. It may be the fault of the material framework, if it is a fault at all. Did these families leave no illuminating wills, no records like the Arthur Annals of Limerick? Did the Anglo-Irish Roches, Cogans and Barrys of the neighbourhood take a part in the city’s life, or did they stand aloof like the Bourkes and the Fitzgeralds at Limerick? Surely the lists of Mayors and Sheriffs would throw light on this. And when the fifteenth century brought the Fitzgeralds of Desmond as neighbours, did the city fall under their spell? Did they use the Port of Cork as well as Dingle and Youghal for their trade overseas?
Mr. O'Sullivan has no doubt that royal prohibitions did not stand in the way when the prospect of good business was in the offing. A letter of 1600, when the South had rallied to O'Neill, gives a side-light on the activities of the Cork merchant: "He buys his powder of the Frenchman, sells it to the rebel for a hide, and that hide he returns back to the Frenchman for a French crown." Thomond readers will be interested to compare the Cromwellian Census particulars for Cork in this work with the Limerick figures as set out in Archdeacon Bagnall's second volume. Taking only the residents within the walls we find that Limerick has a slightly higher population, just as was the case when David Wolfe made his estimate in the fifteen-seventies. In each city in 1638 the recent planters exceeded the natives.

These new planters were to derive huge profits from the provision trade in which the Port of Cork took the leading place. From contemporary sources Mr. O'Sullivan throws light on the rural background to Cork's enormous exports of beef. "Immense tracts of country, extending as far as the eye can reach, display a great assemblage of cattle, under the direction of a single herdsman, unconfined by marches or any visible boundaries"—a world of squireen middlemen and their squatters. In the butter trade the native element reappears. This is the climax of the book, and it makes a fine story of the enterprise of a merchant guild and their direct business relations with the farmers of half Munster. The enterprise demanded new routes for the carmen, and Mr. O'Sullivan has much useful information about road-making and maintenance under the Turnpike and Grand Jury systems. We may pardon our author if at times he seems just a trifle over-awed by his vast array of facts. Yet we have reason to be grateful that he chose the way of conscientious investigation rather than the primrose path of the light and airy generalizer. His bibliography and references will be a sign-post for students of any aspect of Irish economic history. Mr. O'Sullivan has deserved well of Cork, of his University, and his country.

M. M.