The Parish of St. Patrick, Limerick.

By REV. MICHAEL MOLONEY.

At Cashel of the Kings Ireland's Apostle came face to face with the ambitious rulers of the Eoghanacht, the group of families who had made themselves masters of Munster and were busy extending its frontiers over the Leinster plains in Patrick's day. From Cashel he journeyed north-west to the hills on the river bank beside Inis Iton at the head of the Shannon tideway. Here again Eoghanacht lords and their Deis vassails were waging the campaign that wrested the present County Clare from Connacht.

Patrick came first to the stronghold of the Ui Fidgeinte at Mullac Cae, which Archdeacon Begley has identified with Knockea, the hillock south of Carnarry, rising to a two acre plateau crowded with ancient enclosures. It is "over against Carn Feradaigh to the south," as the Tripartite puts it, and a deputation to St. Patrick at Mullac Cae was headed by a man of the Deis Tuaiscirt—the Dál Cais to give them their more usual name—who held the territory about Carn Feradaigh. According to a tale in the Leabhar Muimneach, Eoghan, father of the Eoghanacht, on his way to defeat and death in Connacht, spent a night at "Carn Feradaigh in the Deis Tuaiscirt."

Across the river were the Cratloe and Meelick heights, and on a green brow above a defile through the hills was the grave of Crimthann, kinsman of the lords of Mullac Cae, and the mightiest prince of all the race of Eoghan. The memory of his tragedy endured through the ages: his grave was so important a landmark that Bishop Gilbert set "Crosa in Slabh Ui-dhe an Roight" as a meeting of his diocese. In his Circuit of Ireland a thousand years ago Muircheartach made it a halting place after he had crossed the Shannon at Ath Coille, one of the three great fords of Erin. Across some such ford in St. Patrick's time the lords of Mullac Cae and the Dál Cais were waging the war that carried their victorious arms "from Carn Feradaigh to Ath Luchait" at the base of the Burren hills.

It was near the river that St. Patrick found the Dál Cais and their chief. The Tripartite calls them the Clann Toirdhealbaigh, for the Dál Cais of the river valley were known by that name when the Life came to be written. Moving towards the Shannon from Donaghmore he came to the ridge of Singland with the tidal marsh of the river creeping up to the foot of the slope on his left and the swampy meadows along the Groody to his right. Opposite him the Shannon made a great northward curve: through the middle of the loop a narrow ridge of higher ground made a highway through the marshes to the head of the loop where the Lax weir stands and the river becomes tidal. When we realise that the ridge was the key to the Shannon fords, we can understand why the Dál Cais were camped in such a place on that far-off day when "Cairtheann, son of Blatt, senior of the Clann Toirdhealbaigh, believed in the Lord and Patrick baptised him at Saingeal." When the lands of the Aes Greine extended to Limerick, their chief, too, seems to have ruled from Saingeal. "Aes Greine of the fine bright land was obtained by O Conaing of the territory of Saingeal" (Topographical Poems).

Of the fifteen saints of the Dál Cais listed in the Genealogia Sanctorum, nine trace their descent from Cairtheann, the convert of Singland. There is some evidence to connect three at least of them with the hill and its neighbourhood. One of the three is described as "of Singland"—Molacea Saingil, whom O'Clergy places ninth in descent from Cairtheann. This would assign our saint to the eighth century, though Colgan suggests that he may be the Molacea of Inis Tibrad, who assisted at the obsequies of St. Senan, Inis Tibrad is in the Fergus estuary midway between Foynes and Rinn Eanaigh. In the Dál Cais pedigree Molacea is four generations from Cairtheann, and so in Senan's era. Six miles south-east of Singland there is a Tobermulg on the left bank of the Groody, but the name Molaga occurs so often in the Calendar of Saints that one may do no more than suggest that the well near Bothar may preserve the name of Molacea Saingil. It has been argued in an earlier number of this Journal (Vol. I, p. 39) that the saint better known as Lelia of Killeely, across the river, is no other than Liadhain, a virgin saint of Cairtheann's line.

To complete the litany of Singland saints we must try to identify the patron of Killalee, the old church site on the verge of the marsh below the northern slope of Singland. The meanings of Singland given in two old documents enable us to venture
a guess at the identity of this saint. An Elizabethan deed (quoted in Westropp’s paper on Limerick Churches), conveying the townland from the Cathedral Chapter, names one boundary as “Aghkilfelin, or Cloghanenemagart.” No Limerick man will fail to identify Claughan, even though the name appears on no modern map. It is the stretch of low ground where the Dublin road crosses the present borough boundary to Clare Street. A Corporation Lease of 1676 speaks of the “pool of water called Cloghanavarr lying at the bottom of the hill in the road going to Newcastle.” Beneath the modern road, near where Pennywell enters Clare Street, a bridge connects the swamps on either side, but in an earlier day there was need for the ford of stepping stones that gave Clochán its memorable name. Killalee adjoins Clochán and the causeway was also the “church ford”—the Aghkilfelin of the deed of 1597. The document gives us the initial F of the saint’s name, an F ignored in pronunciation and consequently omitted in spelling. A document four hundred years earlier, and never hitherto examined, confirms the spelling and cites the boundary as the “ford of Fielim.” Very probably we have here the church of St. Feliimidh whom the Genealogiae Sanctorum and the Dál Cais pedigree agree in describing as a pious lady of the line of Carthanne. According to the pedigree she was the sister of Dioma who vanquished the Connacht men at Carnarry and saved Thomond from re-conquest. Her nephew, Ferdomnach—Dioma’s son—gave the island of Inis Iblton to Mainchín of Lúinneach “and Mainchin bestowed on Ferdomnach the blessing of honour and of chieftaincy, and hence he exercised supremacy over the Dál Cais.” (Book of Lecan, 436 a).

At Saingead, then, we tread close on the footsteps of the holy ones of the Dál Cais, but of course its most treasured memory was that of St. Patrick’s coming. In the list of Limerick churches in 1201 (in the Black Book of Limerick) we are not told to whom the Church of “Sengel” was dedicated, but in Bishop O’Dea’s list two centuries later we have the church of St. Patrick with its revenue from weirs and mills, the church of Sengel, and the chapel of Kilquane beyond the Shannon—the three combined forming the living of the Treasurer of the Cathedral Chapter, and all three presumably forming one parish. In the revival of Catholic hopes under James II., Father Jaspar White of St. John’s compiled a list of churches from various sources. Here is what he has to say on the subject:—“Church of St. Patrick . . . Singland belongs to it. . . . Kelchuaun, near Parteen, it belongs to the Treasurer.” We have the same verdict from the Protestant church. A State Commission of 1615 reports:—“St. Patrick’s in Singland: the Treasurer was rector. The chapel of Kilquane belongs to St. Patrick’s.”

The link between St. Patrick’s and the Cathedral goes back to the foundation of the Chapter. The deed of Bishop Donatus instituting secular canons “after the English fashion” is recited in the Black Book (Document CXLIII.), and is dated by the editor to 1204-06. The endowments of the Dean, the Archdeacon, the Precentor, and the Treasurer are set out, the last named receiving “the church of Singland with the lands of Rathgerallin and its appurtenances and with all the church revenues of Drummoiuba and its appurtenances, both from fish and other revenues, as a prebend.” But the connection of the Cathedral with the Singland district went beyond the possession of the church revenues. The townland itself belonged to the Cathedral, and we have already quoted from the deed in which the Chapter assigned it to a tenant. How did Singland come into the gift of the Dean and Chapter? By a “grant” of Prince John, Lord of Ireland, which it is now time to consider. The story of the Prince’s Irish tour is told by Orpen in a chapter in which he calls attention to the document now to be discussed. It is Document CXXV. of the Black Book, and this is its tenor: John, Lord of Ireland, son of the King of England: Greetings to all good Christians whom this charter may reach. Know ye all that I for the love of God have given and granted by this charter confirmed to God and the church of Blessed Mary in Limerick and the canons serving God therein in free and perpetual alms four ploughlands near Limerick, namely from Woodford (vadum silvae) to Currah Birin, and from the Groody to the ford of Fielim, with the fishery appertaining to said land, and with Godrie’s land. And so it is my will, etc. . . . Witnesses: Hugh de Lacy, Philip of Worcester, Alard Fitz-William, William de Flamaro, William Chaplain, Robert de Denill, clerk at Ardfinnan.

The connection of Philip of Worcester with Ireland began in 1184, and Hugh de Lacy met his death in 1186, so we have a narrow limit of date. Indeed we need not hesitate to assign the grant to 1185 when John was at Ardfinnan during his Irish sojourn. William de Wendeval was John’s butler, Alard Fitz-William his chamberlain. The retinue included that sprightly cleric Gerald de Barry, who has some lively comments on John’s touring company: “Talkative, boastful, enormous swearers, insolent.”
that was Gerald's verdict. Whoever secured John's charter could not put it into effect just then. Nearly ten years earlier the Norman garrison had to evacuate Limerick and another decade was to elapse before the place returned to English control on the death of Domnall Mor (1194). The mention of canons shows that the erection of a chapter was in contemplation twenty years before Bishop Donatus took the decisive step. King Domnall in his last years granted the lands of Mungrat (probably the old monastic lands) to the Cathedral, but he has nothing to say of a chapter of canons: his grant is "to Bishop Briecitus and the clergy of Saint Mary's, Limerick."

The meannings of John's grant make it clear that it included Singland. Except for the first hearing named in each document, the grant of 1185 and the setting of Singland in 1597 recite the same boundaries. They both mention Curraghbinrin, a place which that invaluable document—the Civil Survey of Limerick just published—enables us to identify as the stretch of water-logged meadows on the left bank of the Groody south of the bridge on the present Dublin road. The pasture of Curragh of the Civil Survey (page 480) meared on the north "with the high way and pass of Growdin," the predecessor of the present Groody Bridge. As we have seen the two deeds also agree in setting another hearing at Fiilim's church, our Killigley. Both documents then deal with Singland, but with a difference. The Chapter deed of Elizabeth's day dealt with Singland only, John's gift covered much adjoining land.

Singland remained cathedral property down to the nineteenth century. Lewis's Topographical Dictionary (1846) gives the information that "the lands of Singland are held under the vicars-choral of Limerick by a lease, from which body derives little advantage." As Singland was reckoned only one ploughland (see grant of 1619 in Archdeacon Begley's second volume, p. 399), three ploughlands of John's gift to the Cathedral remain to be accounted for. The fact that the grant includes a fishery inclines us to look for the remaining ploughlands in the great horse-shoe loop of the Shannon just above Limerick. This promontory, consisting of the townlands of Park, Reboge, and Corbally, is intersected from north to south by a ridge of upland running from the hill of Singland to the Lax Weir, and falling to river marsh on either side. These three townlands are reckoned as 2½ ploughlands in the Enquiry of 1615 regarding Limerick Corporation Lands. Reckoning the scattered bog pastures of Curragh and Chino as half a ploughland, we arrive at a figure of four ploughlands for the whole parish of St. Patrick. It must be remembered, of course, that the modern parish includes Derrygalvin and Kilmurry as well as the old St. Patrick's.

A further transaction between John and the Diocese of Limerick probably holds the answer to our problem of the missing townlands. This is a grant of 1215 (Cal. Doc. Ire.)—"to God and the Blessed Mary," as in the Ardinnan deed of twenty years before—and to Edmund, Bishop of Limerick, of compensation for the fisheries and mill sites at Limerick which the bishop had claimed. The surrender of the lands of Drummanna (1) by the bishop is also mentioned, "the lands of Drummanna, which to the predecessor of the same before we had given." We have already noticed that Drummoluba with its fisheries is grouped with Singland among the livings of the Canon Treasurer of the Cathedral. A document of 17 Edward II. cited in the Arthur Annals shows that the royal compensation was for a salmon weir at Drummoluba. This enables us to recover the sequence of events. In 1185 John granted the Cathedral four ploughlands, including Singland, and extending to the Salmon Weir: thirty years later the bishop had surrendered the salmon weir and some adjoining lands to the Crown. Limerick historians have been puzzled to account for the Bishop's connection with the famous fishery: the forgotten deed of Ardinnan holds the key.

The fishery was surrendered but the "tithes of the weirs and mill" were still reckoned as prequisites of the Treasurer's parish of St. Patrick, though the chaplain of the King's Castle seems to have claimed them after the transfer of the property to the Crown. (Black Book, Doc. CXXXIII.) Half a mile above the salmon weir stood the eel weir of Callaghheolane where Athlunkard (Atha Longphuirt) Bridge now spans the river. The report of an enquiry regarding Crown property in Limerick (33 Henry VIII.) reveals that "there belongeth to the said (King's) Castle ten shillings a yearly rent of the eel weir which lieth on the east side of Corbally" (Arthur Annals, quoted in

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1. The name occurs often in the Black Book, the spelling continually varying. Once it appears as Drummynolube. Were the foreign scribes trying to reproduce an original Druim na láise?
Lenihan, p. 89). The Thomond shore of the stretch of river where these weirs were situated was and is in the Diocese of Limerick. The Blackwater tributary is mentioned as a boundary in the Synod of Rath Breasail, and it enters the river a little above the mouth of the Groody. That strip of river bank was the chapel district of Kilquane, and formed part of St. Patrick's parish. The ruined church of "Chua na n-Airne"—that is how Kilquane appears in Bishop O'Dea's list—still survives on the river bank midway between the weirs. The existence of a strip of parish separated from the main portion by a great river would lead us to expect an ancient ford to make communication possible. There was no bridge nearer than Limerick, and even from Limerick access to Kilquane was almost impossible until the causeway of Long Pavement was built through Moin na mBrathair just three centuries ago. The name Athlunkard and Castle Troy (Callaghbeolane and Callagh Itroy) may hold the memory of a former ferry.

We need not go beyond the Williamite sieges to find evidence for fords in this stretch of river. Of course, it was here Ginkel's army crossed to the Clare bank, but that was a pontoon operation and we are concerned with actual fording. An official Williamite Diary of the operations of 1691 writes on September 20th: "We also secured a pass to the town, as likewise the pass of Annabeg where we went over the last year." The Elizabethan lease of Singland gave "Aghnebeg" as the first meaning: the name is forgotten now, but Ferrar knew it, and in his map of 1786 he marked Annabeg where the Groody enters the Shannon. The Jacobite narrative A Light to the Blind speaks of a ford between Annabeg and the city. Four regiments of dragoons were stationed "at a deep ford of the Shannon a mile above the town to hinder the enemy from passing over to the county of Clare..." as also to bar the foe from coming between the Irish horse encamped at Annabeg—about two miles from Limerick—and the garrison." That deep ford, then, must have been in the vicinity of Kilquane and Athlunkard, indeed the very name of the latter preserves the memory of a ford. In the last years of the ill-starred Norman attempt against Thomond we find O'Brien's supporters camping at Cluain na n'Airne (Kilquane); after a successful raid their Burke allies drove their spoils across the river, probably at the ford by the camp. (Caithleim Thoirdheadhbhaich, p. 71).

Long before the wars of Thomond a northern chief forded the Shannon near Limerick on his way to Cratloe and Sliabh uidhe an Riogh. In a recent discussion of Muircheartach's Circuit, Mr. Henry Morris throws a new and welcome light on the Limerick part of the itinerary. He holds with the suggestion of the Onomasticon that Ath Coille, one of the three great fords of Erin, was at Athlunkard. The Black Book offers evidence in support. When John granted four ploughlands by the Shannon to the Cathedral his penman had to translate an Irish ford-name. The scribe of Ardfinnan wrote vadum silva : was he not setting down good clerk's Latin for Ath Coille?

The Danish colony at Inis Ibtton was in its vigorous prime when Muircheartach passed this way; he forded the river and avoided the passage through Limerick. A quarter of a century later their doom overtook them when Brian routed their forces at Sulcoit and followed to sack and burn their island camp. The Cogadh Gaedheal re Gallabhad tells how on the heights of Singland there was a massacre of the worsted foes. More than a century later the same hills held a ghastly trophy of another Dál Cais campaign. In the struggle for the kingship with the lords of Aileach, the O'Briens had chance to slay Domchadh Ua Ruairc, a commander of the northern hosts. His head was set up at Singland until victorious northern raiders took the gruesome relic home for burial (A.F.M. 1084, 1088). From the struggle with the north Muircheartach O'Brien emerged as ardri. He was the friend and patron of Gilbert, the reforming bishop, who made Limerick the see of his new diocese about the same time that the ardri made it his political capital. The city continued to be the O'Brien headquarters until Domchadh Cairbreach abandoned the place to the English settlers.

It was probably in that century of O'Brien dominance that the round tower of Singland was built. Writing in 1827 Fitzgerald and McGregor state that the remains of the church and tower were visible up to fifty years before. The church was a ruin before the sieges, and in 1691 the site was fortified as an outpost to the better known fort at the present Fair Green. Both fell into Williamite hands, and batteries were erected there and at intervals along the ridge of high ground leading through Park to the Lax Weir. A sketch of the ruin appears on the Down Survey map, from which we learn, if we can rely on the sketch for detail, that the church had neither aisle nor tran-
sept and that the tower was at the western end. We cannot be sure that the building in the sketch was the medieval church at all: it may be a rebuilding by Sir Richard Southwell, who had property at Clino, near Singland, and was buried at St. Patrick's. According to the deposition of his widow, "the said Richard died at Singland the 12th of February, 1640, and went to be interred in the Abbey of St. Patrick's Church near Singland, which chapel was of his own building." (Journal N. Munster Arch. Soc., Vol. II., p. 51). Whether Southwell rebuilt the church or merely added a family chapel there is no means now of deciding, for nothing remains of church or tower in the crowded graveyard on the summit of Saingeal. The most notable monument now visible in the cemetery is the vault in which two Bishops of Limerick are interred—John Young and his successor, Charles Tuchy. They died in 1813 and 1828 respectively. In 1809 Bishop Young had come to reside in the parish of St. Patrick, in which his successors have lived ever since.

Three hundred paces down the eastern slope of Saingeal is the shrine of St. Patrick's Well. His statue stands above the bubbling spring where long ago he baptised the Dalassian chief. Lower still, beside the Dublin road, is the Penal chapel built in 1816. Its predecessor, dating from 1750, had been built by the Harold family on their property at Park. When it fell into disrepair the site was abandoned, and the present church built in line with the wide new street across the swamp of Moine na Muiche. Some day, perhaps, Limerick will raise a worthy shrine on Saingeal to the great saint who brought our fathers within the Christian fold.


Chapter III. deals with the itinerary of St. Patrick.


1905.


(Further references under "Local History and the Limerick Civil Survey.")