Book Reviews.


With this handsome volume, the third of a series, the Venerable President of this Society completes a work which has occupied him for nearly half a century. For it is now thirty-three years since the first volume appeared and how many years before that the author has been engaged in his labour of love he himself alone can tell us. Only those who have attempted in however small a way, the investigation of local history, can envisage the amount of hard mental and manual labour which has gone into the preparation and presentation of these three fine volumes. The diocesan or local historian ploughs a lonely furrow. He can, indeed, as our author has done, summon to his aid the generous assistance of the expert in some particular line of investigation: but to him alone are the burden of the day and the heats. None but he can see around his subject, gauge the depths to be plumbed, the gaps to be bridged, and the heights to be scaled; none but he can know the times without number when weariness, difficulties and disappointments of one kind or another have tempted him in vain to lay down his pen and relinquish his task before the end of it; and when the work is done it is he alone who must shoulder the praise or the blame.

Limerick—both the Diocese and the area—has been fortunate in her historians. Right back to the time of the compilation of the Black Book, she has never wanted for them. Almost in every age there was someone, clerical or lay, Catholic or Protestant, who committed to writing some of the story of his time in futuram rei memoriam. From the time of Bishop Gillebert to our own, records of one kind or another have been left to us contemporeaneously down the years, perhaps not complete, but certainly ample. And in our own time there have come men of the calibre of Maurice Lenihan, Thomas J. Westropp and the other founders and contributors of the old North Munster Archaeological Society and Field Club, to gather up the materials of the past and preserve them for the future beyond fear of decay. With the publication of this volume this generation of Limerick men can gratefully add the name of the author to the select few of her citizens who have worthily upheld amongst them the ancient traditions of laburious and exact scholarship. Hitherto no city in Eire could claim a more comprehensive or learned historian than Lenihan; now Limerick can truthfully say that the written record of her ancient Diocese is one of the very few in all Ireland which is complete.

In this volume Archdeacon Begley takes us from the Williamite siege to our own day. As he says in the preface, it is by far the most interesting time for the average reader “the glamour of the period being still attractive, tempting the inquirer to seek a clearer view of the situation as it really existed.” He covers, both for the Catholic and Protestant Churches, the chief events in Diocesan history of the 18th and 19th centuries and in particular his details of life in Limerick Diocese during the penal laws will be found most interesting to the reader. Here the author draws on many little known sources and upon carefully preserved and noted tradition. He deals with the Bishops in turn, giving careful attention to each, and presenting many facts quite unknown, even to many who have been in his own field. Besides this he notes all the leading clergy and, in an Appendix which must have cost an infinity of labour to compile, gives the succession list of every parish in the Diocese, in many cases back to 1700, together with—a most important item—the date of the commencement of the parish registers. No one is left out, and a whole succession of notable names appears on his page headings. There is Dr. John O’Moloney—originally of Killaloe—one of the great Catholic Bishops of the Restoration period and contemporary of Blessed Oliver Plunkett. His life has been the subject already of a fine memoir by Dr. Boyle in the Irish Ecclesiastical Record (Dec. 1912), and a full study by Professor Hogan in Studies, 1920: there is James White the historian; the author’s namesake, Dr. Begley; Thomas Spring Rice, Theobald Mathew, Dr. Young, Daniel O’Connell, and finally the great Edward Thomas, who himself had written as far back as 1906, the preface to the author’s first volume, and had lived thereafter to add much lustre to his name and memory, all here faithfully recorded. Besides this, perhaps the author’s extracts from the Presentment Books or his Chapter on the country life of the people in the 18th century, will find most favour with the reader. Indeed, he has omitted nothing; for here is the record of every religious order in the Diocese, with its notable men enumerated and its foundations accurately described. The ‘67 rising in Ardaghs and Kilmallock is touched upon, in which connection it will
be permissible to record that the original printed brief of the prosecution counsel at the ensuing Special Commissions at Limerick and Cork, has recently been recovered and lodged in the National Library. The affairs of the trade and municipal life of the city are also covered and a good deal added to what Lenihan has written: the facts of the finding of the Ardagh Chalice are set out: while there is a full and interesting account of the murder of the unfortunate Colleen Bawn. Indeed, Archdeacon Begley has filled the 644 pages of this volume, not only with the fruit of much garnering amongst the historical records, but also with the varied memories of a youth and full life spent amongst the priests and people of his native Diocese.

To venture to criticise what is the valuable work of a lifetime would be a work of supererogation. If this reviewer, however, refrains from criticism, it is not for that reason, but simply because there is nothing to criticise. The print is of the right size, the binding is durable, and the proofs have been most adequately read. The price is high of necessity, but not too high for the book's worth, and there can be no manner of doubt that a purchase of this volume is an investment which will appreciate with the passing years. If one must have a grumble it is not at the author's learning but at one's own ignorance. In this spirit it may be suggested that when another edition comes from the press it will contain some fuller notation of the author's sources, for some of the minor, but none the less valuable, facts with which he makes us acquainted. Whether this be by way of paged footnotes—as in the earlier volumes—or bibliography, is immaterial. One would like, for instance, to identify the forgotten place name of "New Ross near Nenagh," where Dr. Bruscough, the Protestant Bishop of Limerick, lived and died (p. 145). Perhaps, also, the harassed student of the future would like a more extensive index.

In the words of the late Monsignor Hagan's letter (p. 640), our author has completed a monument for himself more durable than bronze. Long after he and all of us have gone, these volumes will be prized amongst the people of Limerick and their exiles beyond the sea. Monsignor Hagan has expressed in the letter above quoted the fear that "as usual" that time would have come also before the Archdeacon's work would receive its due meed of appreciation. Here one may venture to disagree. For, though art is said to provide its own thanks to the artist, and the work of his own mind and hands to be the true reward of the scholar, it is but right that our author should know that his own contemporaries are not unmindful of the obligation which he has laid upon them as well as on posterity. And so, while he is still hale and hearty, his friends amongst all the clergy and people, and especially amongst the members of this Society, will salute the completion of this Diocesan history with a hearty "ad multos annos" and respectfully beg leave to take off their hats to its venerable and learned compiler.

—D. F. G.


It is part of the vicissitudes of human life that the established order should never be permanent. Like a bolt from the blue, at irregular intervals, comes a social upheaval and the old way of things gives place to a new. The land contained within the Limerick County boundaries has fared, perhaps, not at all too ill in this respect, for, from the beginning of the Christian era to the days of Cromwell, it suffered but two fevered periods of revolutionary change. The first of these was in the fourth century when the great Ógánachta septs of the Uí Fhidaichte imposed their lordship on the territory along the Maigue and westwards thence over the wide and flourishing country to the Cork and Kerry frontiers. These conquering princes were not, indeed, strangers, for the cradle of their race was probably the imposing eminence of Cnoc Aine, a few miles to the east. Closely allied with the Ógánachta were the Déisi, who occupied a narrow strip of land between Bruff and Limerick. In the extreme east were settled two old peoples, the Uaithne and the Arada, who retained through the centuries their identity and a certain autonomy. Some ancient groups like the Corco Oiche, whom St. Ita favoured; the Geibhte, who left their name to Askeaton; the Corco Muidh, around Ballyvran in the south, the Martine to the south-east, the Cor na Die to the north, and possibly sections of the Mus eraighe, were completely or partially submerged. This order lasted for about five hundred years. It was shaken then slightly by the Norse and again by the O'Brien kings but it remained substantially intact to the coming of the Normans.
The success of these in arms brought the lands of Limerick into the possession of a host of new proprietors. The county generally became feudalised and the Norman manor became a common feature of rural organisation. Two branches of the mighty Fitzgerald family secured the ownership of huge territories. The Burkes and the O'Briens shared between them the major part of what remained. This state of affairs continued unaltered down to the fall of the Earl of Desmond and in many respects down to the Cromwellian "settlement."

This second upheaval differed from the first in that it introduced un-Celtic social arrangements and foreign political entanglements. In time, however, a condition of equilibrium was reached. The feudal lords became very like the old Celtic princes. In religion, language, habits, interests, and to some extent in outlook, they were at one with the rest of the people and thus enabled to fill their natural place as leaders. Thus in the complicated structure of social life there was no gaping chasm. Between lord and retainer in mediaeval Limerick the relationship as a rule was friendly; in normal circumstances it may even have been cordial.

That the ancient rulers, though admittedly reduced in status, were not obliterated is clear from the topographical poem of Gilla na Naem Ó h-Uidhirn, who died in 1420. This writer calmly ignores the Norman and Dalcaissian overlords of Limerick and refers to the older families as if they still held undisputed sway. Ó Colleáin (Collins, Culhane) is the prince of the Ó Conaill Gabra; Ó Cléirchín (Clerkin, Cleary) and Ó Dónovan, the princes of the Ó Cairbre Aebda; Ó Bearga and Ó Maolcaillann (Holland) rule in Kenry; Ó Ciarmhaí (Kirby) about Knockany; Ó Conaing at Singland, if no longer at Pallasgreen and Castleconnell; Ó Cadhla (Kiely) and Ó Maille near Limerick city; the Ó Heffernans rule about Murrowe, where during the fifteenth century they were dispossessed by the Ó Mael Rísín, or Ryans; Mag Longachain (Lanigan) rules about Doon. It is even possible that some of the owners reduced by the Ó Eoghanacht in the fourth century were represented a thousand years later by princely descendants for MacInerney (McEnery) and Ó Macassa (Mackessy) belonged by race to the Corco Muichet and the Corco Oiche.

What was the position of these in the 17th century before the vengeance of Cromwell brought about such catastrophic changes? The Civil Survey of Co. Limerick provides the answer. Three of the Culhane or Collins family, "Irish Papists," owned small farms in the parish of Corkamohide, and a fourth had a share in a similar small holding in the parish of Ballingarry. In the same area fortune had dealt more kindly with the McEnerys, for seven of that family had retained fairly extensive possessions. One Heffernan held a large farm in East Limerick. That is the whole story; every other name has disappeared from the list of landed proprietors.

Throughout the county, however, other Irish owners were well in the foreground. True it is that, in West Limerick, following the attainder and destruction of the Earl of Desmond, an immense portion of his estates had passed into the hands of Englishmen. Over thirty of these, the Courtenays, Southwells, Ingoldsby, Standishes, Piggotts, Trenchards, Hunts, Wingfields, Dowdalls, Gills, etc., shared the spoils of the ancient territory of Uí Fidgente. Even here, however, there were some Irish proprietors, including many minor Fitzgeralds, four Sheehys (of that Scotch gallowglass family which commanded the Desmond mercenaries), some de Lacy's, Gormans and Kennedys, a Purcell, Power, Lee, Liston, Hurley and a few representatives of the rich city merchants (Creagh, Roche, Stritch, Rice) who had used their wealth to buy small estates in the country.

Outside of the old Desmond lordship the Irish grip on the soil was very marked. Owneybeg belonged almost wholly to the Ryans; the neighbouring Ó Conaill to the same family, with the Burkes, Hayes, a multitude of O'Briens and O'Brien retainers, like the McMahons and the O'Hickeys. The barony of Clarwilliam was the property of a small army of Burkes, though there, too, the Clancys, whom the O'Briens had brought into East Limerick, had taken deep root. From Pedamore south-east to Hospital the English had acquired a foothold but the O'Grady's, another Dalcaissian offshoot, the Burkes, Hurleys, Lysaghts, Marshalls, and one of the Dunan family occupied no mean place. From Adare south to Kilmallock the Earl of Kildare, now a staunch Protestant, with the Standishes, Southwells and others upheld the English interest, yet not to the exclusion of some Catholic Fitzgeralds, with Kearneys, de Lacy's, Leos and about twenty other Catholic proprietors. In south-east Limerick the Fitzgibbons and
the O'Hurleys were prominent; in Pucklebrien the O'Briens and the McMahonsons were owners still on a large scale.

Within the city and its Liberties (which reached then almost as far as Castleconnell) but five "English proprietors" are listed, and two of these, the Earl of Thomond and Christopher Sexton, were men of Irish extraction who had crossed to the English side. Similarly in the important corporate town of Kilmauleck a local lady named Kathleen Coyne (Ní Chuinn, Quin?), another lady named Anne Casey of Dublin, the Fitzgerald Earl of Kildare, the Boyle Earl of Cork, and the Earl of Bath, alone represented the English interest. In the large number of Catholic owners there were many Creaghns, Goulds, Hurleys, Kearneys and Meaghs. These names suggest that the interrelations between Killmauleck and Limerick and the general question of how far wealthy burgheers bought estates in the country, would be subjects that would well repay investigation.

From what has been said it is evident that down to the Cromwellian "settlement" the soil of Limerick remained substantially in Irish Catholic hands. An excellent summary of what happened thereafter is to be found in Volume III. of Archdeacon Begley's history of the diocese of Limerick. To give, even briefly, all the points raised in this splendid volume of the Civil Survey (the fourth of the series, and a credit once again to the distinguished editor, Mr. R. C. Simington) would be impossible in a review, but it may be said that the information which it offers, both directly and indirectly, makes it an historical document of the highest value. What an enthralling book could be written if it were made the basis of a study after the manner of Mr. Gleeson's Last Lords of Ormond!

J. R.


Only a farmer could depict the true background of Irish history for any era: in this book Mr. MacLysaght has given us the full rural setting of the generation of Irishmen who worked the soil to enrich Cromwell's settlers, Ireland's first capitalists. There is a revealing study of the new masters felling the old forests for their iron-works, and generally sacrificing all other interests to their ambition to get rich quick, that unfailing hallmark of the Elect. With the Roundheads there first came to our shores the curious tenets of Whiggery, England's Greek gift to her neighbours. As soon as the new rich had inherited the Irish earth, having no further use for the principle of uplift, they passed the heritage to the next social stratum of the colonists. These in turn tried to displace the old gang to the tune of the Rights of Man, and so came for a moment into contact with the Irish nation until the Orange drum-tap recalled them to their allegiance. It is one of the ironies of history that a native school should have adopted their principles as if they formed part of the Irish tradition. In Europe, and even in the mother country, the idols of Whiggery may have crumbled one by one: they still have their noisy votaries in intellectual circles here, our great repositories of second-hand English cults. Perhaps their clamour is but the last angry gurgle before they too are sucked into the sink of oblivion.

But, like our author, let us turn from the Puritans and their disciples to the silent, unchanging people who have long since beaten their grim masters into the dust. Mr. MacLysaght has confined his study to the generation emerging from a war in which the Gaelic order, cultural and material, had been shattered to bits. It is a very different scene from the vision of peaceful Irish life that had come as such a surprise to Fynes Moryson in Laoighis a century earlier. "It seemed incredible that by so barbarous inhabitants the ground should be manured, the fields so orderly fenced, the towns so frequently inhabited, and the highways and paths so well beaten as the Lord Deputy found them. The reason whereof was that the Queen's forces during these wars never till then came among them." The very question of fencing, temporary or permanent, is a matter on which this book throws valuable light. In the period under review corn was still plentiful, the potato had already attained to its fatal eminence, the other root crops were as yet unknown. With the scarcity of fences there goes the need for herding and change of pasture ground, and the reader will find illuminating pages on the whole system of creaghting and summer booleying.

For more than a century yet there were to be few direct leases to the small holder,
and socottier tenure is widespread with its cabins and potato patches paid for in labour. 
The author estimates that the cottier class constituted three quarters of the population.

The people of Mr. MacLysaght's study were raising anew the fabric of an ordered life from the scattered elements; their historian required similar virtues, indeed the
patience and industry that enabled him to recapture that vanished scene are little short
of heroic. We can pardon him for calling to his aid and ours the human document of
that gay old scamp, John Dunton, whose letters read like genuine observation, their spice
of malice notwithstanding. The clear references to manuscript sources are a welcome
gift to the many readers who will be anxious to fill in the details for their own districts.
Thomond folk in particular have special reason to be grateful for, as might be expected,
the author moves most freely and gives of his best when treating of Limerick and Clare.
Such works as this inspire the confidence that the story of the Irish people is at last
beginning to be written. It is a field in which our author has outstanding qualifications;
let us hope the success of this book will encourage him to further triumphs.

M.M.

MISERICORDS, with special reference to those in St. Mary's Cathedral, Limerick. By

All lovers of our ancient churches and students of the art treasures which they
contain, are under a deep debt of gratitude to Mr. Haydn for his brochure on the
Misericords in St. Mary's Cathedral, Limerick. For many years the only published
account of these Misericords was that which appeared in the Journal of the Royal
Society of Antiquaries of Ireland for the year 1892, in a paper by the late T. J. Westropp,
on the "Carvings in Limerick Cathedral," but this paper was quite inadequate, as it
gave only a bare list of the carved seats; it was, moreover, only illustrated by rough
sketches of the designs carved upon them. Mr. Haydn's brochure now fills a long felt
want; he explains shortly the origin of this peculiar form of seat and gives a list of
those Cathedrals and Churches in Great Britain in which such carvings are to be found.
St. Mary's, Limerick, seems to be the only church in Ireland where they exist). He
then gives short notes on where the origin of these "strange beasts and birds—real and
mythical," with which the seats are ornamented, may be found, and draws attention to
the humorous scenes depicted on some English examples.

Mr. Haydn dates these carvings to the end of the fifteenth century and would
attribute them to the renovation and enlargement of the Cathedral under Bishop Folan
(or O'Phelan), 1489-1521, but the style of some of the carving seems to be somewhat
earlier and may, perhaps, be ascribed to the Episcopate of Cornelius O'Dea, 1400-1426,
whose beautiful Mitre and Crosier are treasured in St. John's Cathedral, Limerick.

The existing Misericords are then described in the order in which they are at
present placed in the Cathedral—for it must be remembered that they have been moved
from post to pillar in the various renovations—and the meaning of the various carvings
explained.

But what enhances the brochure above all, are the six plates illustrating the
carvings, which accompany it, although it seems a pity that the arms of the seats are
not included in the illustrations, for they, also, are ornamented, as Mr. Haydn states,
with a variety of designs, human, animal and floral. The difficulty which had presented
itself for many years to all photographers, due to the position of the Misericords and
lack of lighting, has been overcome by the writer, with the able assistance of Messrs. Rea
and Hewson, and they are to be congratulated on their success. We hope that in the
near future Mr. Haydn will give us further information on the decorative work in the
Cathedral.

J.N.A.W.
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