Reviews

John Coolahan, DISCOVER THE PAST, 3 vols., Gill and Macmillan Ltd., Dublin 1972-73. Price 50p (vols. 1 & 2) and 60p (vol. 3).

These three volumes, "The Ancient World", "The Roots of our Culture", and "Invasion and Plantation 1169-1691", are most welcome — all are attractively presented, contain fine illustrations, and are clearly aimed at the junior school reader. The world scene starts with the Old Stone Age, while the Irish scene begins with the coming of the first man to Ireland about 6000 B.C., and is illustrated with photographs ranging from a flint knife of Bann Flake type to Limerick's famous Treaty Stone. Within these brackets the reader is introduced, in volume 1, to the Stone and Bronze Ages in Europe, with glimpses into ancient Egypt and the Middle East. Volume 2 begins with the Celts and, in a rather pleasant and romantic way, with their introduction into Ireland; the ancient sagas are well covered in this portion of the volume. The Roman expansion over most of Europe (but not including this country of course) and the fall of the great Roman Empire follows. Then the coming of Christianity to Ireland, including the development of monasticism and the zeal of the Irish missionaries in paganism post-Roman Europe. This volume closes with an account of the Vikings and their raids on Ireland, culminating in the Battle of Clontarf and including some all too seldom made comments on the good influences which the Vikings who remained in Ireland after Clontarf had on the country, notably on Dublin; the concluding pages deal with the discovery of America by the Viking, Lief Ericson. The third volume, dealing with the invasions and plantations from 1169 to 1691, also gives a wonderful exposition of the way of life of the different classes, both in the Anglo-Norman and Gaelic societies, in the towns and in the rural areas. The Reformation and European explorations to America and eastwards to China and Japan are some of the non-Irish events also covered in this volume.

The first two volumes run to eighty pages each, while the third is some sixteen pages longer. Each volume introduces the young reader to archaeology, history, legend, myth and folklore in an exciting and stimulating manner. The author has, furthermore, carefully and wisely omitted overcrowding his text with dates.

The plentiful illustrations also help for easy assimilation. Generally of a high standard, many are in colour and some show an originality which is not normally found in children's books published to date in this country. One might perhaps fault the photograph of the Carndonagh Cross and stelae (vol. 2, p. 61) which gives the impression of having been taken in very inferior lighting, presenting the monuments (and a modern cement rail-pillar) as silhouettes; the photographs of a Henry VIII Irish groat (vol. 3, p. 94) are, incidentally, printed upside-down.

All-in-all, it is difficult to see how any Primary school-child, or even a Post-Primary one, can afford to be without such as these three volumes — they would also provide a source of pleasure in the home.

EDWARD FOX


Those white and yellow circles and elliptical shapes on the dust-jacket of Fr. Gaughan's book would, I suggest, be more appropriate to a work on computers or nuclear physics. Frankly, they mean nothing to me, and will, I feel, only mystify the many who will read the book. In a note on the fly-leaf the author states that, 'the cover design is based on 'Betelgeuse' by V. Vasarely; the L represents Listowel, and the dots, its vicinity.' I am still in the dark. I could, I suppose, track down Vasarely's work in some reference library, and display my erudition by an explanation of these mystifying signs. But I am happy in my ignorance.
That said, I have little but praise for this large volume which puts Listowel fairly and squarely into its place in history. It is a large book, with 611 well-printed pages with ample margins, 56 illustrations, several folding maps, and one magnificent double page coloured illustration of a local square being entertained in a shebeen in Listowel about 1842, which, when examined very carefully, gives one a better idea of the Listowel at that time than pages of print ever could. I have failed to detect a misprint in its pages. When one considers the price of paper-backs which fall apart even with the most careful handling it is cheap at £6.00. As only 1,000 copies were printed one need not be a bookseller to realise that it is an investment; it will be worth double in no time.

The author is an assiduous collector of facts; his list of sources is breathtaking it is so all-embracing and comprehensive. His skilful blending of these facts with local traditions and ballads adds a dimension to his narrative which is often lacking in more pretentious works. He has done more than rediscover Listowel's past, he has conveyed some of his own infectious enthusiasm for his native town to his pages. It is a book of which Listowel can be proud, and an example for future historians of other towns on which to model their works.

I never knew the whole story of Sir Arthur Vickers, I never questioned Paddy Drury's authorship of his famous rhyme on Knockanure, I never read the sad facts of the awful faction fight between the "Cooleens" and the "Mulvihills" at Ballyeaugh on the Cashan in 1834 till I found them here. It will settle many an argument around Listowel. No matter how obscure the happening in the past, go to Gaughrane and you will find it mentioned there.

One small doubt crosses my mind; perhaps the book is too large? Since it will be read almost exclusively by the ordinary people of North Kerry seeking information on their native place, I doubt if such a long list of sources, together with footnotes on almost every page, are necessary. While they add distinction and scholarship to the work, in the context they could be dispensed with. There is enough meat in the work without adding unnecessary fat.

While I am not at all sure that towns like Listowel have what is loosely called a spirit or soul, every town has something (call it what you will) which distinguishes it from all others, Fr. Gaughrane nowhere tries to convey this mysterious something, which, after all, is more the function of the visionary or poet. I think it also true to state that Fr. Gaughrane perhaps does not possess the evocative skill to put life into his description of the town and its people; he is concerned with facts; a historian not a poet.

P. B. LYSAGHT


Le cúpla bliain anuas bhí ag trú leis an leabhár seo ag Doncha Ó Conchúir ar stair agus réamh-stair a níos mó fein — muintir Chorca Dhuibhne. Tá spéis thrí an ghnáth agus sa dhúthaigh seo de bharr na tochaíte atá ar siúl ar an Riasc agus, d’ éagraigh san, tá siúin phearsanta agam san leabhar. Saothar staidéartha atá ann — mon-thaighde déanta anseo ar gach uile ghné den scoil — a rinne an gach caibidil agus, chomh maith, an scoil anste i nGaeilge bheagadh slachtmeathar a dhúthadh féin.

Tugann an leabhár leargus dúinn ar stair na dúiche ón Ré Neáliotach, c.3000 R.C.h., aniar go dtí an súil céad deac, nuair a claidhí na Gearraoltaigh i réimse Eile I. Tá idir chreolachacht, sean-dáilocht, stair agus béaloidis stiúrtu san scoil fada seo, agus a chion féin tugtha do gach ceann acu. Ach thar éinnt eile tá cuntas agaan ar shaol na rdaoinne idir Pádghaigh agus Criost-aithe, Gaelt agus Normánach, ar a gcreideamh, a sithe marreachta atá ann ó thall, agus na hathraithe atá tharla le himeachta iomsír. Léirionn an t-udar dúinn chomh fada is an próinna phobail seo i gCorca Dhuibhne, agus tá an taisleachta agus an saibhreas tainteacha a bheith leis an oibreacht sin go soláire fós san lá atá inniu ann.

Sna caidhléid tosaigh tá cur síos ar na híosaí meiguilíotachta, idir tuamaí nó uaigneanna agus gailínín. Meastar go raibh caeilteach ag na gailínín leis na tuamaí anailloch agus b’fhéidir, amach arseo, staidéar iomlán a dheanann ar an teoiric seo agus ar na smaointe eile atá nochtaithe dúinn sna leathanaigh tosaigh.

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Chuir mé féin suim speisialta sna caibidil a thraachtáin ar na sean-íarsmai atá chomh lionnmar sin sa cheannairear sin ón Daingean go dtí na Blascaodáil. Is sa limisteir sin atá na clocháin, go mór-
mhór in aice le Ceann Sléibhe, in mbailte Fearainn Fóm agus Gleann Fóm. Deintear cur scoil ar na
clocháin seo (beoite cíl saothar) i gcaibidil a cúc, ar an modh tógála ar leith a bhearn leo,
Tri. San caibidil céanna, agus fós i gcaibidil a sé d éag agus in A Gusín V, tá trácht ar aois na
glocháin agus ar na daoine a meastar a thóg iad agus a lonnaigh iomtu. Ceist chasta ach rannach
teacht i seo, agus is iomaitheoir atá ag scoláire ágáis faoi, Ceapann an t-údar go mb'fhéidir gur bhain
furmhór na glocháin seo le Ró na Mhánoise agus gur iomtu a mhair daoíche Gaeil a bhi faoi imeacht agus an saothrath do na Normánnaigh. Teoiricí sin is mó sa bhreathThuigim é seo, ach is soiléir gur ri-dheacair
as teoiric mar seo a chruthú gan tochaill seanadhliochtachta a dheanaimh ar na láthairche na fóm.
San chuid deireannach den leabhar, mar a bhfuil cuntas ar theacht na Normánnaigh agus ar shaol
na daoine i rith na Meánoise, is ea fearcha a chluíodh a shaol mór is sin eile agus an muin-scuid a bhí déanta
ag an údar ar stáit na hálaithe. Tugann sé leagúil an soiléir dúnú ar shaol na linn sin, ar stáit na
na Gaeil agus ar na príomh-shiolachta Normánnaigh. Fuair na Normánnaigh soiléir tapaidh go leor
ar an leithinis, ghabhadar na taite de na thúchaí féin agus rugadhar ar na Gaeil go dtí a limisteir
bheo chaidh ar na sléibhte agus ar na peithi. D'fhéadfadh an Naormánnaigh agus a soiléir i nár díollin
d'ainn a bhí deireadh an stáit each déag.
San caibidil ar an Eagais Mhánoiseach tá teoiricí sountasach faoi cheist atá ag déanamar
bhuartha do go leor scoláirí, ’s e sin — cén fáth go bhfuil cosánacht chomh mór sin idir sínéal Chlil
Mhalacédaire garda Síspéal Chomráca in gCaile Mhúirí. Tá roint fhanais eisean ag an údar go raibh
eagaisí de bhunú Cárthaigh mar chomhara in gcáil Mhalacédaire. Más rud é go raibh
ar Cárthaigh i gceannas na beagnach san dá air, ní aonadhach gur tógadh sínéal Chlil Mhalacédaire ar
an Chlil Mhalacédaire. Bh'fuairis, fhí annmí, an seachadh go ndúirt agus na ceardaíte eile a bhreath siar
go Corca Dhuibhne chun an obair a dheanamh.
Tá idir foinse agus cláracha leagtha amach go crúinnt chéacht ag an údar, agus neart grianagafanna,
cómh maith le léarscáil ar a bhfuil na príomh-íar-mhóir marbhálta. Tá na grianagafanna go tofa
scolléir, agus lóiríom ars iad an shailbhsclachtachta atá leis an leithinis. I ceann na hA Gusíní
ta liosta de na sean-íarsmai de réir na mbladte fearainn agus na bparóisil. Is trua nár cuireadh
pointe tagartha léarscála leis na hainmneacha, mar is duine uaireanta teacht ar chuid den na
h-íarsmaí. LocCh an bheag é seo, agus ar an iomlán is an luach a chur san áireamh is ionmhotha
an leabhar é. Beimid go léir ag tráth le leabhar eile ó phcean na húdar, ar stáit a mhuintire anuas
go dtí ar linn féin.

Tomás Ó Fearraí


To review this book as an archaeologist would be to condemn it for the numerous inaccuracies
and the occasional archaeological howler encountered therein, but that would be unfair not only
to the author but also to the prospective archaeologist reader. To review it as an art-historian
would be to praise it for its general approach and for the many telling insights offered, but that
would be to risk being too critical of the author and, again, unfair to the archaeologist. To
review it as a general reader would be to extol it for readability and for its attractive production
but that would not really be fair to either the reviewer or publisher. For this is a book to be
temps frustrate and irritate the archaeologist yet charm him with its beautiful prose and frequent flash
of inspired comment; a book to enchant the art-historian yet all too often to annoy him with its
many poor text-figures; a book to not only enhance the general reader's coffee table but also to
teach, enlighten, and effortlessly instruct him.
The archaeologist has for long realised the importance of art appreciation as one of the tools
of his trade, as it were. For him, however, accuracy in detail is perhaps more important than the
wider, more general approach of the art-historian, with the result that he occasionally can find
himself floundering around among the trees while not appreciating the wood to which they belong.
It is useful and even necessary, therefore, that the art-historian, with his more sweeping and
overall approach, should now and again venture fearlessly into the archaeologist's terrain. And this Mr.
Finlay has boldly done, generally speaking with success but regrettably leaving a trail of errors
of fact and conflicting dates behind him. To list off the errors noted would be to bias the review
unfairly, though one might be forgiven for quoting the howler on page 25 about chevrons appear-
ing... on Megalithic goldwork from Ireland dating from about 2000 B.C.,” One ought also criticise on several points the map on pages 22-23 showing the more important sites mentioned in the text — notably for the siting of Ardagh in Co. Longford (the diocesan see) rather than in Co. Limerick (the findplace of the Chalice).

The archaeologist, however, will be amply compensated by the flashes of real insight which Mr. Finlay’s discerning art-appreciative approach produces every so often. Seldom, for instance, will one come across such a meaningful interpretation of the Dieu d’Euffignieux as that propounded on page 70 (combined with the additional comment made on pages 76-77), while his comments on the manuscript artists of the seventh and eighth century Insular (Irish) School to be found on pages 120, 140-142 and 146 are not only thought-provoking but also convincing... “Not only did they use old motifs and styles but, more important, their approach was little changed... Neither in argument nor in art was the rational and measured approach of the classical world likely to succeed... the Celtic attitude is fundamental.” Not that those comments are at all necessarily new, but seldom to this reviewer’s knowledge have they been so eloquently made.

A study of a people’s art opens many doors to their minds. All through this book Mr. Finlay works back through the art to the Celtic mind. Indeed, he is undoubtedly correct when he states on page 20 that the Celt “is a man who feels rather than calculates. Much as he may have admired it, and whatever his resources, he could not have built the Parthenon”, a statement which follows that on page 19 to the effect that the Celt “is the eternal rebel not only against established authority but against cold reason.” The author’s descriptions of the art of the Celts support these interpretations, for instance his comments made on page 72 concerning the art of Celtic coinage: “It is true that they adopted certain classical conventions, such as a head on the obverse and another device on the reverse; but their wayward and devious fancies beguiled them away from the sharply realistic modelling of Greek coinage.” The Gaulish artist used the animal [horse] only as his starting-point, and sometimes nearly dismembered it or caused it to explode into an almost unrecognisable pattern over the surface of the coin. It remains in some strange way a horse... and affords some of the most extraordinary examples of the Celt’s passion for abstraction... on the obverse... the artist is preoccupied not with the face, as any southern artist would have been, but with the hair...” On page 76 he further elaborates his own approach to the interpretation of Celtic art when he writes that “music is the parallel which always occurs to me in trying to interpret the work of Celtic artists. Music is essentially abstract yet, in one form or another, has meaning for almost everyone” — the word ‘almost’ is well-chosen: there are living Celts who somehow do not appreciate the art of their ancestors!

The art-historian will like this book but will occasionally be brought up short when he attempts to appreciate the art illustrated by many of the text-figures. Nowhere, for example, has there ever been published a more inadequate, inartistic and inaccurate drawing of the Pában Mura slab than that of Fig. 34, while the initial D shown in Fig. 36 is so badly trimmed at its top and side that all meaning to its beauty and design is destroyed. The photographs are a lot better, although one might justifiably query the strange U.F.O. visible in the lower left corner of Plate 40.

The author’s text is strung together with imagination and poetry, and throughout this book the reader will be provoked to pause and ponder awhile by the striking and elegant turn of phrase. Seldom, for instance, has such a dramatic description been applied to the well-known Aesica Brooch as that on page 81: “Dynamic as a clenched fist, its grip on folds of drapery must have given it an impact out of all proportion to its size” (though at 11.5 cm. in length it is by no means small!). Henceforward one will more clearly remember the art of the Celtic mirrors from England when one visualises the design engraved on any of them as “at first sight symmetrical, though it swirls with the anchored freedom of an aquatic plant dancing in the current” (page 87). The author’s prose is truly worthy of the art he describes.

Although one of the acknowledged experts on the survival of Celtic art into Late Medieval times, Mr. Finlay regretably does not allow himself more than a few short pages to deal with it. He does, however, include some interesting comments about this late survival, not all of which will stand up to close scrutiny. For instance, he tells us that “Only over in Scotland, particularly in the untamed region around Dalriada familiar in history as the Lordship of the Isles, did the tradition [of Celtic art] precariously survive”, a statement which is belied by the great quantity of similar, if mostly as yet unpublished, material from the Ireland of the period. One might further quibble about his comparison of the patterns woven by this very late Celtic art, as found on the West Highland graveslabs, with those of the great Gospel pages (page 178, a statement impossible to substantiate, as can readily be seen by comparing his Fig. 49 with Plates 85, 84-86,
and IV. Closing the book, he further states that "It ended, this art, with the Reformation. There were echoes of it afterwards, but the skills died, and however much we cherish the seventeenth or eighteenth century brooch or targe they are as nostalgic as the poems of Duncan Bhan." Insofar as the line of unbroken continuity of the tradition is concerned this is probably true, though devotees of George Bain, Art O'Murtagh, Michael MacLiammóir, our own Maureen Collins-Ryan, and others who have successfully revived this art within the present century, would hardly agree that it all ended with the Reformation.

One might sum up this review by saying that this is just the type of book which this reviewer has for long dreamed about and wishes he had himself written — even though he quite realises that his more archaeological approach might not have been as suitable as that of Mr. Finlay, an art-historian with a real feeling for Celtic art and with a real flair for the beautifully-turned apt phrase and intuitively perpicious comment. A book for the art-lover and Celtophile — but oh! to have had a chance to cast an editorial eye over the architectural and other details!

Etienne Rynne

James Lydon and Margaret MacCurtain (General Editors), THE GILL HISTORY OF IRELAND, Gill and Macmillan Ltd., Dublin 1972-76:—

Vol. II: Donncha Ó Corráin, Ireland before the Normans — 80p.
Vol. IV: Kenneth Nichols, Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages — 80p.
Vol. VI: James Lydon, Ireland in the later Middle Ages — 90p.
Vol. XII: John A. Murphy, Ireland in the Twentieth Century — £1.30.

It was an imaginative venture on the part of an Irish publishing firm to embark on a paperback series of books on Irish history. The project shows that the spirit of Michael Henry Gill, the original founder of the firm, who first entered the publishing business over one hundred and fifty years ago, is still strong, whether the imprint be McGlashan and Gill, M. H. Gill and Son or, as it is today, Gill and Macmillan, his business has continued to fill the shelves of those whose interest is in the field of Irish history and literature.

The editors chosen for this eleven volume history of Ireland are two highly respected historians, namely Professor James Lydon of Trinity College, Dublin, and Dr. Margaret MacCurtain (Sr Benvenuta, O.P.) of University College, Dublin. Both have themselves made important contributions to Irish historical research, and they are in close touch with recent developments in the field. Thus they were able to bring together a team of writers whose contributions have helped to make the full series not simply a new interpretation of existing research but a presentation at times of new material and new ideas.

The task of the editors was not an easy one. They wisely relied heavily on established historians who, however, were youthful enough to present their work as a progress report rather than as a final legacy. There is no empire building, simply a reasonable look at our existing state of knowledge. However, the editors appear to have somehow held back from exercising too much control over the series and in the process have allowed a certain lack of continuity to creep into the volumes. There is next to no evidence that any writer has been aware of what the writer of the preceding volume had presented. There is also a considerable variation in style between the way in which the writers deal with references and bibliography. This does not impair the usefulness of the work, but it is somewhat unusual for editors not to lay down a consistent standard.

Most apparent inconsistency arises in the way in which the editors allocated their topics to the relevant authors. It looks as if one editor, probably Professor Lydon, took charge of the early and medieval periods while the other, apparently Dr. MacCurtain, seems to have edited the volumes beginning with the Tudor era. The approach of the two editors appears to have been
somewhat different, and to some extent the history has the appearance of being planned in two
halves with little co-ordination between the first and second parts.

The chronological framework laid down by the editors has not been consistently maintained.
In the volumes on the later middle ages separate contributions have been included on Gaelic
Ireland, by K. W. Nicholls, and on the church, by John Watt. This departure from the chrono-
logical scheme has some advantages, though in a series of this kind it is not the usual editorial
practice.

A great deal of initiative has been left with the individual contributors to the series, a factor
which results in some odd imbalances in presentation. Some of the authors introduce the period
allocated to them with a useful picking up of threads from the earlier period; others start off
at the date when they are supposed to begin as if no lead-in was considered necessary. This makes
the latter works less intelligible than those in which the scene is set, and is a serious fault if, as
the editors intended, each volume is to stand on its own. Professor John A. Murphy’s contribu-
tion on the period since 1918 is particularly at fault in this.

Overall the series is a valuable work, but there is considerable unevenness of treatment of the
course of Irish history. To dismiss the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in a single volume
while the three preceding centuries are covered by four volumes is certainly to short-change the
Tudors and Stuarts, and makes Margaret MacCurtain’s contribution much less valuable than it
might have been had she allowed herself, as editor, some elbow room for expansion.

Not all the inequalities in these books, however, arise from the limitations of space. Each
volume is a personal contribution which bears the stamp of the author’s special interest. For
example, one might reasonably criticize Gearóid MacNiocaill for the perfunctory way in which
he deals with the impact of Christianity on early Irish society or for his failure to draw together
archaeological and historical evidence. Nevertheless, one must admit that he has made an original
contribution to the history of secular society in the pre-Viking period. Most inspired of all the
volumes is, to my mind, Donncha Ó Corráin’s on the succeeding phase of Gaelic Ireland, the period
before the coming of the Normans. Of course, he has more adequate evidence upon which to base
his findings. In fact, this series makes a particularly solid contribution to the history of early
Gaelic society in Ireland when we include with those two the third volume on that topic, that
written by Kenneth Nicholls. Perhaps one may be allowed to comment that the later volumes of
the series pay considerably less attention to what had become known by the eighteenth century
as ‘The Hidden Ireland’.

The volumes by Michael Dolley, James Lydon, and John Watt, on the twelfth to the fifteenth
centuries, make the period they cover much more comprehensible than existing textbooks have
done. They also reflect the original work of the authors themselves.

Dr. Edith Johnston’s coverage of the eighteenth century is adequate, with reservations about
her lack of treatment of the Irish cultural background. It has the marks of the Lecky tradition
about it, though it has been broadened in many ways. Gearóid Ó Tuathmáin’s work on Ireland
before the Famine which, remarkably, goes beyond that cataclysm, is a lively presentation of the
period in a more rounded but less detailed way than Miss Johnston’s. Professor Joseph Lee,
dealing with the second half of the nineteenth century, shows considerable understanding and an
ability to synthesise, though perhaps he takes a bit too much for granted for the undergraduate
reader. This, of course, is the basic problem which each author faced when embarking on his or
her work — how far should the facts be stated and how far should they be interpreted? Professor
John Murphy tends to lay more emphasis on the statement of facts than on interpretation. Not
all of his facts are true — it would be impossible to write without error — but his work suffers
more from his purely chronological approach than do most of the others.

All in all, however, this Gill History of Ireland is an exciting addition to our history reading.
Each volume is supplied with an index, and teachers of every level will welcome it — so too will
that growing public who are showing a deep interest in Ireland’s past.

TOMÁS P. Ó NEILL

Nicholas Furlong, DERMOT, KING OF LEINSTER AND THE FOREIGNERS, Anvil

In 1970, Anvil Books published The Norman Invasion of Ireland by Wexfordman Richard
Roche [see this Journal, 13 (1970), 64]. Recently they have published the work of another Wexford-
man relating to the same period. The blurb claims that "the real Dermot MacMurrough" is to be presented — Mr. Furlong, the author of this new book, believes that in history "there is no black, no white, there are instead a great many subtle shadings due to motivations and circumstances".

The Book of Leinster records Dermot's birth in 1110, the third son of Donnchadh MacMurrough, the reigning king of Leinster; the same manuscript records his death at Ferns on the 1st of May, 1171, describing him as "king of all southern Ireland and also of Meath", and adding that it was "after the victory of Extreme Union and Penance. . ." The traditional view of Dermot's career, if true, ought to have left him with a heavy load on his conscience as he made his final peace, but it is Mr. Furlong's belief that "Any objective examination of Dermot MacMurrough must absolve him of the leprosy visited upon him". Having read Mr. Furlong's relatively objective examination, I have been duly persuaded that Dermot was no worse than any other of those horrifically cruel men who had power in twelfth century Ireland — but then, cruelty in Ireland was not the monopoly of the twelfth century.

Dermot was a man of contrasts: the man who had the Abbess of Kildare raped was on another occasion commended by St. Bernard of Clairvaux for his zealous promotion of church reform. Our author, in assembling the known facts has breathed life on them, without overmuch indulging the imagination which he is known to possess. In the process he presents many little gems, some for the first time, like the text of the letter from Bernard to Dermot, or the practise of a little nepotism by the saintly Lawrence O'Toole when he tried to secure the appointment of his nephew as his successor in the abbatical see of Glendalough.

From his unprecedented and lawbreaking choice as 'King of Leinster and the Foreigners' at the age of sixteen, Dermot had to cope with enemies within Leinster like the O'Toole and the Mac Paclain, the Norse of Dublin and Waterford, and even with the High-King, Turlough O'Connor — not to mention his notorious enemy, Tiernan O'Rourke. Within two years the young king, "lashèd, beaten and kicked", was reduced to becoming a minor chiefman, the King of Hy Kinsella. From this point on our sympathy is won, siding with the wealidig in his battles for former titles, former power. But a man with qualities of swordsmanship, ruthlessness, guile, mental super-speed and organisational ability such as Dermot possessed, could not be kept down for long. He soon regained his titles. Mr. Furlong sees Dermot as lacking in luck, but extreme hatred of, and passion for revenge against O'Rourke of Brega, together with his dogged refusal to pay honour price for Devorgilla, ensured the turbulence of the remainder of his career.

Mr. Furlong does not claim to be a professional historian, but he does provide us with a comprehensive bibliography of manuscript and printed sources, and with many useful references. I got the impression that he was somewhat selective in his references to the many sources examined, substantiating some but not all facts, but any lack of professional thoroughness is more than compensated for by some passages of beautiful prose. The book ranges over the whole western European scene of the twelfth century, military, political and ecclesiastical. The rise of the Cistercians in Ireland, the key role of the Norse cities, the struggle for survival of the middle kingdoms of Meath and Offaly, and the fortunes of the twelfth century kingdom of Thomond, are all woven into this story of Dermot.

At 75p this is a very good buy for the historian or the general reader — it provides history with life.

Ann Gannon


Nowhere in this new publication is there even the slightest indication that it is anything other than a completely new book — which it is not. It was first published in 1960 [see this Journal, 12 (1960), 103-104] by the same publisher, so such seeming suppressio veri, suggestio falsi, is not really excusable.

Apart from the fact that this edition is pocket-sized, in paperback, and is cheaper, there are some other differences between it and the first edition. It has been greatly revised, not only with
an extended 'Introduction' but including many more names, and with additions and corrections made to the annotations, e.g. between O Brien and (O) Briody which followed one another in the 1969 edition there are now Briggs, (O) Brine, Mac Brine, and Mac Brinn. The last name is derived from brenn, a raven, and is allocated to Co. Down where they normally make Byrne of it.

Brinn, of course, is also found in Co. Clare where it would seem to be an intermediate form between Rynne and the original Mac Dhrin (likewise derived from brenn, a raven). The 'Bibliography' is also somewhat enlarged, but a not so welcome difference is the way in which the slightly out-of-date map of Irish surnames is now printed in overlapping halves on successive pages; furthermore the distinction between Gaelic and Hiberno-Norman names is no longer clear, all the names being printed in the same black colour instead of in red and black respectively.

The first edition of this book was a most valuable publication and, insofar as the improvements in this one outweigh the less welcome changes, this new edition is even more so.

Etienne Rynne


This is both a personal and historical record of internment without trial in Ireland since 1916, but it deals mainly with events in Northern Ireland since the latest use of this weapon, beginning on the 9th of August 1971. It is a useful and very full account of the question since that date. However, it fails to deal with some of the ancillary events which illustrate the depth of the tragedy of the divisions in Northern Ireland. For example, it does not refer to the joint statement issued on behalf of the heads of the Protestant Churches approving of the introduction of internment by Brian Faulkner or to the fact that Cardinal Conway was not consulted while the statement was being prepared — a tragic example of the limited view of the clergy involved. We are too close to the whole problem to view it dispassionately, and Mr. McGuffin, himself one of those interned, is undoubtedly deeply and emotionally stirred by his experiences. Nevertheless, this is a record which will be basic reading for all who wish to understand the recent history of the troubled province of Ulster or of that part of it ruled from Stormont.

Tomás P. Ó Néill


This book is a many faceted gem — it can be read at a sitting as a well-written volume, it can be referred to as a mine of information on some specific date or custom, and it is a bedside pleasure for dipping into — except that such a reader comes to earth a hundred pages later and realises how late it is!

The principal reaction to this volume is one of admiration for the years of collection and the hours of research into sources which made it possible. This review is written in a part of the country where, mercifully, many of the customs mentioned in the book are not yet evaporated in the heat of 'The Seventies', and the writer knows well the many extensions, and sidetracks, and related subjects that collect around an enquiry into any one of these dates. One, only, need suffice to make the point. The St. John's Eve bonfire, which is still common west of the Shannon, receives an extension in a very restricted area of country, namely the town of Shrake, Co. Mayo. After the main fire has burnt for some time, the eight and nine year olds make a number of small stone enclosures against the wall of the village green, and then transfer a portion of fire into each of the enclosures. It seems doubtful that this is an extension of the household fires to which Dr. Danaher refers, since they are clearly much more closely 'attached' to the large communal fire. The interesting detail is that at no place up to four or five miles radius does this practice obtain, and it would appear that there is a strictly local significance about it.
The delight of a book like this is that it stimulates memory, and produces reactions like "Yes, of course, we used to do that — but afterwards we . . . ." and away we go on some fascinating extra detail. It is well that we should remember our past and do what we can to prevent it being entirely engulfed in today’s materialism.

It was a happy thought to include the well-chosen illustrations in the text rather than making a special section of them which necessitates a complex indexing system as is done in many modern volumes. At least this spares us the infuriating problem of using three or four fingers to interleave the pages to which we wish to refer. The illustrations are chosen with care and imagination too, which is an added attraction. The indexing of the book, though brief, appears adequate, save that in some instances the alphabetical order is somewhat curious!

It is difficult, in commending this book, to avoid the desire to report back to Dr. Danaher, though he would probably not object too much since much of his material must have come to him through interchange of memories. The strength of this desire is a measure of the success of the book. It is curious that in an area where many of the customs are recorded, some of the others are quite unknown, and it would be most interesting to know how and why the losses occurred.

One of the most interesting details is the passage about the true identity of the 'shamrock', which must have taken the wind out of a number of sails, and, perhaps, put the purveyors of 'Real Shamrock' in their proper perspective. There is, alas, always someone prepared to make a fast penny out of a gullible public.

The book is to be warmly commended both as an informant and as a companion. Finally, as a gift to Dr. Danaher: a dateless piece about the wearing of the new suit, as told to your reviewer in East Galway. In that area it was the practice on the first Sunday after purchase, to wear the new coat and the old trousers; on the second Sunday, to wear the new trousers with the old coat; and on the third Sunday to wear the whole new suit and get 'plastered' after Mass!

L. B. MAYER-JONES