From Royal Kincora to Croom of the Merriment.

A REVIEW OF SOME OF THE LITERATURE OF THOMOND.

EILIS NI MHURCHADHA.

"Luacham leigheann, leigheann brón ar lan." Let us discuss some aspect of learning, leaving sorrow on one side. In this year of international topsy-turvydom the suggestion contained in Padraigin Haíead’s fine alliterative line is good. In their trips through Thomond, the Archeological Society have visited historical remains extant above the ground. Perhaps it is opportune to review some of the literary remains of Thomond, some of our national wealth which “is more lasting than the riches of the world.” Thomond’s contribution to Gaelic literature is not inconsiderable. In spite of the burning, drowning and destruction of materials we have a continuous record in the Gaelic language of what Thomond men have thought and felt for over a thousand years. Two famous books, half-novel, half-history, “The Wars of the Gael and the Gall” and “The Wars of Turlough,” give us an intimate, picturesque narrative of life in Thomond from the rise of the Dalcasians until the early fourteenth century. Some of the Fenian sagas have their background in Thomond. In the middle ages, intellectual Normans coming under the influence of the Thomond bardic traditions made interesting additions to Gaelic love-poetry. Famous satires and contentions have emanated from this area. In the literary revival of the seventeenth century Limerick County was well served by the pen of David Ó Bradaigh. In the outburst of the poetry of the people in the eighteenth century Limerick and Clare took an active part. When the Gaelic tongue seemed in danger of extinction in the penal days, scribes were at hand to transcribe old manuscripts and to record recent literary efforts. In the nineteenth century, Thomond produced competent translators who made Gaelic thought available for those who no longer knew the native language. Let us make a brief survey of the outstanding compositions:

*THE WAR OF THE GAEL AND THE GALL. (1016 A.D.)*

We are indebted to Dr. Henthorn Todd for translating and editing this contemporary history of the invasions of Ireland by the Danes and the Norsemen. The style of presentation seems strange to the modern reader; the appeal of the language, with its flamboyant, adjectival rhythm, is to the ear of a group rather than to the eye of the silent reader; it belongs to the age of the shanachie, when readers and manuscripts were few and listeners were many. Though its avowed purpose is to recount the various phases of the two-hundred years’ resistance of the Gael to the inroads of the Norwegians and the Danes, the book is really a dramatic, eulogistic biography of one superman, Brian Boru. The setting of the drama of Brian’s meteoric career is well prepared; the long sequence of the recurring invasions is skilfully presented. In wave after wave they came and they left not a cave under ground they did not explore and they left nothing from Luimneach to Corcombre that they did not ravage.” “The entire of Munhain was plundered by them on all sides and devastated.” This is no precise, military narrative, it is the work of a partisan war-correspondent playing on the emotions of the public. “In short, until the sand of the sea or the grass of the field, or the stars of heaven are counted it will not be easy to enumerate or to relate what the Gaels suffered from them.”

Two scions of Dal Cais Borunha arose to save the country from this menace, “two gates of battle, two spears of victory and readiness, Mathgamhain and Brian.” From small beginnings, the resistance of Brian, the pre-destined saviour of the Gael, grew until “there was not a winnowing sheet from Benn Édaír to Tech Duinn in Western Erin that had not a foreigner in bondage in it, nor was there a quern without a foreign woman.” In graphic, colourful, exaggerated language, the eventful story is woven. The treacherous murder of Mathgamhain, Brian’s rise to the High Kingship and the great peace enjoyed early in the eleventh century are dealt with at great length. So great was that peace that a lone woman made the circuit of Erin unmolested. “From Torach to pleasant Cliodhna And carrying with her a ring of gold.”

*Cogad Gaedhil re Gallaibh. The War of the Gael and the Gall. Edited and translated by Dr. James Henthorn Todd.*
In these pages we meet Brian the patron of learning, the builder of bridges, causeways and highroads. The narrative sweeps on to its well-known climax, the tragic victory of Clontarf. "In short, Erin fell by the death of Brian." The return from Fingall is on a quieter note. But when the men of Osory demanded hostages from the war-worn army, the indomitable spirit of the Dalkeasians asserted itself, even the wounded men asked to be tied to stakes procured from the nearest wood so that they could stand during the battle.

This heroic manner of describing historical events and personages became a feature of literary Gaelic early in the eleventh century. The chroniclers had come under the influence of the Scandinavian sagas and of the Latin and Greek classical writings which were studied in the Gaelic schools. A school of "synthetic" historians arose who wrote the history of Ireland as they imagined it ought to be, not as it was. This technique equates Brian Boru with Caesar and Murchadh with Hector. But in spite of the flamboyance and exaggeration, authorities tell us that the substratum of historical fact is not falsified.

The laments, panegyrics and dialogues in verse form which are interspersed through the prose text are worthy of study. Especially interesting is the dialogue between Mathghamhain and Brian, celebrating the victory gained by them in Limerick over the Danes in 968.

"Limerick was altogether ravaged by thee,  
Thou didst bear away their gold and their silver;  
Thou didst spoil their fort at that time,  
And put it under a sheet of flame."

Brian's proud challenge to Maolmuaidh, who had treacherously slain Mathghamhain, reads well. In translation, the alliterative assonances and the other ornaments of the syllabic metres are lost.

Much interest centres around the identity of the author of this tract. He must have been an eye-witness to the battle of Clontarf, or he compiled his story from the testimony of eye witnesses. Dr. Todd in his copious annotations deals with this and many other engrossing points. Dr. O'Connor suggests that it may have been written by Mac Liag, Brian's friend and chief ollamh of Munster. Between twelve and thirteen hundred lines of this poet's work have been preserved, and they show him to be a peer amongst the poets and scholars of Brian's time. His best composition is his moving lament for the desolation of Kincora after Clontarf:

†"They have all alike gone,  
King's sons who never spoiled a church,  
That I remain in the world after them  
Deprives me of my senses, O Kincora."

The Four Masters thought so highly of him that they record both the first and the last verse he ever composed. Mac Liag well deserved this and the other honours he received.

‡THE WARS OF TURLough (1276-1318).

The long family feud of two branches of the O'Brien family fighting for the supremacy of Thomond is the subject of this story. For three generations Clann Turlough More and Clann Brian Rua strove for the title of O'Brien. Turlough was too young to assume the reins of power after the death of the previous king; Brian Rua, his uncle, had himself inaugurated King at Magh Adhair and for nine years reigned in peace until Turlough was old enough to claim his right to reign. From 1276 onwards recurring wars swept over the land from "burraffy of the wide roads, oared galleys and safe harbour" to "wide Burren's naked hills," and from "Euchte's leafy borders" to "Lough Derg, deep-fringed with bush and bough," "during which time throughout Thomond the man that could hold a sword scarce let it from his hand while he slept." Clann Turlough stood for Gaelic independence. Brian Rua sought Norman help; he went to Cork to get the

*Celtic Ireland. Ecin MacNell.
‡The Wars of Turlough (Irish Texts Society). Translated by Standish Hayes O'Grady.
assistance of Earl de Clare. In lieu of his help, de Clare was given all lands between Limerick and Ardsollus. In 1277, he built Bunratty Castle "of dressed stone, girt with thick outer wall, containing a roofed impregnable donjon and having capacious lime-washed appurtenances."*

The narrative is attributed to John Mac Rory Magrath, hereditary historiographer of the O’Briens at the closing stages of the bloody struggle, and seems to have been compiled about the years 1345-60. The Four Masters mention four members of the Magrath family as poets in Thomond between 1410 and 1573. MacBrody speaks of "the clann Craithe whom the schools used to adore." John Mac Rory Magrath sketches in the story of his patron’s family from the death of Brian Boru to Turlough’s stand against the Normans in 1275. For many years, through "the crooked dealing of the Norman baron de Clare," the war was kept ablaze until it terminated in the terrible battles of Corcomroe (1317) and of Dysert O’Dea (1318). As a result, Thomond was rid for more than two centuries of everything foreign.

Magrath did not break away from the literary conventions of his predecessors. The form of his narrative is similar to that of "The War of the Gael and the Gall," a prose text frequently interspersed with poems. The language is often graphic and poetic but it suffers from an excess of sonorous alliterative phrases, of "the heaped-up epithets of the Irish court poet." The poetry often reveals the rich imagination of a writer stimulated by intimacy with nature. Referring to the strength of Donall O’Brien, he says: — "He was the wave’s impact on the shore." In lamenting his death, he cries out: "By his murder the sun is turned red and every profitable mountain is withered; every moist spot even as far as the sea, the clear, clean wind has withered." The word-pictures of places are apt—"Craite’s thick-sheltering, fruitful, abounding woods," "Ruan’s grass-grown hollow calabers," "well-fenced Ralane" and "Burren’s uncouth ways, narrow gaps, crooked passes, rugged boulders and high sharp crests."

Several battle addresses are included in the narrative. There is a modern flavour in the following reference of Turlough Mor to the evacuation of homes: — "Make the fight to win . . . so that within your borders . . . a final term be set to hither and thither transport of your little labes, to ceaseless peregrinations of your fittings." Murtough O’Brien’s incitement to his troops shows war as unlovely in the thirteenth century as it is in the twentieth. "Win victory, fight for a country, lay warriors low, pierce chiefs outright, bore holes in sides, lop heads, main arms, blind eyes, slash mouths, carve bodies, quell vigour . . ."

Magrath gives us a highly-coloured picture of the monastery of Ennis as it was in his time, "washed by a fish-giving stream, having lofty arches, walls limewashed, with its order of chastity and their golden books, its sweet religious bells; its well-kept graves, homes of the noble dead; with furniture both of crucifix and illuminated tomes, both friar’s cowl and brodered vestment; with windows glazed, with chalice of rare workmanship." The author dwells frequently and admiringly on the Abbey of Corcomroe enshrined in "the edge-stoned, huge-rocked, rough-hilled land of Corc."

The admixture of the supernatural in Magrath’s narrative presupposes a childish credulity in the reader. Such a fantasy is not out of place in imaginative literature. Ireland, depicted in the form of a woman, is met with in a long series of allegorical songs in our literature. One of the earliest examples is "The Old Woman of Beare." In the aislingi of the eighteenth century, the spéir-bhean is a personification of Ireland. It is strange to find such a fantasy in a composition which pretends to be a historical tract. An apparition, "fair of face and of modest mien" with "pliant and wavy flowing hair" rebuked Turlough for desisting from the fight before he had achieved the overlordship of the country. She announced that her name was "Ireland’s Sovereignty." A monstrous and distorted form of a lone hideous hag called "the Dismal of Burren" foretold disaster to the forces of Donough O’Brien. Previous to his death at the hands of O’Dea, de Clare’s end was pressed to him by "the Waterdolful," a spirit of ill-omen and evil. In this, as in other medieval works of the synthetic historians, poetry and fact, dreams and realities, exact detail and wild imagination are linked together.

*That structure was burned by his son’s widow, Johanna FitzMaurice, after his death in 1318.
Having shown how Ireland made war in his day, our annalist reveals his dream-picture of future peace, “every son of a good man in his own residence... ollamhs in their raths... greyhounds in abundance... poets entertained largely... banquets, wine, mead.”

Frost in “The History and Topography of County Clare” finds Magrath’s narrative irritating, “a wretched tissue of strife, plunder and robbery unworthy of record.” It is to be regretted that the O Briens wasted their energies in internecine strife when they could have turned a united front to the foreign enemy. This chronicle, if tiresome, is valuable; it represents a phase in our literary development; it has linguistic and topographical importance. It has much of interest to the student of folk-lore and tradition.

**THE SHANNON.**

We feel that Magrath loved the Shannon, “the mighty-flowing brine,” “that craves the whole ocean. He reflects her many moods—“Shannon of the cold angers,” “limpid,” “blue-flowing,” “bright and deep.” Other writers before and after his time have been inspired by the beauty of our greatest river. Cuan O Lochain (1024), chief poet of Ireland in his day, gives a beautiful, fanciful story to explain the origin of the river. A lady called Sinann ventured near Connia’s well in search of the nuts of knowledge which grew on hazel trees near the well. The nuts were filled with all the refinements of literature, poetry and art. When ripe they fell into the well and were eaten by salmon known as “eo feasa,” the salmon of knowledge. As approach to the well was forbidden to a woman, the waters arose and drowned Sinann; the overflow formed a torrent which spread culture through Connacht, Leinster, and Munster.

A fine poem of uncertain date written by Diarmaid Ó Briain gives unqualified praise to the Shannon.

“O Shannon of Brian Boraimhe,
  ‘Tis wonderful, seeing the greatness of thy laughter
  How thou ceasest from thy clamour
  Going west to the sea.”

“... The good books say
  Thou are greater than all, O Shannon.”

In the Fenian sagas the Shannon is often the scene of dramatic incidents. “The Rowan-tree Palace” is identified with the estuary of the river. “The Adventures of Lomnachtain” begins and ends with Limerick and the river. The frequent crossings of the river by Diarmaid and Gráinne were exciting incidents in their thrilling flight from the anger of Fianna. In the famous lament of Eoghan Mac an Bhaird for the princes of Tyrone and Tyrconnell, the poet tells Nuala O’Donnell that all Ireland sympathizes with her grief, including the women who live beside “the slow Maigue” and the Shannon. There is material for an interesting anthology in the assembling of the literature and folk-lore of the Shannon and of the lakes and rivers of Thomond.

**THE GERALDINES.**

War and literary development rarely co-exist. In Thomond, Gaelic literature fell away as military violence and anarchy increased. From the coming of the Normans to the end of the fifteenth century scholars broke no new ground. The bards of Gaelic families, who retained their own lands in whole or in part, continued their usual records—genealogies, clan histories, conventional elegies for their dead. The Dalcaissian bards and ollamhs did their work continually during this period. On the Limerick side of the Shannon, the Eoghanacht families had been submerged or driven west or south into Desmond. The Bourkes and the FitzGeralds appropriated much of their land. The Gaelicisation of some of the Geraldines is a story that has often been told. Though the statute of Kilkenny forebade them to assume Irish ways, many of them acquired the Gaelic tongue and came under the sway of Gaelic culture. Outstanding amongst these was “Gerald, the Poet,” third Earl of Desmond. His father had been nicknamed “Maurice, the Rhymer.” Gerald had his own son fostered with the O Briens to advance Gaelic.
interests. "He excelled all the English and many of the Irish in knowledge of the Irish language, poetry and history." He was the Lord Chief Justice of Ireland in 1367. The story goes that in 1398 he disappeared and that he sleeps below the waters of Loch Gur whence he emerges every seven years to ride the surface of the lake. In the Scotch Book of the Dean of Lismore there are several Gaelic poems attributed to him. Many of them are dánta grádhla, or poems of love, in the courtly manner. This mode is thought to have been introduced into Gaelic literature by "Gerald, the Poet," from the Norman French. Many Gaelic poets, notably Keating and Ferriter, practised this type of composition at a later date. In "Mairg adeir oic ris na mnaíbh" (Woe to him who reviles women) Gerald shows himself a champion of the female sex. He reminds us that all good men, kings, bishops and prophets are born of women. Other Geraldines showed a partiality for Irish customs, they adopted as their chief ollamhs or professors of native law members of the famed Ó Maol Conaire family. About 1420, Earl James Desmond had a household poet or dán-maker, an O'Daly, of the famous hereditary bardic family. Keating, lamenting the death of Sean óg Mac Gearailt cries out: "—Every school was shattered because of his death." Mahon Ó Heffernan, finding no patron, says: "I am a merchant ship that has lost its cargo, after the FitzGerals who deserved renown." A study of "Dánta Grádhla" collected and edited by Professor Tomas Ó Rathile shows how much Gaelic literature benefited by the infusion into it of some of the culture of the Normans.

"THE Ó DALYS, POETS OF CORCOMROE (1244-16)."

John O'Donovan points out that there is no family to which the bardic literature of Ireland is more indebted than that of O'Daly. The parent stock originated in Westmeath and claimed descent from Niall of the Nine Hostages. Cuimhnacht na Sgoile O'Daly, who died at Clonard in 1139, was the first member of his family to acquire a reputation for learning. From his period onwards, poetry became a profession in the family, members being sent to various parts of the country as professors of poetry. According to tradition, Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh kept a college for finishing the literati of Ireland in history and poetry at Finnyvara, in the north of the Burren in Clare. In O'Donovan's time the ruins of his house and the garden walls were still to be seen. He died in 1244 and the monument erected to him is not far from the site of the house. For four centuries his descendants practised the hereditary art of poetry in Corcomroe; his son, Aenghus, a man eminent for poetry and a keeper of a house of hospitality, died in 1268. The most learned of the poets of Ireland, Aenghus Roe, died in 1350. In 1404, Carroll O'Daly, ollamh of Corcomroe, and Donnell, who was called Bolg-an-Dana (the budget of poetry), died. It is on record that Sir John Talbot, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, plundered the lands of O'Daly, poet of Corcomroe, in the year 1415, after which time Fearghal was chief poet about 1420. O'Daly of Corcomroe, a professor of poetry, who had kept a house of general hospitality at Finnyvara, died 1514 and was buried in the abbey of Corcomroe. Thus we see that for hundreds of years the O'Dalys resided in Thomond as the hereditary bards of the Ó Loughlins. In 1619 the Earl of Thomond gave by deed the lands of Finnyvara to several members of the O'Daly family. About that time the family home was visited by the Red Bard, who praised it:—

"The house of Ó Dálaigh—great its wealth—
Bestowing without folly at a white house;
It were a sufficiently loud organ to hear his pupils
Reciting the melodies of the ancient schools."

THE RED BARD 1571—1617.

A branch of the Ó Dálaigh family settled in Cork in the parish of Kilcrohane, between Dunmanus Bay and Bantry Bay, in the district known as Muinter Bhaire, as bards to the Ó Mahonys. Ruins of a structure called "The Old College House," belonging to the head of the O'Daly family, were still shown in John O'Donovan's time. Though there is no actual proof on record, it is believed that Aenghus O'Daly, the satirist, was a member

"See: "The Tribes of Ireland," by Aenghus O'Daly, with poetical translation by James Clarence Mangan, together with an historical account of the family of O'Daly—by John O'Donovan, LL.D., M.R.I.A.

†For the lands held in S.W. Limerick by the O'Dalys, as "rhymer" to the Earl of Desmond, see Begley II, 13. Across the Cork border another branch of this bardic family held estates under the McCarthy of Duallow (Butler's Cleanings in Irish History, 274-5.)
of this family, but not the chief of it. Ballyrune is supposed to have been his residence. There is a rock near the Tower at Sheep’s Head called Bro Aenghuis (Angus’ Quern), which is locally believed to have received its name from the Red Bard. This poet has the unenviable reputation of being the bitterest lampoonist and satirist in the Gaelic language. He lived in the reign of Elizabeth. Having made a circuit of the country, he composed a satire on the principal Irish families he visited and on such of the descendants of the Anglo-Normans as had adopted their customs and formed alliances with them. He lays bare their poverty and their lack of hospitality, two weaknesses not to be wondered at in an Ireland which had recently undergone the horrors of the Elizabethan wars. His comments on the houses he visited in Limerick and Clare are relevant to our review. His scathing quatrain about the Fitzgibbons was often quoted in reference to Lord Clare after the bitter Union controversy:

There is no anger but abates
Except the anger of Christ with the Clann Gibbon.
Small is the wonder that they should be as they are,
Increasing in evil every day.

In the poet’s time, John Og Fitzgibbon, commonly called the White Knight, was the head of the family. The family tomb is in the Abbey of Kilmallock.

His touch was devastating in reference to the Fitzmaurices—he would mete out neither praise nor blame to them as they were beneath notice—“poor gentlemen!” Thomas Fitzgerald, Knight of Glin, looked so grudgingly at him as he ate his supper that a piece, half-chewed, stuck in his throat at the very sight of the other’s eyes. He visited Ballycallane Castle occupied by the Purcells—hard-hissing griffins, a hungry, lean-bodied, begrudging horde. They had acquired the Kenry district, formerly the home of the Gaelic O’Donovans, O’Mulereveys, O’Cathlains, or the O’Callans. It is significant that Aenghus does not mention one Gaelic family on the Limerick side of the Shannon. The Burkes of Clan William, Castle Connell, closed inhospitable doors in his face:

I will make a satire for you with all my heart
And for the Friday against my will.

As he was leaving the area the only thing he was thankful for was that the bad roads of Limerick would prevent him from ever coming that way again.

Clare did not please him as—“A day-dinner they are never wont to take, one supper and that scantily given.” He journeyed through the country from the Ford to the Leap, that is, from An Na Boraimhe, near Killaloe, to Loop Head.

“But a living wight did not bestow on me,
The fourth of a groat in copper.”

The most ghoul-like invective of the whole satire was vented on a minor family of the O’Briens living at Kells, near Corofin.

Cealla bore away the palm for starvation,
In digging the church-yards in the snow!

This is reminiscent of Spenser’s terrible picture of Munster after the Elizabethan wars:—“Out of every corner of the woods and glynnes they came creeping forth upon their hands, for their legges could not bear them; they looked like anatomies of death, they spake like ghosts crying out of their graves; they did eat the dead carriions, happy where they could finde them, yea, and one another soon after, insomuch as the very carriasses they spared not to scrape out of their graves.” Little wonder that John O’Donovan asserts that Aenghus was in the pay of the British Government!

The MacMahons of Corca Bhaiscin; the MacNamara of Kilkishen and of Corbally Castle in the Barony of Upper Bunratty, came under the lash of his tongue. If he were at the door of Inchquin Castle for a thousand years he would not find one person to open it, but he would find eight to close it.

This satire is not an attractive composition, but it is interesting in many ways. From the numerous references to bread and butter throughout the poem, John O’Donovan

*History and Topography of Clare (Frost).
inferences that these formed an important part of the people’s food at the time. Much information can be gleaned from it about the private and general history of the different tribes and of the localities of their territories as well as the manners and customs of the period.

From the earliest times the satirising propensity of the bards was a bone of contention in the country. No man dared displease them lest he should be made infamous in the mouths of all men. Attempts were often made, with varying success, to curb their power. Aenghus the satirist was silenced when he met his end in O’Meagher’s house at Dromsaileach in the barony of Ikerrin, not far from Roscrea. He was stabbed by a trusted servant of O’Meagher. As he died, he composed a quatraine of repentance, lest the venom of his satire should fall on the chiefs:

All the false judgments that I have ever passed
Upon the chiefs of Munster, I forgive;
The meagre servant of the grey Meagher has
Passed an equivalent judgment on me.

THE CONTENTION OF THE BARDS. (1617-1620).

The early seventeenth century saw an extraordinary re-awakening of the Irish literary spirit. A Clareman, Teighe Mac Daire MacBrod, was responsible for the initiation of the famous Contention of the Bards. He was chief poet of Donough O’Brien, fourth Earl of Thomond. He had a fine estate and castle at Dunogan, in the barony of Ibricon, which belonged to him by right of his office as the hereditary ollamh of Thomond. His advice to the English-breid earl on the occasion of his inauguration is interesting. **“Run not according to thine own desire.”** “Be easy of access and diligent in thine own interests.” “Give not thyself up to play nor wine, nor feast . . .” In another poem, he warns O’Brien not to plunge the province into war and threatens him with dire consequences if he does not follow his advice; he will satirise him with a “*store of blister-raising ranns*” and, he adds, “they live not long so stricken.”

Teighe gave rise to the contention by reviving the old argument as to the relative superiority of Leath Mogha and Leath Cúinn, of the O’Briens and the O’Neills. He reproduced a poem supposed to have been written by Torna Êigeas in the fourth century which gave the palm of supremacy to Niall of the Nine Hostages to the detriment of Corc, king of Cashel. MacBrod disagrees with Torna in the poem, which begins with the line —“Ole do thagrais, a Thorna (Poor was your argument, Torna). That poem was the spark that set the fire of argument ablaze for four years. About seven thousand lines in all were written by the disputants. The southern protagonists on Teighe’s side were Fáelfeas O an Cháinte, Eoin Mac Craith, Art Óg Ó Caomhín and Turlough Ó Briain. Lughaidh Ó Cléirigh, a relative of the famous Micheál Ó Cléirigh, lead the van of the north, supported by Riobard Mac Artuir, O.S.F., Aodh Ó Domhnaill, Anluain Mac Aodhagain, Seán Ó Cléirigh, and Baoghghalach Mac Aodhaígín.

Many and curious are the topics introduced in the course of the long controversy, each poet’s contribution reflecting his own individuality and quality. Mac Brod dwells on the virtues of Leath Mogha, he claims that it is more temperate in cold and heat than the north, it is fuller of honey and fruit, it is nearer to all goods over seas and it is richer in cities and neighbours. Good Dalcassian that he is, he becomes lyric about the glories of Brian Borumha: —“Never was born of Niall’s race a king stronger than Brian.” Brian introduced surnames, he boasts, so that one sees to which tribe of Mide a man belongs. “Muircheartach Ó Briain brought the stones of Oileach to Limerick asking no leave.” Not to be outdone, Lughaidh, Ó Cléirigh reminds Teighe not to be boastful of the ports of Munster, Corcaigh, Portlairge, Luimneach—“they are new places founded by the Gaill and concern not our old divisions.” He draws attention to the fact that “among the Northerns are the capital of the Churches.” There is often a lively, acid flavour in the tit for tat of this contention. Hard knocks are given and taken but the courtesies are observed. In Teighe’s stand-offish reply to the priest, Riobard Mac Artuir, who intervened in the discussion, one senses the hauteur of the craftsman dealing with an intrusive novice. “In all that concerns your calling, I will obey you, as is my duty. In nothing

*Literary History of Ireland.—Dr. Douglas Hyde.*
farther do I heed you.” Mathghamhain Ó hIferráin composed an amusing fable to prove that it is futile for Irish people to quarrel among themselves while the Sasanaich reaps the spoils.

Teigue justly claims that he did great service to the cause of learning among his contemporaries for he “opened up and made clear paths of knowledge which were obscure.” It is significant that the researches of Keating, Micheál Ó Cléirigh and Mac Firbis were subsequent to the Convention of the Bards. The poetry in this long discussion is of a high standard, composed by critical scholars who were masters of their art. Particularly striking are the pithy epigrams one meets with on every page, which are so typical of the Gaelic speech and so revelatory of the Gaelic mode of thought.

Tradition has it that Teigue MacBrody was murdered by a Cromwellian soldier who threw him over a cliff saying, “Abair do raoin anois, a dhír bhig”—“Say your rann now, my little man.”

*DAVID Ó BRUADAIR (c.1624-1698).*

Irish scholars and poets have always been wanderers. Donnchadh Rua Mac-Connara, of Craitee, settled down in Waterford, having travelled the world from Hamburg to Newfoundland. Perhaps it was wanderlust or the search for a patron which urged David Ó Bruadair to leave his native Cork and adopt Limerick as a home. For more than forty years this most learned poet of his day composed religious, patriotic and political poems, satires, eulogies of patrons, epitaphs and humorous compositions—an exciting running commentary on the Cromwellian Plantations, the restoration of the Stuarts, the Titus Oates Plot, the Williamite war, the Treaty and its aftermath of violation and confiscation. We follow the repercussions of these events on his patrons, the FitzGeralds of Claonaghla, Drumcollogher, and the Bourkes of Ballinagarde and Cahermoyle.

It would be impossible in the compass of a few paragraphs to do justice to the work of this versatile poet, this satirical commentator of a changing world. Much of his work is a passionate lament for old ways and things that have passed. In mocking, pungent style he jibes at the ignorant pretences of the Cromwellian upstarts, their dislike for learning and the prevalent love of outward show. “Would that I were a boor like the rude, illiterate people with whom I am forced to consort.” He belonged to an earlier age, he was out of joint with his times, like Oisin after the Fiana. Well-versed in the language, history and the ancient literary forms of the country, he was too prone to the use of the arduous, archaic words and forms. He despised the new lyric poetry which he considered as nonsensical, musical assonance. Though his profession necessitated dependence on patrons, he was not subservient; dignity, personality and intellectual pride are the keynote of his work. He met with poverty but he faced reverses with fortitude. “My knuckles are all swollen from the motion of the clay-spade.” He knew false friends but he survived their defection. We note his pathetic, short-lived pleasure when he sees Irish Teagues on guard at the soldiers’ barracks instead of the Cromwellian Ralphs. He composed a rather pompous poem in praise of Patrick Sarsfield after the blowing up of the siege-train at Ballyneety, which compares unfavourably with the splendid anonymous poem, “The Farewell to Patrick Sarsfield,” one of the finest ballad poems in the language. Through his verses we see the conflict of opinion about the advisability of accepting or rejecting the Treaty of Limerick. Like his patron, Sir John Fitzgerald, David approved of the Treaty; he rebuked those who did not hold the same view; he inveighs against the Irish soldiers who joined the Rapparees in preference to going to France with “Sir John.” But he lived to see bishops and religious banished, “alien sects and masculists” in power, the Treaty violated, all hopes blighted—“the end of the whole of it is, that I am reduced to old shoes, here is an end to my writing on the man of Fodla.”

David Ó Bruadair, with his world fallen about him, became silent. He is thought to have died about 1698. We do not know where he is buried. Ó Bruadair’s writings bear witness to the fine potentialities of Gaelic as a means of literary expression. Circumstances contrived to make him almost a free lance, untrammelled by the cramping and stereotyping influences of hereditary patrons. He brought his wit, his learning, his

accurate idiom, his patriotism, his moral integrity to bear on his interpretation of the times and Gaelic literature is the beneficiary.

THE WILD GEESE. THE PENAL LAWS.

After the Treaty of Limerick in October, 1691, Patrick Sarsfield used his influence to make as many as possible adhere to the Jacobite cause and to make them accompany James II. to France. Many anonymous poems dealing with this period have been preserved, the finest being, "A Farewell to Patrick Sarsfield."

*Farewell, O, Patrick Sarsfield! May luck be on your path! Your camp is broken up—your work is marred for years; But you go to kindle into flame the King of France's wrath Though you leave sick Írle in tears.

The poet has other pleasant memories of Limerick during the siege:
†We had card-playing there, o'er our camp fires at night, And the Word of Life, too and prayer.

The lovely song, "Shule Aroon," is surely an Irish Brigade Ballad, a Munster girl lamenting her absent lover:
†But now my love has gone to France, To try his fortune to advance; If he e'er comes back, 'tis but a chance, Is go d'téidh tu, a mhùirnin, slán.

The hope of the return of the Wild Geese is frequently expressed: —§"The Wild Geese shall return, and we'll welcome them home—they will waste and destroy, overturn and o'erthrow—They'll accomplish whatever may in man be . . .!"

The plight of those who remained at home in Ireland after the violation of the Treaty of Limerick has been dealt with by many writers. The dark and evil days of the Penal Laws affected the work of scholars and poets very seriously. The "poor scholars" and poets who wandered through Limerick in those desolate years found no Big Houses there ready to welcome them. Anglo-Irish nobles who might have appreciated their art were gone with Sarsfield and strangers replaced them. The scholars gravitated to the humble homes of the submerged Irish, who, through plantations and confiscations, had held on to the land as inferior tenants, gavellers or farmers, hewers of wood and drawers of water to their conquerors. "The savage old Irish," as Swift called them, had fallen low. Irish Ireland had become a peasant nation. Gone was the super-structure of princes and nobles, gone the aristocratic caste of bards and ollamhsh and law-givers. Gaelic Ireland had now its home in cottages and hovels, removed from anglicised cities and towns. Into this lowly environment came Aodhagán Ó Rathaille, a cultured scholar from Sliabh Luachra school in Kerry. Though poor, the people of Limerick had retained the love of learning for which their ancestors were noted. Ó Rathaille was not idle during his stay in their midst. In the library of the Royal Dublin Society there is a manuscript copy of Keating's History of Ireland with the following inscription: —"Written by Egan O'Reilly for Rory, son of John Óg Mac Sheehy, of Dromcollogher, on the 7th day of July, 1722." Other poets came to Limerick from the dispersed Blarney Bardic school which had flourished until the MacCarthy's were broken. Professor Corkery in The Hidden Ireland shows us how the poverty-ridden and plague-stricken people reacted to contact with these cultured men. As a result, pariahs outside the law became vocal expressing themselves in an amazing burst of lyric poetry.

THE POETS OF THE THE MAIGUE. THE CLARE POETS.

Limerick, so long silent, so long over-run by planters, produced a famous coterie of writers known as the poets of the Maigue. Sean Clarach Mac Domhnaill (1691-1754) was the pioneer who established the first Court of Poetry in Coshma, sessions of which

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*The Poets and Poetry of Munster, p. 225.
†The Poets and Poetry of Munster, p. 229.
‡The Poem Book of the Gaeil, p. 196.
§The Poets and Poetry of Munster, p. 201.
used to be held at a lios on his farm at Kiltoohig or at the brúgh of Oilioll Oilum (?) at Bruree. He was, perhaps, the most learned and artistic poet of the period. Seán Ó Tuama (1708-1775) inn-keeper, water bailiff, butter-broker, school-master and 'herder of hens,' became the leader of the Court after the death of Ó Domhnaill. It seems highly probable that he received an education above the average; he writes like a man of culture. Ó Tuama's tavern at Croom became a celebrated meeting-place for the bards of Thomond. Much against his wife's advice, the poet put up a sign over his door offering welcome to all true Gaels when they happened to be without money. It runs thus:—

*Should one of the stock of the noble Gael,
A brother bard who is fond of good cheer,
Be short of the price of a tankard of ale,
He is welcome to Ó Tuama, a thousand times here!

These bardic assemblies exercised a steadying influence in the district, they aided in the restoration of the national spirit, so crushed beneath the weight of penal enact-ments. Seán Ó Tuama used the old melodies still sung by the people as the framework of many of his lyrics. In a lament for the downfall of the Stuarts, he used with great effect the air: "The White Cockade":—

†It makes my grief, my bitter woe,
To think how lie our nobles low,
Without sweet music, bards or lays,
Without esteem, regard or praise.

To the plaintive air, "Moirín Ni Chuileannain," he composed his well-known aisling of that name.

Father Dinneen mentions the names of more than thirty poets in this group of the Maigue. Many of them were priests, outstanding amongst whom was Father Nicholas O'Donnell, O.S.F., the learned guardian of the Franciscan Monastery of Adare for many periods between 1738-1759. He lived in close intimacy with the poets and wits of the Maigue. The disappearance of his horse, Preabaire, formed the subject of a bardic contention in lighter vein.

Andrew Magrath, a wild rake of a man, was, perhaps, the one in whom the spark of poetic genius burned most brightly. Owing to a quarrel with the parish priest in connection with one of his love affairs, he was obliged to leave the Croom district. His farewell song is tender and pathetic and entitles him to rank as a lyric poet of a high standard:—

‡A wanderer and languid am I, furious and cold, weak, prostrate, disease-smitten, wretched on the mountain-top, with none, alas! to befriend me—except heather and the north wind!" He who loved to be hail-fellow-well-met with all is now cold-shouldered: §"When as a bird in its questing I enter the village, there's no welcome for me, they are cold and jesting, and the women gathered together question one another: Who is he? Whence is he from? Where is he going?"

These men, this galaxy of poets, were the interpreters of the life of the people; they revealed their religious feeling, their intense patriotism, their deep-felt, mental resistance to the Sasanach.

||Those insolent Sasanach bands,
Shall hold their white mansions transiently,
Ours shall again be those lands,
Long tilled by our fathers anciently!

Drinking songs and convivial compositions were frequent. Ó Tuama's drinking song is merry and vigorous:—

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* Poets and Poetry of Munster, p. 11.
† Poets and Poetry of Munster, p. 63.
‡ The Hidden Ireland, p. 286.
§ The Hidden Ireland, p. 231.
||Poets and Poetry of Munster, p. 95.
"I sell the best brandy and sherry,  
To make my good customers merry;  
But, at times their finances  
Run short, as it chances,  
And then I feel very sad, very!"

Contentions and discussions alternated with songs dealing with the ups and downs of the poets' lives. Beautiful allegorical vision songs conveyed in a secret way the hope of ultimate freedom of the country. The return of the Stuarts was desired by some, but by others they were suspect, they had shown themselves unworthy: —

It is the coming of King James that took Ireland from us,  
With his one shoe English and his one shoe Irish.  
He would neither strike a blow nor would he come to terms,  
And that has left, so long as they exist, misfortune upon the Gaels.

Sometimes the poets dipped their pens in gall to attack those whom they disliked. Seán Clárach's bitter satire on Colonel Dawson of Aherlow, is a notable example of this phase.

†Squeeze down his house, O ye stones, in your hall of clay,  
You reeking, gore-sprinkled boar, old Dawson the grey.

This terrible tyrant "hitched hunger to the people, forcing them to obey." Seán O Tuama's risposte to the nagging Madame Quinn of Adare is amusingly translated by James Clarence Mangan as "O Dame of the Slander Wattle." He was never really tossed about by the storms of life until he herded her hens. He always passed on the other side when he heard a hog's tangle rattle, until he was forced by circumstances to take service with her.

‡I scarce ever know what cruelty was, except through rumour or prattle,  
Till the dismal day I felt your flail, O Dame of the slander wattle.

Clare, as far as we know, had no organised Court of Poetry. Three fine poets were thrown up out of the grimmness of the Penal Days in that county. Michéal Colmín, a Protestant of Kilcorcoran, near Miltown Malbay, living in more comfortable circumstances than the other poets of his time, composed an attractive Fenian lay about Oisin in Tír-na-nóg, also a long prose tale, "Turobhf Mac Stairn"—two works of merit. Most of his literary output was burned by his son after his death as he was ashamed of his father's Gaelic tendencies. Donnchadh Rua MacCormara is the author of the lovely lyric "The Fair Hills of Holy Ireland." What praise for a country! : —"How sweet sing the birds, o'er mount there and vale! " "With honey and cream are her plains flowing o'er."  

§More sweet than tune flowing o'er chords of gold  
Comes the kine's soft lowing from the mountain fold—  
O, the Splendour of the Sunshine on them all, young and old  
'Mid the Fair Hills of Eire O!

MacNamara is also the author of the long mock-Aeneid, "The Adventures of a Luckless Fellow."

Brian Merriman, a Clareman, composed the outstanding work of the eighteenth century, "The Midnight Court," a splendid, vigorous satire on the abuses and discontents current during his day. In the preface, he describes Loch Greine, near his native Feakle.

||My soul would light up when I saw Loch Greine  
Lie blue on the breast of the landscape green,  
The heaven's expanse, o'er the ring of the mountains,  
Peak beckoning to peak o'er the ridges between.

Merriman's composition is no vicious lampoon after the manner of the Red Bard. It gives an insight into the stoicism with which the people withstood the rigours of the

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*Poets and Poetry of Munster, p. 79.
†The Hidden Ireland, p. 259.
‡James Clarence Mangan, Poets and Poetry of Munster, p. 15.
§The Poem Book of the Gael, p. 194.
Penal Days. It shows their avoidance of self-pity and of sentimentalizing their plight; it attempts to avoid the almost unbearable under the cloak of humour. The young girl, who cannot get an eligible partner because all the young men are in the Irish Brigade, is amusing in the superstitious practices she tries in her desperate efforts to get a partner.

"Through all those tricks I have mentioned
I invoked the help of the devil and his brethren
And—here am I still, unwedded.

Some of the rhyming couplets in this composition are indicative of great poetic merit:

†I am in the strong grip of the years
Drawing violently on to the grey days.

Merriman is not a surname frequently found in Clare. Frost in The History and Topography of County Clare, says that the poet's surname was Macnamara. He says that the autograph original of The Midnight Court, signed "Bryan Merriman Macnamara," was in the possession of Anthony Howard of Midtown Malbay in 1839, when John O'Donovan wrote his topographical account of Clare for the Ordnance Survey.

This poetry of the eighteenth century is a far cry from the youthful exuberance and prodigality of style of the earlier Dalcassian writers and from the polished, mature intellectuality of MacBrody or O Bruidair. Signs of decay are not wanting in it; the old richness of vocabulary still remains and the musical rhythm which charms the ear, but, gone are the cultured poise, the evidences of training and discipline which were the hall-marks of the highly-trained, educated graduates of the Bardic Schools. The emotions contribute more to this poetry than does the intellect.

This outburst of lyric poetry was not durable, it was the last flare-up of the old fire before it became finally extinguished. One after another the poets died and they were well and truly lamented by their friends. Brian O'Plaherty, Tomás O Tuama, Andrias Mac Craith, Seumas O Dálaigh, and Liam O Lionáin vie with one another in composing elegies in memory of their dear friend, Seán O Tuama of the Merriment, when he had been laid to rest in Croon churchyard. The last quarter of the eighteenth century heard many such elegies, dirges for the passing away of the custodians of the Irish language and culture, of an age-old civilisation which seemed to be gradually nearing extinction. With the death of Seán O Tuama the Court of Poetry of the Maigue disappeared. Scholars and poets no longer walked the roads of Limerick, nor taught in Hedge Schools. The English language spread out from the towns. Limerick had its only contact with the Gaelic tongue when spailpín came in the autumn from the Gaeltacht to help to harvest the products of the rich lands; that contact was not sufficient to keep the language alive and Limerick county gradually became English speaking. In Clare, the passing of the native tongue was a slower process.

Not without a struggle to recapture it did the language decline. Scribes were at hand to conserve it, to record any material that was in danger of being lost. Names of well-known scribes are the O'Longáins, James O'Daly and his two sons, James Scanlan of Killmalhane, and Joseph Kett of Kilkee.

The nineteenth century brought with it three translators of outstanding ability who were associated with Thomond; James Clarence Mangan, whose father was born in Shanagolden; Eugene O'Curry, who came from Corcha Bréiseín, and Standish Hayes O'Grady of Castleconnell, the learned editor and translator of The Wars of Turlough and Sílva Gadelica. Some of these translations have had a definite formative influence on Anglo-Irish literature.

Those readers who have followed this review of some of Thomond's contribution to Gaelic literature from Royal Kincora to Croom of the Merriment will agree that it is a legacy worthy of study, and that it provides a store-house from which future Thomond writers in the Gaelic language can draw material and inspiration.

†"The Hidden Ireland," p. 235.