



Adare and Its Poets

By

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WHEN we speak of the Maigue Poets we are invariably referring to those boon companions, Seán Ó Tuama and Aindrias Mac Craith, who sang their Gaelic songs beside the river Maigue, at Croom, in the County Limerick, about the middle of the eighteenth century. A century later other poets were singing beside the Maigue, but this time in the Adare countryside, and in the English language. There were the de Veres, Aubrey and Stephen and, a little before their time, Gerald Griffin, the poet of "Sweet Adare."

The claim has frequently been made for Adare that it is Ireland's most beautiful village; and anybody who has ever seen its broad, clean streets and its neat thatched cottages will readily admit that there is nothing very extravagant about the claim. Certainly one of the fairest views in Ireland confronts a sightseer looking upstream from the Maigue bridge at Adare. In one sweep the eye takes in a wide, gently-falling cascade, the battered remains of a proud Geraldine keep rising straight up from the water's edge and, further back, set against a dark-green background of encircling woods, the grey ruins of a Franciscan abbey. Of that ruined abbey, Father Donatus Mooney, in his *History of the Franciscan Convents in Ireland*, compiled in Louvain, in 1617, wrote:

"Of all our Munster monasteries there was none more celebrated than that of Adare, whose ruins look down on the silvery Maigue."¹

The abbey was founded in 1464 by Thomas, Earl of Kildare, and Judith, his wife, and was consecrated in honour of Saint Michael, the archangel, on 29 September, 1466, when its noble founders presented it with two silver chalices, and a bell which cost ten pounds. Many of the chief local Irish families gladly combined with its Norman founders in building and equipping the abbey; the belfry was erected by Cornelius O'Sullivan, who also presented the community with a silver chalice washed with gold; O'Brien of Ara built the dormitory, and Rory O'Dea completed the cloisters; the refectory was added by Marianus O'Hickey. Margaret Fitzgibbon, wife of Cornelius O'Dea, built the great chapel, the smaller ones being erected by John, son of the Earl of Desmond, and Margaret, wife of Thomas Fitzmaurice.

But the abbey enjoyed only a comparatively short life of peace, for, all too soon, the storm of religious persecution began to blow from the east across Ireland. And when the storm blew at its fiercest, Adare's Franciscan abbey bore the full brunt of its fury. The death blow came one morning in 1646, when the building was attacked and burned by a force of Cromwellian troopers. Two of the friars were slaughtered, and two more were taken prisoner; the rest escaped and fled through the woods. There is extant an Irish poem of fifty-five four-lined stanzas which mourns the fate that overtook the Adare Franciscans. It is in the form of a dialogue between the charred remains of the abbey and the ghost of Father William O'Hickey, one of the martyred friars. The abbey asks God if He has not slept while death and destruction visited the gentle and devoted Franciscans—

*Dias díobh marbh, is dias i láimh,
Is an chuid eile ar seachrán,
Is mise thar a n-éis, mo thrua!
Mar ghléas magaidh le Gall-shlua!*

(Two of them dead, and two in prison/
And the rest scattered/ And I after them,
alas!/An object of mockery to the foreign
host.)

The ghost of Father O'Hickey consoles the abbey, saying that now it most truly resembles Saint Francis for, since the raid, it bears upon itself the scars of the stigmata.²

In all, there were three abbeys in Adare, for the Trinitarians and Augustinians also had houses there. The Trinitarian abbey was founded in 1230 by John Fitzgerald of Kildare; and the Augustinian abbey was founded eighty-five years later by the Earl of Kildare. The Trinitarians wore a white habit, having a cross of red-and-blue on it, and the Order devoted itself to the redemption of Christian slaves from the Moors.

After the confiscations, the broken abbeys of Adare and the lands that had belonged to them changed hands a number of times before finally coming into the possession of Thady Quinn in 1684. A descendant of that Thady Quinn, in the person of the first Earl of Dunraven, repaired portion of the Trinitarian abbey and, in 1811, handed it back to the Catholics for their use as a parish church, which purpose it still serves. In 1854, a roof was laid on the remaining portion of the ruins, and this part of the abbey was given to the Sisters of Charity for a convent and a school. So, after a lapse of two hundred years, a great wrong was in goodly part undone. The Augustinian abbey was re-roofed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and has since been used for Protestant worship.

Though far inland, Adare is reached by the tide which flows, first up the Shannon, and then seven or eight miles up the Mague, to wash the base of the old Desmond castle at the bridge. On very rare occasions it goes as far up as Drehidtrasna; and once it is said to have reached all the way up to Caherass, near Croom, surprising anglers there with a supply of fluke. To the mediaeval traders Adare was

a well-known port of call, and the flat-bottomed boats of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had little difficulty in sailing up the winding channel between the high mud banks. It is strange to reflect that up to the old timber bridge at the Ford of the Oak—for that is what Adare (*Ath Dara*) means—laden, slow-moving vessels came countless times, bringing wines and spices, rich foreign clothing and exotic products of all kinds to the proud burgesses of Adare.

Gerald Griffin, though his name will forever be associated with the place, was not a native of Adare, having been born in Limerick city, in 1803. His father, a Clareman, had served in Grattan's Volunteers, and at the time of Gerald's birth was managing a not very flourishing brewery in Limerick which, very soon, was forced to close down. The family then moved to Fairy Lawn, on the Shannon; but Gerald, when he reached school-going age, was sent back to Limerick to be taught by Richard Pierce Mac Elligott, a noted hedge-schoolmaster, Gaelic scholar and patriot.

Mac Elligott compiled an Irish grammar that was used extensively by the great antiquarian, John O'Donovan. In 1798, he was arrested and lodged in Limerick gaol. A letter written by him while he was in prison gives a harrowing account of his experiences:

What shall I suffer walking up and down this dismal place from light to light, with no companion but a man who, three times flogged, lies dying in a corner, a still-breathing corpse; and legions of rats of all ages, which have forgotten the timidity of their species and lord it here with hereditary sway. . . . There were three happy fellows on every lamp on the bridge as I was crossing here; the lantern hoops were breaking so I must wait till some kind friend drops off. They nearly took up the little footpath, and the toes of some of them were touching it.³

In 1820, the parents and other members of the Griffin family emigrated to America, and Gerald went to live with a brother of his who was practising as a doctor in Adare. Though it was intended that he should follow in the footsteps of his brother, and make medicine his profession, Gerald, before he was twenty had chosen literature for a career. Even when he was still in his teens, his literary tastes showed unusual discernment and ability, and clearly held the promise of future achievement.

From Adare he sent regular contributions to the *Limerick Advocate*, and so popular did his contributions become that he was appointed editor of the paper. But it was a post he was not to hold for long, for some articles of his drew strong protests from Dublin Castle, and these were echoed by a notice of dismissal for the youthful editor from the "safe" proprietor of the *Advocate*. Richard Pierce Mac Elligott's pupil was beginning to prove his mettle.

It was in Adare that Griffin really launched himself on his literary career. Besides having made a brief trial of journalism, he experimented with drama, and his first effort in that field was *Aguire*, a Spanish tragedy now lost. Evidently well pleased with himself, he now wrote *Gisippus*, a tragedy modelled on classical drama; and with this stowed safely away in his pocket he set out for London, buoyant with all the hopes and dreams of a twenty-year old, and sought there fame and fortune as did so many of his countrymen before and since that time. And like so many of those who went with that end in view, he soon discovered that in that great metropolis fame and fortune were hardly won, and that failure was far more easily thrust upon one than success.

He failed to convince anyone of the merits of his play; but could he have peered into the future he would have discovered that one day *Gisippus* would be produced and well received in Drury

Lane—but that would be after its author's death. And so Gerald Griffin lived for a time in secret and desperate poverty, until he received an introduction to the editor of the *Literary Gazette*, who found some remunerative work for his pen.

Fortune at last began to smile on him, and after years of bitter disappointment he had a drama accepted. He then wrote *Hollandtide Tales*, a collection of seven rather gruesome tales told round a rural hearth. It was a success, and it showed the author where his genius lay. London had by now ceased to attract him—in fact, he was beginning to hate the great city, and he longed for a sight of Ireland and of home; for the ripple of the Maigue and the sighing of the wind through the oak woods of Adare. And when, at last, he sat in a coach, with the miles between him and London steadily increasing, he gave poetic vent to his feelings:

Adieu! thou pestilential air,
Where death and pain reside!—
Where every brow is dark with care,
And every eye with pride—
Where vapours change the maiden hue
Of winter's cloudless moon,
And man's unwinking eye may view
The burning sun at noon.

* * *

Away, away, fair Taunton Dene
Lies nearer to the West—
Now fast o'er Hounslow's fading scene
Night draws his gloomy vest.
Now, while I watch the tiny beam
Shot from each beauteous star,
I think of Ireland and of him
Who reads their lore afar.

At home in Ireland, at Adare, and later in Pallaskenry, some miles farther north, he continued his literary output, producing *Tales of the Munster Festivals* and *Tales of a Jury Room*. In 1828 came his most famous work, *The Collegians*, bringing him £800,

which he sent to America to his parents. The materials the novelist wove together in *The Collegians* were drawn mainly from the notes he had taken and, the feelings he had experienced when, as a young reporter for the *Limerick Advocate*, he had attended at the Limerick Courthouse in which John Scanlan was being tried for the murder of Eily Hanly, or the Colleen Bawn, to give her the name by which the world now remembers her.

Eily's father, Michael Hanly, worked a small farm at Ballycane, a few miles north of Croom. When Eily was about six or seven years of age she was sent to be reared in the house of her maternal uncle, John Connery, who resided nearer to Croom, at Grange Hill. She grew up to be very pretty, and by the time she was fifteen was famous in the district for her good looks.

One night, two men who had been fowling in the neighbourhood of Tory Hill, called at John Connery's door, requesting a night's lodging, and stating they were too far from the house they were visiting to go back there at that late hour. The two men were the twenty-three year-old Lieutenant John Scanlan, who had served in the Royal Navy, and his man, Stephen Sullivan, both of whom were later to die for the murder of Eily, and to be reborn in the pages of *The Collegians* as Hardress Cregan and Danny Mann.

After that first night Scanlan paid many visits to Connery's house and, at length, persuaded Eily to elope with him. She left the house on Sunday, 29 June, 1819, while her uncle was at Mass, and she took with her £100 in notes and twelve gold guineas. Sullivan, disguised as a priest, and unrecognised by Eily, conducted a mock marriage ceremony between herself and Scanlan. In a very short time Scanlan tired of his bride, and employed Sullivan to murder her and throw her body into the Shannon, somewhere between Glin and Kiltrush. The discovery of the pinioned

body near Kilrush some weeks later, and a chain of evidence, clearly pointed the finger of suspicion at Scanlan; but presumably owing to the social standing of his family in the county, the law seemed reluctant to move against him. Matters might have rested so had not dissatisfaction at the delay in making an arrest been expressed by Thomas Spring Rice, the Resident Magistrate in Foynes, and also by the Knight of Glin.

Eventually, the law got moving, and on Saturday, 13 November, 1819, some two months after the discovery of Eily's body, a troop of dragoons and mounted police under Major Vokes, the Police Magistrate, and accompanied by Thomas Spring Rice, rode out from Croom to Ballycahane House, and arrested Scanlan, whom they found hiding in a loft in an outhouse.

On 11 March, 1820, he was charged at the spring Assizes in Limerick with the murder of Eily Hanly, and was defended by no less a person than the great Dan O'Connell himself. But not even O'Connell's forensic might could save him, and he was sentenced to die at Gallows Green, on 16 March, 1820. When the horses drawing the carriage that was conveying the doomed man from the prison to the scaffold reached Baal's Bridge they refused to cross it—for a horse will not take a murderer across water, says tradition—and Scanlan alighted and calmly walked the rest of the way to the place where he was to die. It is believed that his body was later buried in the family burial plot in Crecora. Sullivan was arrested some months later in Kerry, and met the same fate as his master on 27 July, 1820.

That then was the rather sordid story that was the basis for *The Collegians*; a story that would also inspire Boucicault's melodramatic *Colleen Bawn*, and Benedict's musical, *Lily of Killarney*. The only other novel Griffin wrote, *The Duke of Monmouth*, was not a success.

Today, Gerald Griffin is best remembered for his novel, *The Collegians*, and for his poetry, of which he wrote a considerable amount, most of it of good quality, and graced by a delicacy and gentleness that reflects the character of the poet himself. One of his sisters became a Sister of Charity; another became a Presentation Nun; and a cousin entered the Sisterhood of Saint Vincent de Paul. Hence the inspiration for his poems, *The Sister of Charity* and *Nano Nagle*. His *My Mary of the Curling Hair* reminds of the loveliest of the Scottish love songs; and scarcely less pleasing is his light-hearted *I Love My Love in the Morning*. And there is something hauntingly beautiful about *Sleep that like the Couched Dove*—

*Sleep that like the couched dove,
Broods o'er the weary eye,
Dreams that with soft heavings move
The heart of memory—*

* * *

*Far from thee be startling fears,
And dreams the guilty dream;
No Banshee scare thy drowsy ears
With her ill-omened scream.
But tones of fairy minstrelsy
Float like the ghosts of sound o'er thee,
Soft as the chapel's distant bell,
And lull thee to a sweet farewell.*

* * *

*Hither bring your drowsy store,
Gather'd from the bright lusmore,
Shake o'er temples—soft and deep,
The comfort of the poor man's sleep.*

Other of his poems like *Orange and Green*, *The Bridal of Malahide*, *Hy Brasil*, *Lines to a Seagull* and *The Shannon's Stream* are little the worse for having constantly found a place in the school anthologies. In *Would You Choose a Friend* Griffin reveals the sociable side of his nature. Choose not, he warns:

*He on whose lean and bloodless cheek
The red grape leaves no laughing streak,
On whose dull white brow and clouded eye
Cold thought and care sit heavily.*

That man is very bad company, he says;
and so is

*. . . he around whose jewelled nose
The blood of the red grape freely flows;
Whose pursy frame as he fronts the board
Shakes like a wine sack newly stored,
In whose half-shut, moist, and sparkling eye,
The wine god revels cloudily.*

Then comes the poet's advice:

*But he who takes his wine in measure,
Mingling wit and sense with pleasure,
Who likes good wine for the joy it brings,
And merrily laughs and gaily sings:
With heart and bumper always full,
Never maudlin, never dull,
Your friend let him be,
'Tween you and me,
That man is excellent company.*

He wrote some long dramatic poems, including *Shanid Castle*, which is based on a legend of the Geraldines; and the *Fate of Cathleen*, based on the well-known legend of Glendalough. Another romantic legend of the daughter of an Adare Geraldine and her rustic lover he made the subject of *Matt Hyland*, a poem which runs to 2,600 lines. It is in this poem one finds those oft-quoted and delightful stanzas that so fittingly describe the sylvan splendour of "Sweet Adare":

*Oh, sweet Adare, oh, lovely vale,
Oh soft retreat of sylvan splendour,
Nor summer sun, nor morning gale,
E'er hailed a scene more softly tender.
How shall I tell the thousand charms,
Within thy verdant bosom dwelling,
Where lulled in Nature's fostering arms
Soft peace abides, and joy excelling.*

*Ye morning airs, how sweet at dawn
The slumbering boughs your songs
awaken,*

*Or linger o'er the silent lawn,
With odour of the harebell taken.
Thou rising sun, how richly gleams
Thy smile from far Knockferna's
mountain,
O'er waving woods and bounding streams,
And many a grove and glancing fountain.*

*Ye clouds of noon, how freshly there,
When summer heats the open meadows,
O'er parchèd hill and valley fair,
All coolly lie your veiling shadows.
Ye rolling shades and vapours gray,
Slow creeping o'er the golden heaven,
How soft ye seal the eye of day,
And wreath the dusky brow of even.*

*There winds the Maigue as silver clear,
Among the elms so sweetly flowing.
There fragrant in the early year,
Wild roses on the banks are blowing.
There wild duck sport on rapid wing,
Beneath the alder's leafy awning,
And sweetly there the small birds sing,
When daylight on the hill is dawning.*

In 1838, at the height of his fame, Gerald Griffin turned his back on the world, and joined the Order of the Irish Christian Brothers. Two years he gave, without earthly award or acclamation, to the education of poor boys in the North Monastery at Cork, before typhus cut short his gentle and unselfish career.

It can be said of him that his is a more authentic Irish voice than that of his near neighbour, Aubrey de Vere, who somehow never managed to bring himself right out of the Big House. Though not having the same Gaelic background to his work as the Young Ireland singers who succeeded him, Gerald Griffin, nevertheless, must be numbered among the very earliest of those Irish writers who strove to produce in English a literature that would be racy of



“ Sweet Adare ”

the soil. He is the first English-speaking singer of the Maigue countryside. Had he lived a century earlier he would, in all probability, have sat in Ó Tuama's tavern in Croom, an honoured member of that sweet-voiced company who called themselves *Filí na Máighe*, the Poets of the Maigue. (THE CAPUCHIN ANNUAL, 1961). And he would have with him there Tomás Ó Tuama of Adare, Gaelic poet and teacher of languages, who would one day write a lament for his namesake, Seán Ó Tuama:

*Mo chreach, mo dheacair-se, marbh gan
luaid fá lig
Ollamh na ranna do scanadh is na nduanta
a shníomh,*

*Tug srotha na ndearca go frasach le
gruana Gaoidheal
I gCroma ó taisceadh i bhfeartaibh Ó
Tuama an Ghrinn.*

(My woe, my trouble, dead without power under a headstone/ The master who scanned the verses and wrote the poems/It brought streams of tears flooding to the cheeks of the Gael/Since in a grave in Croom was deposited Ó Tuama the Gay)

John Francis O'Donnell, that gifted Limerick poet, who was born in 1837, was the author of many poems, one of the best is that which he wrote on Adare:

*Soft sleeps the village in the maze
Of dreamy elm and sycamore;
Soft slides the river's rosy tide
Through blossomed sedges by the shore,
Rushes and pendant willows hoar.
The little boat moored in the cove
Takes no pulsation from the stream,
But shadowed in the water lies
The lovely image of a dream. . . .*

*Three hundred years in channelled stones
Hewn in some quarry vast and fair,
But touched with melancholy grey—
The habit of our Irish air—
Which slays but still knows when to spare.
Chancel, quadrangle, tower are here,
Gaunt cloisters, roof and mullions riven,
With that clear interspace through which
Souls, tired of flesh, looked out to heaven.*

Like Griffin, O'Donnell died young, death claiming him in his thirty-seventh year.

While we feast our eyes on the natural beauty of Adare, and grow lyrical about it, as did Gerald Griffin and John Francis O'Donnell, it is unlikely that we will fail to notice at the same time the wonderful richness of the land about us. As one would expect, that richness did not fail to catch the eye of that most observant and cultured traveller of the nineteenth century, Arthur Young.

"Land lets at Adare," he wrote, "from 10 to 40 shillings per acre, average 20 shillings. The richest in the county is the corcasses on the Maag, which lets at 30 shillings to 36 shillings, a tract 5 miles long and 2 broad, down to the Shannon, which are better than those on that river; the soil is a kind of yellow and blue clay, of which they make bricks, but there is a surface of blue mould."

When it flows under the old stone bridge at Adare, the Maigue enters the last lap of its journey to the sea. It travels lazily westward for a short distance, till it comes close to the road to Kildimo,

then swings north, to flow, shortly, by the charred remains of Curragh Chase House, accidentally burned in December, 1941. And so, once more, we link the Maigue with poets and with poetry, for Curragh Chase was the home of the poets, Aubrey and Stephen de Vere.

Aubrey de Vere was born at Curragh Chase, on 10 January, 1814. His father was Stephen de Vere, whose family, long settled in the district, traced its descent through Aubrey Vere, second son of the sixteenth Earl of Oxford, who was born about 1555. His mother was Mary Spring Rice, sister of that Thomas Spring Rice, whom we have already mentioned as the man chiefly responsible for bringing the murderer of the *Colleen Bawn* to justice. Thomas Spring Rice, whose statue crowns the tall column in the People's Park, Limerick, was lovingly remembered for the efforts he made to redress the wrongs of the people in the early decades of the nineteenth century. He was a barrister by profession, and was Member of Parliament for Limerick from 1820 to 1832. Eoghan Caomhánach of Kilmallock, one of the very last of Limerick's Gaelic poets, wrote a song to help his election cause—

*Le chéile anois léimeadh, gan scáth gan
bhaoigheal,
Gach tréinfhear de phréimh jhine álainn
Gaoidheal,
Gan staonadh ar aon chor go brách arís
On bhFéinnidh do shaor iad, Tomás de Rís.*

(Let us all leap now together, without fear or danger/ Every brave man of the beautiful race of the Gael/ With no deflecting any more/ From the Leader who saved them, Thomas Rice)

Though a staunch supporter of Catholic Emancipation, Thomas Spring Rice opposed the Repeal of the Union and, as a result, lost much of the popularity he had so deservedly enjoyed. He was made

Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1835, and in 1839 was raised to the peerage, becoming the first Lord Monteagle. But the "good drop" was always in the Spring Rices; and in 1914 resurgent Ireland saluted Mary Spring Rice, who sailed the perilous seas with Erskine Childers to bring guns to the men who were planning to fight for Irish freedom. Aubrey de Vere's mother, it will be remembered, bore the same name as her valiant kinswoman of the Howth gun-running.

In 1832 Aubrey entered Trinity College, with a view to taking Orders and becoming a minister of the Established Church. After graduating in 1837 he went to England. In England it was a period of wonderful intellectual activity and intense religious questioning, with the Great Oxford Movement, headed by John Henry Newman, just getting under way. De Vere found himself attracted to the Movement, though as yet, and for long afterwards, he showed no particular inclination to become a Catholic. But religion, philosophy and poetry continued to absorb him completely. His ceaseless questionings during those years are the questionings of a man engaged on a search, a search that for Aubrey de Vere was to end on the morning of 15 November, 1851, when in the archbishop's chapel, at Avignon of the Popes, he was received into the Catholic Church.

In Trinity, Aubrey had been on terms of the closest friendship with the celebrated mathematician, William Rowan Hamilton, who became attached to Aubrey's sister, Ellen—an attachment that was not returned. Later, in England, he was to become a friend of some of the greatest lights of the age: among them Newman, Manning, Wiseman, Carlyle, Wordsworth, Browning and Tennyson. Indeed, it was he who first brought Wordsworth and Tennyson together. Tennyson spent some time as his guest at Curragh Chase in 1848; and we have his *Lady Clara Vere de Vere* to

show his close friendship with the family.

A poet of no mean order himself, Aubrey de Vere felt happy in the company of poets. His father, too, had poetic gifts, and wrote sonnets that later won the praises of Wordsworth. From his youth Aubrey had a tremendous admiration for the poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Sara Coleridge, the poet's daughter, afterwards said of de Vere:

"I have lived among poets a great deal, and I have known greater poets than he is, but a more entire poet, one more a poet in his whole mind and temperament, I never knew or met with."⁴

Returning from England during the great famine, Aubrey, with his brother Stephen, strove tirelessly to bring relief to the stricken. They expressed dissatisfaction with the Government relief schemes, that were of no benefit to the old and infirm, and did nothing to develop the resources of the country, and suggested that it would be better to buy Indian meal with the money allocated, and distribute it to the hungry. This terrible period drew from Aubrey a graphic poem entitled *The Year of Sorrow*, of which the following are some stanzas:—

*Fall, snow, and cease not! Flake by flake
The decent winding-sheet compose.
Thy task is just and pious; make
An end of blasphemies and woes.*

*Fall flake by flake! by thee alone,
Last friend, the sleeping draught is given:
Kind nurse, by thee the couch is strewn—
The couch whose covering is from heaven.*

*Descend and clasp the mountain's crest;
Inherit plain and valley deep:
This night, on thy maternal breast,
A vanquished nation dies in sleep.*

*Lo! from the starry Temple gates
Death rides, and bears the flag of peace;*

*The combatants he separates;
He bids the wrath of ages cease.*

*Fall, snow! in stillness fall, like dew,
On temple's roof and cedar's fan;
And mould thyself on pine and yew;
And on the awful face of man.*

*On quaking moor and mountain moss,
With eyes upstaring at the sky,
And arms extended like a cross,
The long-expectant sufferers lie.*

*Bend o'er them, white-robed Acolyte!
Put forth thine hand from cloud and mist,
And minister the last sad Rite,
Where altar there is none, nor priest.*

*This night the Absolver issues forth:
This night the Eternal Victim bleeds:
O winds and woods—O heaven and earth!
Be still this night. The Rite proceeds!*

In 1848, Aubrey de Vere published a work called *English Misrule and Irish Misdeeds*, and forwarded copies of it to a number of his friends. John Stuart Mill, the English political economist, received a copy and, while praising it in his letter of acknowledgment, stated that he did not agree with the author that emigration was the remedy for Irish misery, but thought that the remedy lay in the reclamation of waste lands and the alteration of landed tenures. In the same letter he wrote:

"Perhaps, also, I should not let off the generality of Irish landlords quite as easily as you do, though there are among them not a few of the most meritorious landlords (probably) upon earth."⁵

William Smith O'Brien acknowledged his copy in a letter that was in keeping with the character of an Irish aristocrat who, before the year was out, was to hear sentence of death passed upon him for leading a revolt for Irish freedom.

Aubrey de Vere never was a revolutionary or a sympathiser with revolution,

and his idea of patriotism, though sincere and ardent, was shared by few in Ireland. His ideal was to live in some kind of perpetual Middle Ages, professing honour and chivalry, and rendering loyalty to established order and royalty. Republicanism, the overthrow of landlordism, agrarian reform, these to him represented Jacobinism in its worst and bloodiest form.

His sympathies with the men who fought for Ireland did not come further down than the days of Sarsfield. He was a hundred per cent Unionist. When bishop Moriarty of Kerry violently denounced Fenianism in 1866, de Vere wrote and complimented him, saying he could not understand how anyone could be a good Catholic who was not at the same time a thorough Loyalist, both as regards the Church and the State. It utterly passed his comprehension how certain of the priests could support the Fenians; and when the Land War came, and practically all the priests, and most of the bishops ranged themselves on the side of the tenants, he was bewildered. In 1881, he wrote:—

"The recent Resolutions of the Bishops at Maynooth were a surprise to me . . . the Resolutions said not a word about Duties, but spoke strongly about Rights, respecting which the people seem for some time to have been sufficient awake."

In 1885, he wrote a pamphlet on the Irish Land Question, and sent copies of it to, among others, Cardinal Newman and Matthew Arnold. In acknowledging it, the Cardinal wrote: "I think your pamphlet a good one, but I am ignorant of the elements of the question." Arnold, in his letter, said:

"If you look at what I have said about Ireland in the last number of the *Nineteenth Century* you will see I do not believe in government of Ireland by the 'Loyalists' . . . I do not believe that the landed class will retain power even in Scotland and England, nor do I wish them to retain power."

Aubrey de Vere's long life came to a close at Curragh Chase on 21 January, 1902. In all, he had written some thirty books, mainly of poetry, philosophical, religious and otherwise. The Pope, in an audience he had given him, had expressed a wish that he should write some poems in honour of the Blessed Virgin. He did so; and this is perhaps the loveliest of them:—

*He willed to lack; He willed to bear;
He willed by suffering to be schooled;
He willed the chains of flesh to wear;
Yet from her arms the world He ruled.
As tapers mid the noontide glow
With merged yet separate radiance burn,
With human taste and touch even so
The things He knew He willed to learn.
He sat beside the lowly door;
His homeless eyes appeared to trace
In evening skies remembered lore
And shadows of His Father's face.
One only knew Him, She alone
Who nightly to His cradle crept,
And lying like the moonbeam prone,
Worshipped her Maker as He slept.*

But despite all that he wrote, Aubrey de Vere is chiefly remembered today for his handful of patriotic ballads. Is there anybody who has been to school in Ireland in the past forty years who could not recite:

*Does any man dream that a Gael can fear?
Of a thousand deeds let him learn but one!
The Shannon swept onward broad and clear,
Between the leaguers and broad Athlone.*

And as well as *A Ballad of Athlone* there was *A Ballad of Sarsfield*, and the song of *The Little Black Rose*, and *The Dirge of Rory O'Moore*, and *The March to Kinsale*—

*O'er many a river bridg'd with ice,
Through many a vale with snow-drifts dumb;
Past quaking fen and precipice
The Princes of the North are come.*

*Lo! those are they that year by year
Roll'd back the tide of England's war.
Rejoice Kinsale! thy help is near,
That wondrous winter march is o'er.*

Though their author could never have imagined it, and certainly would not have wished it, these songs became part of the literature of the resurgence, and helped in their own way to rouse the spirit that raised on high, to the salute of revolutionary gun fire, that tri-coloured flag of the Irish Republic that would one day be wrapped round the coffin of his kinswoman, Mary Spring Rice, when men of the Irish Republican Army would bear her to last resting place in Mount Trenchard, near Foynes.

Aubrey's brother, Stephen de Vere, translated the *Odes* of Horace into English verse; and not least known among his compositions is his translation of the Irish song, *Pearla an Bhrollaigh Bháin*, *The Snowy Breasted Pearl*. Stephen had become a Catholic in 1847, four years before his more famous brother, his conversion being due in no small measure to the wonderful faith displayed by the Famine victims in that dread year. He was far more popular with the people, far more in sympathy with near national aspirations, than was Aubrey. In a letter written late in life, Aubrey says:—

"From his early youth Stephen's life has been one of labour for Ireland. He has saved sons of hers from the gallows—laboured in their schools—abstained from wine for twenty years that he might encourage temperance among the poor, brought dying men into his house that they might have more comfort in death, pleaded their cause in public and private life, and during thirty years he has reduced the rental of the property by about a fourth below what would have been considered the fair value.

"You know of his going out to America as a steerage passenger (I think it was then a six weeks' voyage) that he might speak as

a witness respecting the sufferings of emigrants. He has always been a Liberal, as he is now; and (unlike me) he approved of Gladstone's recent Land Act, having himself recommended nearly the same thing to the Government of 1870."⁶

Stephen de Vere—or Sir Stephen, as he is entitled to be called—died at Foynes on 10 November, 1904, and with his death the baronetcy, gained by his grandfather, Sir Vere Hunt, in 1774, became extinct.

The Maigue Country has never lacked poets. It was only in the Spring of 1963 that Dáithí Ó Ceantúil was laid to rest in *Croma an tSúbhachais*—Croom of the Jubilations. Dáithí, who could versify equally well in Irish or in English, was the author of a long poem called *Where Maigue's Bright Waters Flow*; and I feel there could be no more fitting *ceangal* or *envoi* with which to end our story than the final stanzas of Dáithí's poem telling of the river's course through "Sweet Adare" to the Shannon:—

There woodlands gently waving spread
welcoming arms wide
To greet me in Adare's sweet vale, flower-
strewn on every side.

Yet tho' sylvan beauties charm me and
tho' floral welcomes spring
From that fair land by my waters, 'tis a
requiem that I sing,
A low-voiced plaintive requiem, an eerie
haunting caoin
Charged with all the lingering memories of
a long-forgotten scene,
Saddened by the ghosts of sorrows that
haunt my banks, nor sleep
With the long-dead knights and ladies that
oft thronged the palace-keep.

Peaceful be your slumbers by my waters,
warriors all,
Black friar, brown-robed brother, knight
and man-at arms tall.
For you no more the trumpet and the war
cry, for you the matin bells no longer ring.
For your castle now is rubble and your
church a broken thing.
And the Mass-bell calleth elsewhere on the
early morning air,
While the brethren slumber quietly in their
cells in "Sweet Adare."
Peace to your souls, oh heroes all, who
sleep there side by side,
While I keep tryst with my ageless love,
the Shannon's flowing tide.

1. Quoted in *Duffy's Hibernian Magazine*, October, 1860.

2. The whole poem in *Mungret Annual*, 1903.

3. Cf. : *Worthies of Thomond*, Second Series, R. Herbert.

4. *Aubrey de Vere*, Wilfrid Ward.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*