

## IRISH CHURCH BELLS.

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NOT taking account of the early Irish ecclesiastical bells, which were almost all composed of iron plates, riveted together, and rendered sonorous by being covered with a coating of molten bronze, there are but few church bells remaining in Ireland of an earlier date than the last quarter of the seventeenth century. The art of casting bells, or bell-founding, at and after this period, was but little cultivated. The smallness of the windows of the bell stage of most of the mediæval church towers remaining shows that the bells could not have been of a large size. Perhaps, owing to the frequent plunderings which the churches suffered, it was not considered advisable to have much valuable property in them, which could not be carried away at short notice. The Parliamentary forces appear to have generally destroyed the bells of those churches which fell into their hands, so that there must have been a great scarcity of bell material in Ireland at the time of the Restoration. The introduction of whole wheels, which made it possible to ring bells mouth upwards, and the consequent possibility of the art of change-ringing being practised, gave a great impulse at a later period to the manufacture of church bells, which naturally extended to Ireland, though the love of that art, which is a purely English one, does not appear to have followed it. To this cause may in a great measure be attributed the destruction of these seventeenth century bells, which were most probably destroyed by the system of "clappering," that is, pulling the clapper against the side of the bell, a practice which almost invariably results in the destruction of it, through the vibration being checked. One man could, by adopting this most unscientific and lazy method, produce in feeble tones changes or tunes on the bells, whereas the grand full tone can only be produced by the clapper striking the bell while it is in motion. The researches carried out by Sir Edmund Beckett into the art of bell-founding and the best shape for bells, proved that the rules followed by the English

across the mouth is 2 feet 5½ inches; the thickness of the sound-bow, 2⅝ inches; the height to the shoulder about 1 foot 11 inches; round the shoulder between bands is the legend—'THIS FOR ST. MARY'S CHURCH IN ATHLONE, 1682. T. C.' It is cast without canons, and has a flat crown of about 12 inches diameter, and raised about 1 inch above the shoulder, and is hung by bolts passing through the crown. The fracture, which runs up to the middle of the sound-bow, shows the metal to be compact and good there, though the waist of the bell is somewhat honeycombed, owing probably to a deficiency of spare metal when casting it. It is well moulded, except the lip, which is contracted, so as to be of somewhat less diameter than the sound-bow, and is also too thin, consequently it has been much chipped round the edge, showing that it has been often laid on its mouth and carelessly handled. It will be seen by the copies of the legends that the ornaments of fleurs-de-llys and bells used to fill up the spaces between the legends and founder's initials, and also the latter, are identical. T. C. was a modest man, but fortunately his name has not been lost, as the following extract from the Acts of the Dean and Chapter of Christ's Church Cathedral, Dublin, kindly furnished by the Rev. Edward Seymour, M.A., Precentor, will show:—"*Extracts from Chapter Acts.*—Tuesday, 4th June, 1686—Ordered, that the great bell of this church be new cast; and thereupon on reading of Covey's letter to the Registrar agreed that Mr. Covey be sent for, and that the Dean and Chapter will contribute to his charge in running up, &c. Tuesday, 7th June, 1687—Agreed between the Dean and Chapter and Tobias Covey that he, the said Covey, shall take down the great tenor bell of Xt. Church and cast it new, he finding all materials for the said work, which done, to bring it back, to raise it into the steeple, to tune and hang it up againe, and all this to be done at his owne pay, cost, and charges, mettall onely excepted, which Dean and Chapter are to provide. In consideration whereof the said Dean and Chapter are to pay unto the said Covey fforty-five pounds sterg., and to allow six pounds for weight of mettall with every hundred pounds

in weight that the new bell shall weigh. And in case the said bell doe miscarry in lifting, the said Covey is to cast it again at his owne cost and charges, the weight of mettall excepted, and to be at the charge of the said Dean and Chapter." This bell, if it was cast according to agreement, is not now in existence.

The name of 'Tobias Covey' appears in full on the third bell, and his initials on the second bell, of the ring of six, in St. Nicholas Church, Galway, in exactly similar characters, and with the same ornaments, with the date 1726, and his marks on the first and sixth bells of 1684, of which fuller particulars will be given in a future number. There can be no doubt, therefore, that Tobias Covey was the founder of the two bells for the Duke of Ormonde, and the bell for St. Mary's Church, Athlone. Very probably he was one of the "socii" of William Covey and Roger Purdue, who cast the bells for St. Canice's Cathedral, for Bishop Benjamin Parry, in 1674-5, as a reference to the recorded inscriptions will show; for the names of Gulielmus Covey and Rogerus Purdue appear "cum sociis," so that there must have been others in the back ground. We know that there was a William Purdue, for his tombstone existed at Limerick Cathedral; so there may also have been a Tobias Covey, who appears as an expert seven years afterwards. The Purdues were established at Salisbury, and cast many bells in the south and west of England, of which some remain—notably at Exeter Cathedral.