



# FRANCE, O BRUADAIR AND SIR JOHN FITZGERALD

In approximately 1640, the poet Cúchonnacht O Dálaigh wrote, in his *Duan Leanbhaíocht Sir Seáin Mhic Ghearaill* ('Childhood Poem for Sir John Fitzgerald'):

*Brat caomhna leasa Luimnigh,  
leanbh bhús cheann dá  
chaithbhuídhnibh,  
caor bhuaídh Bhaile na Tráighe,  
fear faire cuain ciúin Mháighe.*

*Guardian mantle of Limerick city-  
child who'll be head of her warriors,  
victorious blaze of Ballynatra <sup>(1)</sup>  
harbour-sentry of slow Maigue.*

Twenty-six years later (1666), in a long elegy written on the father of the above Sir John (Edmund), the then official poet to the family, Dáibhí O Bruadair, addresses the new heir, then living in Nantes, France, where many young well-to-do Irishmen went for their education:

*Do ghrásaibh foirfe an toirghin  
trócairigh  
ní bháidhfídh tuile is ní thuitfe le  
tóirneachaibh,  
ní thráighfídh tinneas, ní mhuirfid  
beochuilg  
ar ndáil in ionaid go bhfille dár  
bhfoirighin.*

*By the perfect grace of the merciful God  
wave will not drown nor thunder fell  
disease not waste nor keen swords kill  
the man destined to return to us and  
help.<sup>(2)</sup>*

Sir John Fitzgerald did return to Ireland and, in 1680, was arrested, with other Irish landowners, and sent to London in connection with the 'Popish Plot'. Earlier, in 1673, the presence of France, always hovering in the European background, was beginning to be felt. 'In March, 1673 or thereabout, several officers out of France landed in Ireland . . . to wit Captain Daniel MacNamara, Captain John Lacy, Captain Con Oneale, one MacMahon and Lieutenant Hurley . . . I enquired of Lacy, whether there was any probability of the French's invading Ireland or any such matter intended. He answered that if the Dutch were once subdued he did not question but the French would establish the Roman-Catholic religion in all the Northern parts of Europe . . .<sup>(3)</sup> It is ironic that the writer of this should also be a Fitzgerald, David, 'a gentleman of the Fitzgeralds, a Protestant'. Thus, more than a hundred years before the French Revolution, France was much involved in Irish



Memorial stone to Dáibhí O Bruadair at the entrance to Springfield Castle, Co. Limerick.

BY MICHAEL HARTNETT

religious and military affairs.

'1679, November 8th, Dublin ... information on oath of some masters of ships of many arms sent out of France to be landed betwixt Waterford and Dungarvan, in order to fit the Papists for the reception of a French army, then, as they said, ready to sail for Ireland.<sup>(4)</sup> And, according to the information of Maurice Fitzgerald gent, it had been arranged that 20,000 French were to land, as early as the winter of 1676.✓

Sir John Fitzgerald, during the Jacobite war, was lieutenant-colonel of Mountcashel's regiment of infantry and, later, colonel of a foot regiment bearing his name and largely composed of his own retainers. After the capitulation of Limerick and the signing of the Treaty in October, 1691, the transfer of Irish soldiers to the continent began. Sir John agreed with this policy and was disappointed because his followers did not share his views. He himself did not believe that the English would keep faith and attached no value to the Treaty. He sent the following to O Bruadair in October, 1691:

*On dtalamh sin do chleachtasa's mo  
shinnsear romham,  
pearsa aco ní leanann mé na díis don pór*

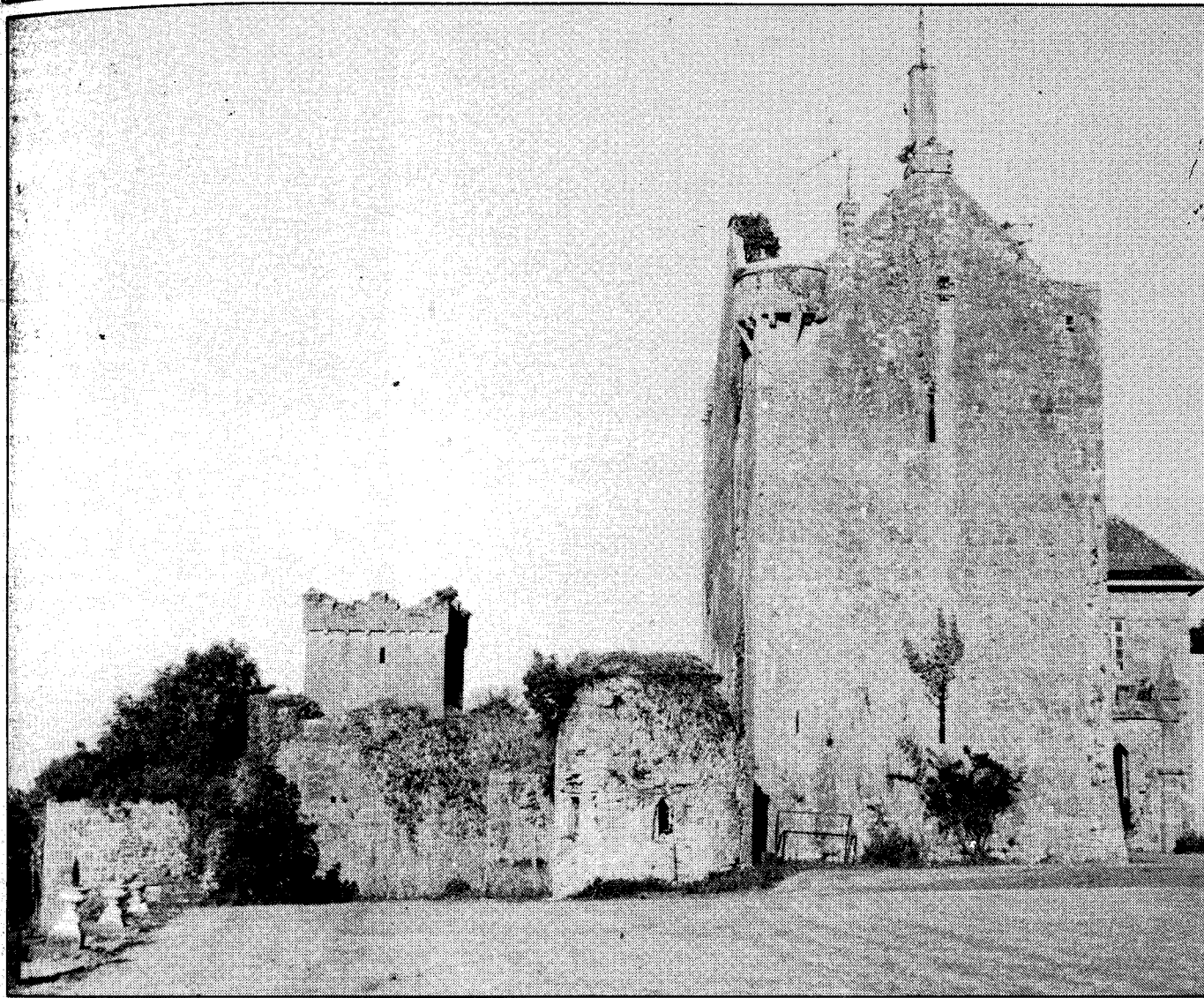
*tarrangaireacht dearbhtha do-ghnímse  
dhóibh-  
go mbiaid Sacsansigh dá dtreascairtsín  
arís go fóill.<sup>(5)</sup>*

*From the land I lived in and my  
ancestors before me  
not even one or two of that seed follow  
me-*

*I make a prophesy for them that will  
come true:  
that the Saxons will soon slaughter them  
again.*

After the surrender of Limerick, about 19,000 Irish soldiers left Ireland to take up service in France. Of these, 8,000 sailed from Limerick, while the remainder took ship at Cork. The last division of the Irish army quitted Limerick on the first of November. 'In a fortnight after Limerick was surrendered, the expected French fleet, under Count de Château-Renaud, arrived about the twentieth of October at Scatterry in the river of Limerick, being eighteen men of war, four fire-ships, and twenty ships of burden, bringing vehicles, ammunition, money and all other necessaries of war . . . The French fleet, being informed of the surrender of Limerick, returned within a few days to France, with deep resentment at their unexpected disappointment. There went aboard of them a part of the Irish soldiers.' (*A Light to the Blind*, pp 190, 191). From (the

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Springfield Castle, once the home of the Fitzgerald family.

dedication to) the present poem we learn that Sir John Fitzgerald was one of those who went to France at this time, and that 'Carraigafoyle, in the county of Kerry, at the mouth of the Shannon, was the port of embarkation'.<sup>(6)</sup>

O Bruadair's reply to Sir John shows that the poet had as little faith in the Irish themselves as he had in the English:

I  
*Battle-tree for whom I showed great zeal  
 and true friendship from a heart without deceit-  
 though you thought awhile I was  
 indifferent to your fate  
 I am sad to see your back turned on  
 board a ship.*

II  
*Certain's my parting from you since the  
 end of the battle  
 by which I though you would be ruling  
 beside me in this land.*

*Your anger was dearer to me than the  
 smooth faces  
 of the gang I must be meek before, for  
 awhile.*

III  
*The flock that did not follow you under  
 sail*

*and guided your followers to disaster-  
 the excesses they practised in times gone  
 by  
 are still remembered in the people's  
 minds.*

IV  
*In the defilement that spread this over  
 the land-  
 whoring I won't call it, but a sacrifice of  
 cows:  
 the promise of forgiveness you got for  
 them  
 was why they didn't bother to cheer you  
 on the road.*

V  
*An insulting bargain for this gang  
 who robbed the English lawlessly-  
 If John Bull signs the Article not ratified  
 yet  
 and sees no flaw there, he is blind to their  
 history.*

VI  
*Since I am deprived of silver and store of  
 gold  
 and the energy to campaign sword in  
 hand*

*I beg of the charity of the just Creator  
 that you may reach your land alive and  
 unwounded.<sup>(7)</sup>*

VII  
*Since the men of Ireland are sentenced  
 to bear the heaviest yoke that grew in the  
 woods*

*a pity they go not from shore  
 over the sea with you away from the  
 torture of the heavy harrow.*

Both O Bruadair and Sir John were right. The Irish who remained became a mob; the Articles of the Treaty were not ratified; English oppression began again. The poet describes the aftermath in a long poem, *An Longbhriseadh* (The Shipwreck).<sup>(8)</sup> And, contrary to O Bruadair's wishes, his patron was not to return to Ireland. His corps kept its old name and fought with the French in the Flanders campaign, and at the battle of Lauden, 1693, where the Duc d'Luxembourg defeated William III, and Fitzgerald received a special mark of honour. He fought in the Italian campaign until 1696, and along the Rhine in 1697. Some authorities state that he was fatally wounded at Oudenarde in 1798, but may have confused him with a Brigadier Nicholas Fitzgerald, who was fatally wounded at that battle. One ms.



A Victorian artist's impression of James II's Irish troops leaving Limerick to start their exile.

states that a retired officer of the same name (Sir John Fitzgerald) was admitted to the Hotel des Invalides in 1703, and that in the same year, the colonelcy of the regiment was given to another Fitzgerald. I am indebted to Richard Hayes' *Biographical Dictionary of Irishmen in France* for the above information and for the following, which shows that Sir John Fitzgerald was as interested in Gaelic culture as his poet was:

Sir John Fitzgerald's name came into some prominence in connection with the somewhat mysterious disappearance of the 'Book of Lecan' from Trinity College, Dublin, during the Jacobite war in Ireland. For some years after the termination of this war the valuable work was in the possession of various prominent expatriated Irishmen in France, and claims to its ownership led to much acrimony among them till its deposit in the Irish college at Paris. Sir John Fitzgerald seems to have been its first possessor and he was said to have sold it to James Terry the Jacobite genealogist. It has always been difficult to understand how the valuable codex came into the hands of the former. The following entry in the Register of Trinity College would seem, however, to throw a suggestive sidelight on the question: 'September 6th, 1689. The college was seized on for a garrison by the King's (James) order, and Sir John Fitzgerald took possession of it.'

The book is now in the Royal Irish Academy.

#### NOTES

1. In his edition of O Bruadair, Father John MacErlean has the following note: 'Baile na Traíge', literally Strandtown, not identified. Possibly it may be merely a descriptive epithet of some place situated on the banks of the

Shannon estuary. There is a Ballynatra in the parish of Templerobin, barony of Ballymore, Co. Cork, and another in the parish of Kilcrohane, barony of Carbery West, in the same county; but it does not appear that Sir John Fitzgerald had any connexion with either of them! (*Poems of David O Bruadair*, Irish Text Society, Vol 1, 1910, p. 184, XIII).

However, the village of Strand, Co. Limerick, is only a few miles from the seat of the Fitzgeralds (Gort na Tiobraid - 'Springfield'). In Irish, An Trá, not being on the sea, was humorously called *An Trá gan Taoide* - 'The Tideless Strand'.

2. From *Dursan éag Éamoinn* (ibid, Vol. I).
3. A narrative of the Irish Popish Plot for the betraying of that Kingdom into the hands of the French, massacring all English Protestants there, and utter subversion of the Government and the Protestant religion, as the same was successively carried on from the year 1662. David Fitzgerald, Esq., London, 1680.
4. Hist. Mss. Com. Report on Mss of the Marquis of Ormonde, Vol. ii, pp. 293, 294.
5. *Poems of D. O Bruadair*, MacErlean, I.T.S. Vol. 1. p. 158/159.
6. Ibid, pp. 160/161. A *Light to the Blind* was edited by John T. Gilbert and published in Dublin in 1892 under the title *A Jacobite Narrative of the War in Ireland 1688-1691*. It was re-issued by Irish University Press in 1971, with an Introduction by J.G. Simms. See also *The Danish Forces in Ireland 1690-1691*, edited by K. Danaher and J.G. Simms, Irish Mss. Comm., 1962.
7. Irish text in MacErlean, Vol. 1.
8. MacErlean, and O Bruadair, Michael Hartnett, Gallery Press, 1985.



King's Island and the Shannon River, 1769.