



FRANCE, Ó BRUADAIR

AND SIR JOHN FITZGERALD

Wn approximately 1640, the poet Cúchonnacht O Dálaigh wrote, in his *Duan Leanbhaocht Sir Seán Mhic Ghearrailt* ('Childhood Poem for Sir John Fitzgerald'):

*Brat caomhna leasa Luimnígh,
leanbh bhus cheann dá
chaithbhuidhniibh,
caor bhuaidh Bhaile na Tráighe,
fear faire cuain ciúin Mháigé.*

*Guardian mantle of Limerick city-child who'll be head of her warriors,
victorious blaze of Ballymatra⁽¹⁾
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 ghrásáibh fairfe an toirghin
trócairigh
ní bhaidhfidh tuile is ní thuitfe le
tórneachaibh,
ní thráighfidh tinneas, ní mhurifid
beochuig
ar ndáil in ionaid go bhfillle dár
bhfóirighin.*

*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.⁽²⁾*

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 . . . ⁽³⁾ 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.⁽⁴⁾ 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:

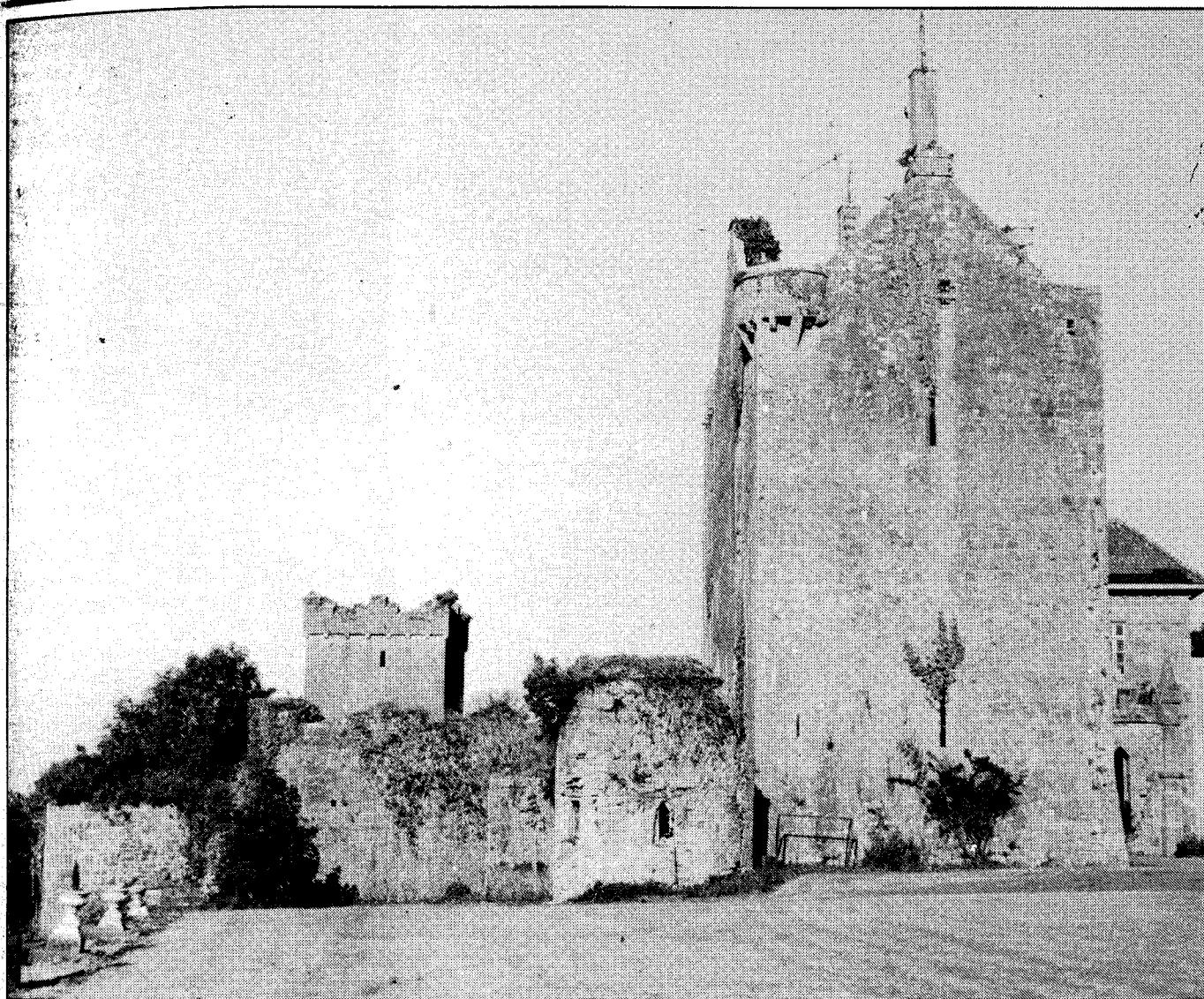
*On dtalamh sin do chleachtasa's mo
shinnsear romham,
pearsa aco ni leanann mé na dís don pór*

*tarrangaireacht dearbhtha do-ghnímse
dhóibh-*
*go mbiad Sacsansigh dá dtreascairtsin
aris go fóill.⁽⁵⁾*

*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 Scattery 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 necessities 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



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'.⁽⁶⁾

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 wont 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.⁽⁷⁾

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).⁽⁸⁾ 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 Tráighe', literally Strandtown, not identified. Possibly it may be merely a descriptive epithet of some place situated on the banks of the

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.