Dr. Daniel Griffin in his Life of his brother, Gerald Griffin (1803-1840), published in 1843, states that Gerald’s first school-master was “Richard McEligot, a character of some celebrity at that time in Limerick, and still well remembered there—a man of singular ability and industry—a self-taught scholar, and one of whom, as he was Gerald’s earliest instructor, and as his own history was rather curious, I may be permitted to say a few words.

“One day at a large and respectable school in this city, when the master was engaged as usual with his scholars, an odd-looking, half-clad figure, bare-foot and bare-headed, flung himself into the room after the manner of a tumbling boy, moved towards him, walking on his hands, and presently springing to his feet, stood upright before him. It was Richard McEligot. ‘What do you want?’ said the astonished master. ‘Employment,’ said the stranger; ‘I don’t like my father’s trade, and I’m sick of it.’ ‘What can you do then?’ inquired the master. ‘I can write,’ said the other. ‘Well, then, let me see?’ He sat down, took a pen and wrote a hand so exquisite that it could scarcely be distinguished from an engraving. He was immediately engaged as writing master to the school, and was soon induced by one of the more advanced scholars to learn classics, to which, as well as the other studies necessary to a teacher, he devoted himself with so much energy, and made such progress, that he soon had the proud satisfaction of raising himself from the humble condition I have described, to that of a most respectable classical teacher in the city.
“His success in these pursuits seems to have affected him with a degree of conceit and pedantry, from which few would perhaps be entirely free in the same circumstances. I remember one of his advertisements about opening school after the Christmas vacation, which began:—‘When ponderous polysyllables promulgate professional powers,’ etc., etc. Mr. T. O’Brien, to whose school my brother was sent at a later period to complete his education, was himself pursuing his studies at the period of the incident above-mentioned, and was present when McEligot introduced himself in the extraordinary manner I have described. O’Brien was a man of very refined taste, of superior ability—passionately fond of the classics—an elegant classical scholar, and was the same, who by much persuasion, prevailed on McEligot to turn his attention to them. On one occasion, when they were enjoying themselves together with some friends, the latter suddenly called out to him in a very mixed company, to translate a certain passage in Horace. Though O’Brien felt the absurdity of such a proposal, at such a time, yet either his vanity or his character as a public teacher, made him think the challenge was not one that could be safely declined. He accordingly translated the passage in such a manner as seemed to be faultless. McEligot commended the effort with a most amusingly patronising air. A new sentence was given, of which his interpretation was found equally satisfactory, upon which McEligot said, ‘Well done, Tom, ’pon my word, very well done, you have translated these passages very well indeed—but look Tom.’ He dipped his finger in a tumbler of punch that stood before him, and allowing a drop to remain suspended on the end of it, fixed his eyes on O’Brien, and said with the utmost gravity, ‘You are no more to me than this drop is to the ocean!!’

“My mother went to school with the boys on the first day of entrance. ‘Mr. McEligot,’ said she, ‘you will oblige me very much by paying particular attention to the boys’ pronunciation, and making them perfect in their reading.’ He looked at her with astonishment. ‘Madam,’ said he, abruptly, ‘you had better take your children home, I can have nothing to do with them!’ She expressed some surprise. ‘Perhaps, Mrs. Griffin,’ said he, after a pause, ‘you are not aware that there are only three per-
sons in Ireland who know how to read.' 'Three!' she said. 'Yes, madam, there are only three—the Bishop of Killaloe, the Earl of Clare, and your humble servant; reading, madam is a natural gift, not an acquirement. If you choose to expect impossibilities, you had better take your children home.' My mother found much difficulty in keeping her countenance, and confessing her ignorance of this important fact, she gave him to understand that she would not look for a degree of perfection, so rarely attainable, and the matter was made up.'

Dr. Griffin goes on to give further illustrations of the school-master's peculiarities, but in the second edition of the Life of Gerald Griffin (Dublin, 1857), he omits most of these particulars, and introduces a reference to the schoolmaster's fame as an Irish scholar. It is easy to understand the change. The publication of the first edition gave offence to admirers of MacElligott's genius, and one of his pupils, the Rev. Jonathan Furlong, published in the following year a pamphlet (London, 1844) in reply to Dr. Griffin's observations. John O'Donovan ("Irish Grammar," 1845), who refers to this pamphlet for an account of MacElligott's literary qualifications, states that he "also compiled an Irish Grammar, which is still extant in manuscript, in the possession of his daughter, Mrs. Ryding of Limerick, but was never printed. He was a native of the county of Kerry, a region in which they studied classics, 'even to a fault,' in his time, and was for many years a classical teacher in the city of Limerick, where he created a high taste for classical and polite literature."

The Gaelic Society of Dublin was founded in 1806,¹ and published their first and only volume of Transactions in 1808. Forty octavo pages of the Transactions are occupied with "Observations on the Gaelic Language, communicated by P.² McElligott, of Limerick, Honorary Member of the Gaelic Society of Dublin." In this valuable treatise, from which O'Donovan in his "Irish Grammar" (1845) quotes frequently, MacElligott gives some specimens of the Berlagar na Sær, or Mason's Jargon, used in Co.

² Recte R.
Cork, and to a lesser extent in Limerick, Clare and Kerry. He also institutes a comparison between the three main dialects of the Gaelic language—Irish, Scottish, and Manx, and makes some very interesting suggestions as to the improvement of Gaelic orthography. Honorary Members were eligible for election under Rule XI. of the Society, “in cases of Merit,” and possibly MacElligott was the only person singled out for this distinction. Theophilus O’Flanagan, the editor of the Transactions, mentions some valuable collections of Irish MSS. “of which those in the possession of the learned M’Elligott, of Limerick, are not the least worthy of estimation.”

According to John O’Hart’s Irish Pedigrees (4th ed., Dublin, 1887, Vol. I., p. 141), Richard Pierce McElligott (1756), of Limerick, was grandson of Edmund McElligott of Galey parish, of Cookeragh, Co. Kerry, who was transplanted in 1653. Richard was twice married: first to Miss Loftus, and by her had three sons and four daughters:

I. John.
II. Richard.
III. Pierce.
   I. Alice.
   II. Elizabeth.
   III. Mary.
IV. Another Alice.

His second wife was Jane, daughter of Captain William Craig, of Cork, 2nd Foot Regiment; the issue of the second marriage were two sons and two daughters:

I. Charles.
II. Ulysses.
I. Anne.
II. Jane, who married Stephen Nathaniel Ryding, L.D.S., and had issue.

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8 In an analysis of the Transactions in the “Gaelic Journal,” vol 1 (1883), the Rev. J. J. O’Carroll, S.J., stated that MacElligott’s tract impressed him “with a high idea of his widespread Gaelic culture,” and appeared to consider that O’Donovan was not sufficiently frank in acknowledging his indebtedness to MacElligott.
O’Hart proceeds:

"This Richard Pierce MacElligott was a scholar of great eminence; his MSS. were full of interest to the soldier, the mathematician, and the linguist. Some of those MSS. have, since his death, been deposited in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy, and other places in Dublin, and elsewhere; some taken by friends; and some borrowed by others who, without any acknowledgment, have published their contents as their own work. Even in fortifications and Military Art, our newest systems were to him already old. As a Tribute to the memory of Mr. MacElligott, the following poem on him, by one of his descendants, the elder brother of the late Sir de Lacy Evans, is here worthy of record:—

"Where are those days as beauteous and sublime
As those of the original Paradise,
When angels missioners from above came down,
To teach the Deity’s infinite wisdom, love
And all His glorious attributes to man.
Where are those days of beauty, gifted man?
When in the original power of genius, thou
Led’st forth thy pupil through the blooming fields
Of Art, of Science, and of Classic lore!
Then Archimedes’ self and Euclid taught,
From thy clear brain and fire-touched eloquent lips.
There Homer sped his music of the soul,
Demosthenes again sent forth, through Greece,
Those thunders which struck tyrants pale, of you;
Whose very echoes in our modern day
Have taught the Turkish despot wretch to bend
His recreant knee to mind, and own the power
Which from on high rebukes the tyrant, and
In blushes paints the visage of the slave!
To reach, to feel, to teach those nobler points
In morals, wisdom, in eternal truth,
In Art, in Science, or in Classic lore;
All this was thine. But higher, nobler still,
'Twas thine to teach the youthful mind to rise
Above the sordid level of the crowd,
To build its own foundations deep and strong,
And raise the superstructure to the stars!
To scorn each petty tyrant, as he crawls
In reptile slime on the dishonour’d earth—

4 A MS. copy (R.I.A. 23 K 23) of O’Molloy’s Irish Grammar (Rome, 1677) has on the cover the signature of Richard McElligott [Croghley House?], Limerick. Another MS. in the R.I.A. (23 C 2) is a copy of Macolin og Mac-Brodin’s Genealogical Poem for Donall Mac Gormain, with an English verse translation and a literal Latin translation, both done by Richard MacElligott, Limerick, for the Chevalier O’Gorman, Anno Domini 1800. This MS. is entirely in MacElligott’s handwriting. Another MS. (R.I.A., 12 O 7) contains a brief note of some Irish MSS. in MacElligott’s possession.
To cherish in the heart each worthy man—
And court assiduously that converse pure,
Which is the prototype, foretaste, of Heaven?
Where are those days? Yes, yes, they yet will
Immortal e'en on earth, for they belong.
To Heaven's own atmosphere, and the rich seed
Of glorious mind, cultured by thee, shall bloom
And fructify throughout th' embellished land!
Oh! may thy sons, and theirs, ascend to that
High and immortal tone of sentiment,
That vigour made of fire and sprung from Heaven.

Ollis est ignea vigor et celestis origo.

Glin (Co. Limerick), 11th May, 1844.

"Richard Pierce MacElligott, the subject of the foregoing poem, having been a political prisoner in Limerick Jail, in 1798, the following is an extract from a letter by him sent out, pasted with a piece of potato to the bottom of a plate:—

"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:

"Hail! solitude, all gloomy horrors hail!
For Truth has led me to thy dismal shrine.
In her bright face all earthly glories pale;
Thy darkest den is filled with light divine.
What shall I suffer?
After this, nothing.

"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 (or occupied) all the little footpath, and the toes of some of them were touching it.

"As I passed, I thought what a splendid and economical plan for lamp-lighting; for by its piercing rays the whole earth could see into the dark hearts of a distant people, and follow its each individual to the world's end while he carries one grain of pride. In the glory of such bright eternal light, who would not wish to burn? Not Typhus, not Smallpox. No! No!"

"Mr. MacElligott was, however, reprieved."
It is probable that O’Hart obtained his information about Mac-Elligott from Father Furlong’s pamphlet, of which I have not yet succeeded in tracing a copy. The following item of Limerick

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8 The Rev. Jonathan Furlong was a Catholic Curate in Killrush, Co. Clare, until the year 1841, but whether he subsequently left the diocese of Killaloe for England or elsewhere I do not know.

He wrote a Catechism which was published under the following title:—

**Διαμαρτυρία ἐπὶ τῇ ἐφημερίδι τοῦ Κύλλαλοζ Επίσκοπος, Ἐκ τῆς Κυπριακῆς, διὰ τὸν Πρέσβη Νεοκλέα Σέκας, Καθολικοῦ**

**Συντάγματα τῆς Ζώστης, Καθολικοῦ τοῦ Κύλλαλοζ Επίσκοπος, Σέκας Καθολικοῦ.**

1839.” 24°. front + 32 pp. **Verso. Stereotyped and Printed by T. Coldwell, 50 Capel-Street.**

I have a copy of the following works by Father Furlong:—


This first edition of his Primer, as well as the Catechism were printed in the ordinary Irish type, but in his later publications he used a modified form of the Roman letters, with dots instead of “h’s” to indicate the aspirated consonants. A similar type is to be found in the Rev. Wm. Neilson’s Irish Grammar (Dublin, 1808).


This book [Carad An Críosdaig] is in the Irish language (Mullany, Printer, 11, Capel-Street), and contains "Rules For Reading" [Irish].


The Irish title leaf has the following:—"Dublin: Published By Tegg & Co., Lower Abbey-St.; London: C. Dolman, 61, New Bond-Street; Liverpool: Booker & Co.; New York: John Doyle, 166, Broad-Way. 1842." **Verso—** "E. Eginton, Printer, 36 L. Ormond-Quay, Dublin." 200 pp. (including a frontispiece of the Crucifixion).

The work [Compánaz An Críosdaig] contains letters of approval from Rev. Dean Lyons of Ernis, and Rev. M. Horgan of Barney, and a list of episcopal subscribers. There is a plate of "The Agony In The Garden" (Dublin: Published By Michael Reilly), and another of the Annunciation, "Engd. by J. Kirkwood, Dublin," [and published by] Thomas Tegg & Co., Dublin.


The Irish title-leaf [Compánaz An Críosdaig] has the following:—"Dublin:
news, dated July 11, appears in *Finn’s Leinster Journal* (July 18-21, 1798):—

"Yesterday Richard M’Elligot was liberated from prison, General Morrison having been pleased to reduce the bail to be given by him from 2000l. to 200l."

The following advertisement appeared in the "Limerick Chronicle" of 5th April, 1809:—

"**Richard M’Elligot**

Begs leave to inform the Public, that it has ever been his ambition that his School should exhibit every necessary branch of **education**, in the most finished and masterly stile—**Fair Penmanship, Correct Reading, Arithmetic, Book-keeping, Euclid's Elements, Algebra, Geography, and the Greek and Latin Languages.**

M’Elligott shall, in addition to the above, teach the English grammatically, and so that the entire Language can be acquired by any Boy of moderate talents and attention, with ease and accuracy, in one year.

M’Elligott shall also instruct such Pupils as wish to arrive at the compleat conclusion of Classical Learning, in Greek Prosody, through every species of metres; never known or attempted in this Country.

Terms—for Day-boys, four guineas a year—for Boarders, thirty.

**Limerick, April 1, 1809.**"

The date of MacElligott’s death is somewhat uncertain, as the announcement in the *Freeman's Journal* of Friday, 24th April, 1818, of the death "On Sat. morning in Limerick of a lingering decline," of Mr. Richard MacElligott, may refer either to the schoolmaster or one of his sons.

The Limerick newspapers of a hundred years ago ought to throw some further light on the history of this remarkable scholar.

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**Seamus Ua Casaide.**

Published By Tegg & Co., Lower Abbey-St. ; London : C. Dolman, New Bond-Street. 1844."

There is a long and interesting list of subscribers’ names, and the two letters of approval are reprinted from the 1842 edition.

There are twelve very beautiful plates (W. Furlong, Debet Sculp.) in this work, and ten of them are reproductions of altars in Dublin churches.


Whether Father Furlong wrote any other works besides those enumerated here and his pamphlet in defence of MacElligott (London, 1844). I am not able to say.
Mr. William Reeves, B.A., has kindly examined the file of the *Limerick Chronicle* for 1818, and could find no announcement of MacElligott’s death, but in the issue for April 25th, 1818, he found the following appeal, but could find no record of the response to it. The date of the appeal leaves no doubt as to the notice of death in the *Freeman’s Journal* applying to the subject of these notes:

"**The Late Mr. Richard McElligott.**

We learn with pleasure that in the course of the ensuing week it is the intention of a few respectable gentlemen to engage the attention of the benevolent inhabitants of Limerick on behalf of this highly talented individual's now totally destitute and numerous family. We are aware there have been latterly a great many calls upon their bounty, but meritorious as the subjects of it certainly have been, we are of opinion that in this case there are still stronger claims upon them. We will not here stop to eulogise his splendid talents—he has left behind few that can be compared to him; and though it has been too often the melancholy fate of genius to languish in obscurity, we trust the result of the present appeal will prove that its recollection will be of advantage to the family of its possessor. To his former pupils we particularly address ourselves, and they have now an opportunity of testifying the respect they hold his memory in, by sending their benefactions to the office of this paper."

Political troubles, and a shattered constitution, appear to have cast a shadow over the closing years of the life of this distinguished scholar.—**EDITOR.**