THE GAELIC INSCRIPTION OVER A LIMERICK POET AT MUNGRET.

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In a corner of the Munger burying-ground, a few yards from the north-east end of the ruined church, there is an old tombstone bearing an inscription in the Irish language. At the foot of the stone are the words:—"Here lies the body of James Daly. Lord have mercy on his soul. Amen." The upper portion of the stone is rather neatly carved, and the ornamentation includes the letters I.H.S., with a cross having the words "Gloria in Excelsis Deo" arranged semi-circularly around it. Then follow the Irish lines, which, when the contractions are lengthened out, read thus:

Ir céim par cér an Lea rí an a cén a che
án g'féar bán nír eil eile chroág
Seamar déag o Dála an bál sa bháirse.
'S a Dá g'fíd aíului páig é maigh uí Ídeada.

An Peacht Laoit.
Seacht eóna déag in reachtmaíacht mo deacht
Broacht 'n-a déig déit Laoití nóchtaí déit an
O féacht éic Dé 50 h-áig an ríl deo beocht
Go h-áiric uí féimi aon Lív in ceasaithebit deacht.

The whole may be rendered freely in English as follows:—"It is a sad event that the accomplished champion, famous Seamas O'Dala—the fair, poetic scion, who was no weakling in the Irish language—should be laid low beneath a tombstone, wrapt in mantle of clay.

THE EPIGRAPH (An Peacht Laoit.):

There are exactly 1700 (years) and 70, followed by 40, with the exception of some days, from the coming of the Son of God to the
HEADSTONE AT THE GRAVE OF SEAMAS O'DALA.
death of the perfect poet. His own age was, one + fifty + five + four exactly."—i.e. sixty years.

The inscription is written in one of the stressed metres commonly used by the Irish poets of the 17th and 18th centuries. Every line has four principal stresses, together with a secondary stress coming in between the third and fourth stresses. Two syllables are pronounced by aid of each stress, viz.: the one on which the stress falls and the following syllable. Sometimes, too, the first syllable in the line is pronounced with the help of the first stress. In this system of poetry the consonants have nothing to do with correspondence between the lines. If we mark the unstressed vowels by a horizontal stroke and give the stressed vowel where it is simple and, where it is a diphthong, the corresponding simple vowel, the first four lines will be represented in stress notation, thus:

\[ \text{\textasciitilde e \textasciitilde a \textasciitilde a \textasciitilde 1 \textasciitilde e} \]

\[ \text{\textasciitilde e \textasciitilde a \textasciitilde a \textasciitilde 0 \textasciitilde e} \]

\[ \text{\textasciitilde e \textasciitilde a \textasciitilde a \textasciitilde 1 \textasciitilde e} \]

\[ \text{\textasciitilde e \textasciitilde a \textasciitilde a \textasciitilde a \textasciitilde e} \]

The Peaite Laorc has its stressed vowels arranged on a different plan.

As regards Seamas O'Dala, unfortunately very little information can be gathered at the present day. O'Curry says he was "a tailor living in the neighbourhood of Croom, in the County of Limerick;" and he adds that he knew "two of O'Daly's sons who were Irish readers and transcribers." Fitzgerald, in his History of Limerick (Vol. II, page lxxv of the appendix, 1827 Ed.), makes the following short reference to our poet:—"James Daly, of Loughmore, was living in 1790; he left several beautiful elegies." From the inscription on his tombstone we know that he died some time before the end of the year 1810. And it is possible that a search through the files of Limerick newspapers of that year may disclose some facts about the life and death of O'Dala. In the catalogue of the R.I.A., O'Dala is credited with only one elegy, which Fr. Dineen prints at page 89 of his Pí in e na Másté (The Maigue Poets). It is a long poem of 68 lines, composed on the death of Seaghan Ua Tuama an ghrinn, the famous Croom poet, who died in Limerick, August 30th, 1775. From the second stanza of this elegy
it would appear that it was written on the day after the funeral:—

"ματι ζωής ηδύνα τοίχον
ζην υπνό τοίχον ηδύναν
ζην υπνό τοίχον πάλιν,
ζην υπνό τοίχον ηδύναμ,
παράκολο υπνό πάλιν ὑπόν." That is,

"Bitter is the wail which has left minstrels distressed; deprived of the right knowledge of the rules of poetry in the land of Fail (Ireland), when yesterday we bound fast in the grave the bright scion of beautiful countenance."

The date of O'Tuama's death is known from the English inscription over his grave in Croom graveyard, but it may be gathered also from the two last lines of O'Dala's elegy:—

"Socratico dēsō dtē deōn ἰαμαρ πνευματικὸν ἀγαθόν ἐπὶ ὄμων
ἀπὸ ὅ ὧν ἦν κανέν ἀρχαιόν ἐκεῖν ὤλθεν ὁ Ὀδόμενος ἐπὶ Ὀτωμάν ἡμῖν."

From O'Dala's own tombstone we know that he was born in 1750, and therefore would be only twenty-five years of age when he wrote the elegy on O'Tuama. His later elegies, to which Fitzgerald makes reference as being well known among the people when he wrote his History, may be still lingering in MS. on the shelf in a farmer's kitchen waiting for some one to decipher the unknown characters.

Notwithstanding a diligent search in the neighbourhood of Loughmore, the present writer has not been able to pick up any thread of tradition about O'Dala or his family. Of the Daly name there are only two brothers at present in the parish, and they belong originally to Ἰάβαλ η ὑώταρ, i.e. the junction of the Mungrer road and the Ballinarcurrma road near the barracks. Their family, however, is buried in a different part of the Mungrer church-yard from that in which the poet rests. It would appear, therefore, that the family of Seumas O'Dala must have been swept away by the Great Famine of '47, or have emigrated in the exodus which followed. The stonemason, R. Garvey, who carved the poet's tombstone, is buried in Mungrer also, and he has a grandson a stonemason living in Limerick, but the latter has no record of Seumas O'Dala.

Whoever the poet's friends were who preserved his memory by erecting the Mungrer tombstone (perhaps they were his sons mentioned by O'Curry), it is a very remarkable fact that, within a few miles of the English-speaking city of Limerick, a monument with a unique Irish
inscription should be raised to the memory of a local Gaelic poet long before the Irish Revival.

In our ruined abbeys, such as Cong and Clare Galway, you search in vain for an Irish inscription. Even on tombs two and three hundred years old, you find invariably either Latin or English. In Arran and Ring, where Irish is the every-day speech of young and old, English is the language of the tombstones. The Limerick district can claim to have given birth to greater poets than Seamus O'Dala, still, as far as their graves are known, his is the only Gaelic inscription. Seaghan O'Tuama's tomb in Croom is inscribed completely in English. There is an epitaph in Latin over the grave of Seaghan Clarach Mac Domhnaill in Ballysally, near Charleville. As to the rest, we know not where "their lonely graves were made."

Some readers of this JOURNAL may meet with a local tradition which would lead to further discoveries, and, accordingly, I transcribe Fitzgerald's list of our Gaelic Poets ("Natives of the County and City of Limerick"). —David O'Brudair (Anglicised Broderick), born near Newcastle-West, was living in 1692. He witnessed the Siege of Limerick and wrote, amongst others, a poem in praise of Sarsfield's exploit at Ballyneety. O'Brudair's poems are at present being collected and edited by Rev. J. MacErlean, S.J., for the Irish Texts' Society, London. Thomas Gleeson (1) lived at Adare, and was a celebrated Latin and Irish scholar. Patrick Kelly died in 1741. John Roberts was living in 1778. Patrick Fennell, a schoolmaster in Ballingarry in 1771. John Lloyd lived near the weigh-house in Limerick in 1775. Brian O'Flaherty, author of Ómna Úrin Ærfa an Òrga and of No. 52 in Pítróe na Máige. Maurice Griffin lived at Slievereigh in 1778. In the 18th century David O'Clery lived at Newcastle, and James Kennedy at Kilmallock. Poem No. 51 in Pítróe na Máige is by Kennedy. About the same time lived Andrew MacMahon, who kept a tan-yard in Limerick; he left several satires. The Franciscan, Father Nicholas O'Donnell, holds an important place among the Maigue Poets. He was Professor of Philosophy in Louvain in 1705, and in 1717 he was appointed President of the Franciscan College there. Between the years 1733 and 1759, he was five times appointed Guardian of the

(1) He is the author of Poems Nos. 21 and 34 in Fr. Dineen's Pítróe na Máige.
Franciscan Convent at Adare. He is the author of Nos. 30, 35 and 47 in 
\textit{Pitré na Máigé}. He was the intimate friend of his contemporary 
poets, and, as a tribute of respect, was elected by them High Sheriff of 
the Apollonian Court held in Cork.

Fitzgerald omits the name of Andrew MacGrath, "\textit{an Manṣaíne 
Súsač}," the neighbour of O'Tuama of Croom, whose death MacGrath 
bewailed, in 1775, in a touching elegy. MacGrath is the author of 
many satires, humorous pieces, and lyrics. His \textit{Stáin le Máig} (Farewell 
to the Maigue) is his best known song. It is said that he reached an 
advanced age, and that he was buried in Kilmallock churchyard. The 
author of "The Midnight Court," Brian MacNamara, who for thirty 
years was schoolmaster in the parish of Feakle, in the Barony of Upper 
Tulla, died in Limerick in 1808. (Miss Hull's \textit{Text Book of Irish 
Literature}—Vol. II, p. 150). (2)

The compositions of all these poets were, Fitzgerald assures us, 
"well known among the people" when he wrote his "History." He 
adds a regret that their writings were not collected. Father Dineen has 
published in the \textit{Maigue Poets} all he could discover in the MSS. of 
Maynooth College, of the Library of the R.I.A., and of Trinity College, 
Dublin. It is the duty of those who may possess other poems to make 
that fact known, that they may be copied for publication.

During the whole length of the dark 18th century, there shone forth 
a galaxy of poets in this county, some of whom were nowise inferior in 
brilliance to the brightest stars of Kerry and Cork. Whether the poet 
sings the praises of Henry Hartstonge of Bruff for his attachment to the 
cause of the exiled Stuart, or whether he describes the sights and scenes 
of the "Fair of Merry Croom," those pieces are the only records we have 
of the life of the Gael from within during that dark period. Their poems 
were the instruction and inspiration of all that remained of the historic 
Irish Nation. Even now the "Maigue Poets" are being studied with 
enthusiasm in most of our Intermediate schools all over Ireland. Later 
on, if our New University turns out to be in reality the "intellectual 
eye" of a revived Irish Nation, scholars will come searching for traces 
of our poets. Any information, therefore, about them which we can 
glean and publish in this \textit{Journal}, will be duly appreciated in the time 
to come.

Tomár vo Óal.

(2) To the above list add the name of Fr. William English, born in Limerick, and 
afterwards in 1749 a member of the Augustinian Community in Cork. He wrote, in 
his youth, several well-known Gaelic songs, and was famous as a wit and humorist. 
He died in 1778. (ib. p. xxxi.)