

History of Clare
and the
Dalcassian Clans
of
Tipperary Limerick, and Galway
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(1893)

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A.D. 432 to 554.

Christianity introduced—St. Benignus, Nephew and Successor of St. Patrick, preaches in Thomond and Kerry—St. Patrick blesses Clare from Knoc Patrick, near Foynes—Baptises there people from Corcovaskin—Prophesies the Birth of St. Senan—Incidents in the Life of this Saint—His Labours—His Death and Burial—St. Euadan, Abbot of Lorha, in East Thomond, curses the Ard-Righ and his Palace of Tara—Its Abandonment.

THOUGH this county was not at any time blessed by the presence of St. Patrick, his coming to Ireland effected such a radical change in the social and moral, as well as religious, condition of the whole of the people of the country, that the events attending it are not out of place within the narrow limits of a county history. He had been preceded in the effort to convert the nation by St. Palladius. For some reasons not explained, this holy man “did not,” in the words of the Four Masters, “receive much respect in Ireland,” so he had to depart, having failed to impress the people, and died on his return towards Rome—his ill-success hastening in all probability his demise. St. Patrick then offered to the Pope, St. Celestine, his services in attempting the difficult task of weaning the Irish from their ancient and comparatively enlightened pagan worship. He knew the language and customs of the people, having been for years a slave among them, probably brought over into bondage by Dathi after one of his foreign expeditions. The escaped slave panted to rescue from a worse form of slavery those at whose hands he had suffered so great a wrong. St. Celestine blessed his design. He was consecrated Bishop. And so St. Patrick, having received his mission from the successor of St. Peter, turned his face towards the “Wooded Island” of the West, and landed with some companions on our shores, A.D. 432, in the fourth year of the reign of Laoghaire, King of all Ireland.

As might be expected, he met with much opposition, his life being often in danger. The Druids and their fanatic followers could not be easily won over from their ancient superstitions. The preaching of Christianity meant to many among them the loss of valuable and dearly-prized privileges. It pleased God, however, to protect him from their machinations, and the spectacle, unique in the history of the world, is presented of a whole nation converted to the faith of Christ by the energy of one man, and without the loss of a single life. The time for the shedding of blood in defence of faith came much later on. At St. Patrick’s arrival, Aengus of the Eoghanacht line was King of Munster, and embraced the Christian faith.

The conversion of the island was in no small degree facilitated by its singularly peaceful condition. Judging from all the accounts of the progress of St. Patrick, from end to end of the

country, we can reasonably infer that no intestine war raged. As Christ came into the world, so did His apostle bring the knowledge of Him into Ireland, in a period of profound peace.

It is very likely that, as the Saint himself did not visit Thomond, some of his disciples preached the faith there ; [1] the fact of their having done so being overshadowed by the much better known and more successful preaching of St. Senan some years after. While St. Patrick was preaching in the country of the Hy Figeinte,—the western portion of the present county of Limerick,—the people of Corcovaskin, on the Clare side of the Shannon opposite, crossed over to invite him to preach and baptize in their country. The chief and his people claimed descent from Conary I., King of Ireland, but became afterwards amalgamated with the more numerous and more powerful Dalcassian clans. Finding himself unable to accede to their request, he consoled them by foretelling the birth of one of their own race who would do for their country what he was doing for the rest of Ireland. Tradition asserts that, going to the top of the mountain, called after him to the present day, Knoc Patrick, overlooking the territory of Corcovaskin, he stretched his hands out towards Thomond, and solemnly blessed it and its inhabitants. His prophecy was fulfilled, in the birth, forty years later on, of St. Senan, A.D. 488. This date, Dr. Lanigan asserts, tallies best with the historical, as distinct from the legendary, accounts of the holy Saint's life.

The various authors who wrote of him agree in pointing out Magh-Lacha, within about three miles of Kilrush, as his birthplace. The lake in the district, called after him St. Senan's Lake, is held in great veneration. Every year crowds flock to it, performing pilgrimages in honour of the Saint, and seeking his intercession. His father's name was Ercan, his mother's Coemgilla. Very little that can be relied on is known of his early youth. The first noticeable incident was his being compelled to take arms under his chieftain in an attack upon the people of Corcomroe. But he made no use of those arms, feeling that the raid was unjust. The invaders were repulsed with great loss. Senan was taken prisoner, but God softened the hearts of his captors, and the peace-loving youth was set at liberty.

He now resolved to enter on a life of religion, and placed himself under the guidance, first of the Abbot Cassidan, and next of St. Naal (Natalis) of Kyle na Managh, in Ossory. I pass over various stories told of miraculous events in this part of his career. After some years with St. Naal, he was prevailed on to establish a monastery at or near Enniscorthy. The accounts given of his journey, soon after, to Rome, and of his intimacy with St. David of Wales, are not well founded. We next hear of his building a church at Inniscarra,—now the Great Island,—near Cork. Leaving this, as may well be inferred, in a flourishing condition, he turned his face towards his place of birth. He seems to have had a passionate desire for the establishment of monastic houses, and churches adjoining, in retired places suitable for contemplation, as on his way homewards he built again monasteries on the islands of Inislunga and Inisluidhe in the Shannon, two of the group of islands at the junction of the Fergus with the Shannon. As if to gird Corcovaskin with holy houses, he stretched out into the Atlantic, and, landing on Iniscuireach, now Mutton Island, within full view of Aran - na - Naoimh, he again laid the foundation of and constructed a house for holy retreat. At last, after having made provision in so many places for the adoption and pursuit of a life of religion by those—and in those days of fervent faith they were countless—who felt called to it, the time came for his final and most important undertaking. The desire to surround the holy man with, as it were, an atmosphere full of miracles, accounts for the numerous legends which the writers of his life revel in. They tell us that at this, the turning-point of his career, an angel of God brought him up into a mountain, probably Baltard, near Kilkee, which is not far distant from Iniscuireach, and, pointing out to him an island in the broad expanse of the Shannon, within view of his native Magh-Lacha, told him that this was to be the place of his burial, where he should await the resurrection ; as also of many other Saints. In order that no crime should stain its soil, a sea-monster was allowed to hold sole possession of it till he for whom God intended it should

arrive. The legend further tells how St. Senan banished it, driving it into Lough Doolough, near Slieve Callawn. The one fact that stands out from this mist of pious legend unquestioned and unquestionable, is that St. Senan did settle down in the Island of Iniscatha, and made there his resting-place, and a home for piety and learning in the revolving centuries. The group of churches still standing, with the graceful round tower, almost untouched by the hand of time, keeping watch and ward over them through all the ages, speak of no name but that of St. Senan. Such an impression did his work make on the people of Southern Clare, that to-day he is spoken of almost as familiarly as if he were yet a living reality among them. He is as vividly present to their minds as the Round Tower, the building of which they attribute to him, is to their eyes. They love to speak of the miracles wrought by him. [2] Some of these are almost exact copies of the miraculous events related in Holy Scripture, and may therefore be regarded as quite unauthentic. Indeed, I should not wish to pin my faith to most of the wonders attributed to him by tradition or the writers of his life. Underlying all of them is the manifest purpose of bringing into view the holy Saint's strong and efficacious faith in Christ. But that he did work miracles, can hardly be doubted. We can in no other way rationally account for the strong current of tradition attributing them to him.

No credence can be placed on the tale told of the opposition he met with from the chief of the Hy Figeinte, who is said to resent St. Senan's occupation of his territory, unless, indeed, he objected to his episcopal jurisdiction on the other side, seeing that the island is on the Clare side of the Shannon, and most probably belonged to his own people of Corcovaskin. There is an air of truth in what is related of his ordaining that no female should land on the island. This was quite natural. Under his rule Iniscatha became simply a monastery, intended exclusively for men, like so many other establishments of the same kind in every age of the Church. Curiously enough, some writers, in their ignorance of Catholic spirit, regard this as evidence of harshness and a morose disposition in the holy Saint ; while our own national poet, Moore, in his song on the subject, treats of it in the flippant manner not quite unnatural to his versatile genius.

We have no account of when or by whom he was raised to episcopal dignity. If what is told of his having given the veil to a daughter of the chief of Hy Figeinte while he was in Inislunga be true, it is likely that he had been a bishop for a considerable time before his arrival in Iniscatha. Whether this be so or not, it is certain that while there he exercised episcopal functions, making it the seat of a diocese which extended for miles on both sides of the Shannon as far as Limerick, and of which much will be heard later on in these pages. The two oratories still standing, defiant of time and storm, on Bishop's Island, near Kilkee, are supposed to be built by him. The name by which it is still spoken of among the people, " the Island of the Hungry or Fasting Bishop," renders this morally certain. In that remote period there must have been a passage from the mainland to the island, since worn away by the encroaching Atlantic ; and it is very probable, considering the ascetic character of St. Senan, that he provided this place of occasional retreat for himself and his monks. There indeed was a locality suitable for silent communings with God in the presence of His wonderful works, and we can well conceive the holy man, with some chosen companion, so absorbed there in contemplation as to be unmindful of the needs of the frail body, becoming in good truth " a starving bishop." Like so many other Saints of God, he desired to live in continual mortification. He is said to have prayed earnestly that affliction of the flesh should never be wanting to him, and that his prayer was heard. Neither the exact date of his arrival on the island nor of his death can be ascertained ; but the great fame attaching to it, for so many centuries, from his life and works there, is clear proof that his rule lasted over many years. The writers of his life regard it as very probable that he took possession of Iniscatha about 540, and died about 560. He took ill while on one of his visitations, [3] at a convent called Kyleschaille, on his way home,—very probably Kyle na Gaillagh, the remains of which may still be seen within a short distance of his monastery in the parish of Moyarta, now called after its principal

village, Carrigaholt. It is not certain whether he died there or in Iniscatha, but there is no doubt about his being buried in the island of his choice the place of rest, as it was the place of greater labour, marked out for him by Divine Providence. Thus passed away, after a life of good works, one of Clare's most illustrious sons. The people still regard with reverence not only the little church, St. Senan's Bed, which encloses his remains, but the island with which, in preference to his other foundations, his name and his fame are indelibly associated.

About this time occurred two remarkable events, which, though not strictly part of Clare history, yet, inasmuch as they took place within the kingdom of Thomond, deserve at least passing notice. In 562, according to the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, St. Brendan of Birr, one of the shining lights of the infant Irish Church, "was seen to ascend to heaven in his chariot;" and St. Ruadan of Lorha excommunicated the monarch of Ireland. This king, Diarmid, openly professed paganism. He paid no attention to the rights and privileges of the Christian Church. He violated the sanctuary of the monastery at Lorha, by dragging thence Curnan, son of the King of Connaught, who took refuge there, and putting him to death. This barbarous invasion of the rights of his cloister, which was under the patronage of St. Columbcille, so filled with a holy indignation the breast of the fiery Dalcassian abbot, that, like another St. Ambrose, proceeding to Tara, he reproached the monarch to his face, and pronounced a malediction on his palace. This excommunication had a lasting effect on the history of the country. The ancient royal residence of the Ard-Righ of Erin was doomed. The Four Masters, under the year of the age of Christ 554, say, "The last feast of Tara was given by Diarmid, King of Erin." After him no king dared to occupy the palace lying under such solemn ban. To this early abandonment and continued desertion for so many centuries of the once famous Hill of Tara, is most probably due the fact that not a trace remains of its ancient splendour. Oxen and sheep roam at will over the spot where, in the days when Ireland was almost if not the only civilised and cultured nation in all Europe north of Italy, kings and chiefs and Druids met periodically in the hospitable halls of the supreme monarch, to make laws and take counsel on the affairs of the nation. It is still further consecrated to Irish veneration, from the fact that there St. Patrick had appeared boldly before the august but naturally hostile assembly, bringing to them the first tidings of their and the world's redemption.

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History of Clare from 554 to 800.

Dearth of Historical Records—Mode of election of Chief, Prince, and King—Their Privileges and Tributes—Boromean Tax—Its Abolition at the instance of St. Molaing of Ferns—Influence of Christianity on the Arts and Customs of the People—Learning fostered—Long Peace.

DURING the three subsequent centuries the history of Clare is involved in almost hopeless obscurity. As far as the present writer can ascertain, very little of it indeed is recorded in the MSS. of the Irish annalists. [4] Nor can they be blamed for this. The Dalcassian clans were thrown into the background, being greatly outnumbered by their rivals for power in Munster, the Eoghanachts. In open violation of the will of their common ancestor, the latter, being able to outvote the Dalcassians, held fast hold of the sovereignty of Munster. Owing to the prominence of South Munster, Thomond fell for the time into the shade, so much so that even the Four Masters, those diligent searchers into the mists of the past, have little to say for her. Following the same rule of "might against right," of which the world even in our enlightened age knows something, the northern Hy Niall usurped the sovereignty of the whole island. As a set-off against the dearth of local history, it will not be amiss, even at the risk of some repetition, to glance here at the system of selection of chiefs and kings recognised by Irish law which operated so unfavourably against the clans of Thomond, as well as at the general aspect of Irish society in the bright period between the introduction of Christianity and the invasions of the Danes.

The succession to power and dignity in Erin, in every grade, from that of chief of the clan up to the Ard-Righ himself, was regulated by a system, partly hereditary and partly elective. It is not quite clear that any method more just, or better calculated for the weal of the clan itself, or more ruinous to the general interest, ever existed in any other country, either in ancient or modern times. Every clan was a family, each member of which had well-defined rights to a portion of the clan territory, and had a vote for the selection of the chief. His office was to decide in all matters of dispute among his clansmen, in accordance with the interpretation of the common law of the land, as explained by the Brehon, or Judge, and to lead his clan in time of war. Stability of government was provided for, in the recognition of the claim of certain families in each clan or kingship, as being the first to be considered when an election was to take place. By an arrangement, somewhat like that which prevails in the relation of the President and Vice-President of the United States towards each other, the danger of disturbance on occasion of the death of the chief or king was averted. His successor was already selected by a vote of the whole people. And just as this wise provision secured the peaceful transmission of power, so the right on the people's part of selecting not the nearest of kin, but the most worthy of those nearest in blood to the chief or king, afforded a healthy stimulant to the display of wisdom in council and valour in battle among the aspirants to the coveted dignity, while it tended to save the commonwealth from the evils arising from incompetency in its leaders.

The same principle regulated the election of the provincial kings and the Ard-Righ of all Ireland, but with the difference that for these higher and more exalted positions the electors were not the people generally, but the chiefs and subordinate princes. On the day fixed for voting, the electors met in the open air at the rath or mound specially erected or set apart for this most important purpose. The one on which the kings of Thomond were acknowledged, as will be seen later on, still maintains its attitude of immovable repose about half way between the villages of Tulla and Quin. The elect, henceforth called the Tanist, or High Damna (or "making of a king"), having received from the chief or prince next in power the white straight wand typical of the purity and uprightness with which he should rule, took henceforth the place of honour and dignity and privilege next to the chief or sovereign. To use the modern phrase, he was recognised as heir-apparent to the throne.

The one flaw in the system, as there must be some weak spot in everything human, was the temptation, so pressing and so strong, on the elected to step as soon as possible into power, even if it had to be over the murdered remains of their predecessors. Yet with all this, though there had been deeds of violence in the struggle for the first place, they were few and far between, till the Danish invasion threw the country into a condition bordering on anarchy. Each monarch or king, or prince or chief, on accession to power, became entitled to certain well-defined privileges, and received fair warning against encroaching on the rights or privileges of others. These are all to be found in minute detail in that very ancient work, the *Psalter of Cashel*, and still more minutely in O'Curry's *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*. The former compilation is attributed to St. Benignus, the nephew and pupil of St. Patrick, and his successor in the See of Armagh and Primacy of all Ireland. To allay the jealousy excited against him among the people of Munster, for whom he ministered, by reason of his apparent preference for the people of Connaught, to whose spiritual needs also he largely devoted himself, he composed this book, wherein the customs and claims of the princes of Munster receive special notice. It is highly probable that the work, now well known as the *Leabhar-na-g-ceart*, or *Book of Rights*, is a development and enlargement of that inserted by St. Benignus in his *Saltair Chaisil* or *Psalter of Cashel*. The original of the Psalter was literally and carefully preserved in various MSS. all along, but that portion of it dealing specially with the rights of the kings of Munster was, for an obvious reason, revised, and, so to speak, edited and continued, first under the direction of Cormac MacCuilenan, King of Munster and

Archbishop of Cashel in the ninth century, and secondly by command of Brian Boru, monarch of Ireland in the eleventh century. Alas! most of those ancient MSS., so full of interest to students of Irish history, were destroyed or lost in the troubled period when Irish as a spoken language became banned by the Saxon usurper. Connell MacGeoghegan, in dedicating his translation of the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* to Terence Coghlan, dated April 20, 1627, laments their great loss in the following strain : “ Kinge Bryen, seeing into what rudeness the kingdom was fallen, after setting himself in the quiet government thereof, and restored each one to his auncient patrimonye and repaired their churches and houses of religion, he caused open schools to be kept in the several parishes to instruct their youth, which by the said warres were growen rude and altogether illiterate. He assembled together all the nobilitie of the kingdom, as well spirituall as temporall, to Cashel in Munster, and caused them to compose a booke containing all the inhabitations, events, and septs, that lived in this land . . . which booke they caused to be called by the name of the Psalter of Cashel ; signed it with his owne hand, together with the hands of the kings of the five provinces, and also with the hands of all the bishoppes and prelates of the kingdome ; caused several copies thereof to be given to the kings of the provinces . . .

“ Since which time there were many scepts in the kingdome that lived by itt, and whose profession was to chronicle and keep in memorie the state of the kingdome . . . and now . . . neglect their bookes and choose rather to putt their children to learn English than their own native language, insomuch that some taylors do cutt with their scissars the leaves of the said bookes which were [once] held in greate account, and sleice them in long peeces to make measures of, so that the posterities are like to fall into grose ignorance of any things which happened before their time.” [5]

The rights or privileges claimed by the kings and princes of Ireland were, in some instances, of a distinctly Christian origin. For instance, the King of Cashel *i.e.* of all Munster claimed from the territory of Corcovaskin “ ten hundred oxen and ten hundred cows,” and from Burren “ a thousand cows and a thousand oxen, and a thousand rams and a thousand cloaks ;” but it is carefully noted that “ it is not for inferiority (of race) that they pay these tributes, but for their territories and for the superiority of the right of Caiseal and for its having been blessed by Patrick.” [6] It would appear from an examination into these nicely adjusted rights and prerogatives all over Ireland, that while the kings of Ireland and the provincial kings received large contributions in kind from the whole country over which they ruled, they in turn had to make grants and distribute favours to some of the minor princes and chiefs. For instance, the King or chief of Corcovaskin was entitled to receive from the King of Thomond “ a drinking horn, two score steeds, and a king’s or chief’s apparel ;” and the chief of Corcomruah received from him “ his choice ship on a day of voyage, two hundred cows, and his blessing with his daughter in marriage,”—a rather curious arrangement, but illustrative of the manner in which the clans and great families were, for their mutual advantage, kept in a state of dependence on each other. This policy of “ give and take” established between them a strong bond of union for offensive and defensive operations. In this same chapter of the *Book of Rights* the following appears : “ The first with him (the King of Caiseal or Thomond) into another country belongs to the King of Dal Chais ;” which, of course, means that in the wars of the King of the province of Munster, the place of honour as well as danger, the leading of the van, belonged to the Dalcassian clans. In modern times they were said to be always “ the first into the fight and the last out of it.” Here we have in this ancient record proof indisputable of the fact that they were regarded from time immemorial as remarkable for valour among the bravest people on the face of the earth.

The Clare of to-day may well be proud of such an inheritance. As this county will be found, later on, to be identified with the most glorious pages of Irish history during the reign over all Ireland of its most illustrious son, Brian Boroimhe, it may be well here to quote from the *Book of Rights* the law relating to such an event. “ Here follows concerning the laws of

the right of Caiseal and of the tributes and rents given to it and by it, and of the stipends to the King of Mumhane (Munster), and the other kings of Eire by the King of Caiseal when it is the seat of the monarchy.

“ Caiseal is derived from ‘ Cais-il,’ *i.e.* a stone on which they used to lay down pledges ; or ‘ Cis-ail,’ *i.e.* ‘ the payment of the tribute,’ from the tribute given to it by the men of Eire. Sidh-dhruim (‘ fairy hill’) was the name of the place at first.” Then follows the description of the appearance of an angel on the hill to swineherds, who foretold the coming of St. Patrick, and blessed the hill and the place. “ The figure which appeared there was Victor, the angel of Patrick, prophesying that the grandeur and supremacy of Eire would be perpetually in that place. Accordingly, that town is a metropolis to Patrick, and a chief city of the King of Eire. And the tribute and service of the men of Eire are always due the king of that place *i.e.* the King of Caiseal, through the blessing of Patrick the son of Alplainn. Now, here are the stipends of the kings from the King of Caiseal, if he be King (monarch) of Eire, and his visitation and refection among them on that account.” [7] It is curious to find this prophecy of supremacy gravely attributed to an angel, in presence of the well-known fact that the supremacy of Eire had not for many centuries rested in the King of Cashel or Munster. The only explanation I can find for this notable incongruity is in the supposition that in the time of Brian Boromhe the story was invented, with a view to establish the right all along of the supremacy of Cashel by virtue of the blessing of St. Patrick ; and now, when the supposed right had become a fact, the stipends and tributes to the subordinate princes were decreed in order to secure their allegiance. A monarch so vigorous and so successful as Brian Boromhe may well be credited with a desire to retain, for the throne of Munster, the supremacy of all Ireland, which he had won for it with his good sword ; and what better means could be devised than, first, to invest it with a kind of Divine right by reason of the blessing of St. Patrick, and then prop it up by paying for the support of some of the provincial kings and petty princes ? That such a policy was inaugurated in his reign is not at all unlikely. We find wise provision made in the *Book of Rights* for carrying it out ; for, while the monarch in Cashel was bound to share with some of the kings and princes the tributes he received from most of the territories of Erin, he exacted from them in return, not only their support in war, but also the maintenance of his army for certain well-defined periods, while on his way to punish, or to seize the property of, refractory tributaries. For instance, “ one hundred drinking-horns, one hundred swords, one hundred steeds, and one hundred tunics (are given) from him to the King of Cruachan (Connaught) ; and refection from the King of Cruachan to him for two quarters of a year, and to accompany him into Tir-Chonaile.” [8] Here is evidence of an arrangement with the King of Connaught to overawe and keep in subjection the sturdy northern men. But it would require a succession of monarchs in Cashel, brave and skilful as Brian, to effect such a purpose, and such a succession was not forthcoming. The whole island was subjected to obligations of a like kind, with a view clearly to the establishment of a strong central authority. It would be well for Ireland if it had proved successful.

The scheme had, however, a fatal blot. It proceeded on the *divide et impera* principle, which is sure to foster and develop deadly enmities, ready to burst out into flame when the strong controlling power itself grew weak. We shall find only too many evidences of this in the history of the succeeding centuries. The “ prohibitions” were, in a great measure, directed against the continuance of pagan practices, and so bestowed a Christian character on what was in its origin a druidical code of laws. Even in Christian times there was no relaxation of the unfair and unjust imposition on Leinster of what was called the Boromean tax. The origin of it is traced to the monarch Tuathal, who recovered possession of the throne, from which, for some time, a successful revolt of the Firbolgs hurled him. In their revolt they had the active and continued aid of the King of Leinster, for which he and his successors were in this wise punished. Not only were the tributes in kind to a large extent exacted, but, what was far more humiliating, they were obliged to provide one hundred and fifty male and female

servants to attend at the Palace of Tara, It was manifest that vigorous resistance to so odious an impost might be expected, and so the monarch very wisely ordained that a third of the tribute belonged to Ulster, a third to Connaught, and the other third should be divided between the queen of the monarch and the King of Munster. In this way he secured the cooperation of the provincial kings in giving effect to the exactions. Nevertheless, resisted it was again and again. In fact, it was one of the principal causes of all the bloodshed which stained the soil of Ireland for many centuries.

In the year 595, Aodh, the monarch of Erin, himself fell in the attempt to enforce the payment of the tribute ; and this was but one of many other disastrous events which followed. An end was at last put to it in a manner which shows how deeply the teaching of Christianity entered into the hearts of the people and their rulers. About the year 684 A.D., Fionactha, monarch of Ireland, marched into Leinster to seize the usual tribute—fifteen thousand head of cattle—and insist on the fulfilment of the other conditions. He was met by St. Molaing, Bishop of Ferns, who remonstrated with him on the injustice of the impost so successfully, that then and there it was for ever (except on special occasions as a punishment for some transgression) abolished, just as St. Columb-cille, more than a century before, had procured the freedom from tribute of the Irish colony in Scotland. The period to which this chapter is devoted, for the purpose of a general sketch, was unquestionably the most glorious in Irish history.

The acceptance of Christianity put an end, in a great degree, to the ravages of war. The fervour with which it was embraced was unexampled in any country on the globe. The Irish, as a nation, turned their attention almost exclusively to the carrying out of the Christian ideal, and the promotion of learning, science, and art. The whole island was covered with religious houses, ecclesiastical seminaries, and hermitages, the ruins of some of which exist almost untouched by the hand of time to the present day. The oratory of St. Flannan at Killaloe, the beautiful little church in the island close to it, and the beehive structures of St. Senan on the Bishop's Island near Kilkee, may be mentioned as among the numerous buildings, of a similar kind, and for a like holy purpose, which are to be found yet standing in every county of Ireland, attesting the longing for the higher virtues which animated our forefathers. To this period must be attributed, in all probability,—though, strange to say, the known Irish annalists are silent on the subject,—the erection of the round towers which add such grace to Irish scenery, and those other buildings, like Cormac's Chapel on the Rock of Cashel, which, for beauty of design and chasteness of execution, have hardly ever since been equalled. The unknown artists and their employers worked for God alone. They would not have the merit of their work marred by the vainglory of its publication. The unrivalled beauty of the illuminated MSS. of those far-away ages the work, too, for the most part of unknown hands—is another proof of the high state of perfection to which art bounded under Christian influence.

But what most deserves notice is the generosity with which learning, sacred and profane, was fostered, while all northern and western Europe, including Britain, was little, if anything, beyond the stage of barbarism. While Charlemagne himself was barely able to affix his signature to public documents, the schools of Erin were crowded with the youth of the country ; and those of the other nations anxious for learning, had to bend their steps to the remote but illustrious isle of the West. No doubt the preaching of Irish Saints on the Continent contributed to this influx of foreign students ; and it is a striking fact that, as if to encourage this egress of apostolic preachers and ingress of foreigners seeking enlightenment, all the great schools were built either on the sea or the rivers giving easy access to it. Lismore on the Blackwater, Taghmon on the Slaney, Beg-Erin in Wexford Harbour, Bangor and Armagh on the Belfast Lough, Mungret and Clonmacnoise on the Shannon, and Aran-na-Naoimh on the Atlantic Ocean, were among the most noted of these ; and such generous provision was made by the Irish princes for the support of education, that no distinction was

made between those who could and those who could not pay for it. The rich, of course, did pay, as well they might, for a boon so rare and of such priceless value ; but to the deserving poor both education and sustenance while seeking it were as free as the air of heaven. No costly buildings were raised for this purpose, nor expensive living indulged in. In all probability, the students themselves, as they came, and as the necessity for it arose, helped to put up structures of the simplest and easiest kind, just sufficient, and no more, for the end in view. They were satisfied with the plainest fare and the scantiest lodging, while they imbibed learning from masters who set them the same example. Under such easy conditions, thousands of young students could be, and actually were, effectively taught, with little cost as compared with modern methods, and with the greatest care, under the vigilant eyes and unceasing watchfulness of their religious instructors. The priests chanted matins with their pupils at early dawn, offered with them the Holy Sacrifice, shared with them their modest meals, joined them in their hours of recreation, but devoted far the greater part of the day to literary, scientific, and religious instruction. No thought was there for many succeeding centuries of separating religious from secular instruction. They went hand in hand, blessing the givers and the receivers alike. A great zeal for the spread of the faith was enkindled. Fired with it, very many holy men of the Irish race crossed the seas into Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland, and even into Italy, spreading the light of the gospel, establishing schools and monasteries, spending their whole lives ungrudgingly, some of them securing the martyr's crown, in bringing to those peoples, as yet lying in darkness, the blessings of Christian civilisation.

The names of St. Columb-cille, St. Aidan, St. Rumold, St. Killeen, St. Gall, St. Columbanus, St. Fiacre, St. Dympna, St. Feargal, or Virgilus, etc., are still venerated in those countries, as well as in the land of their birth. To the latter, who became Bishop of Salzburg, are attributed some of the hymns now in use in the Roman Breviary, as well as a knowledge of the sphericity of the earth. He was the first to propound to an unbelieving age this new and startling doctrine. A controversy on this strange subject was maintained with vigour for some time between him and St. Boniface in Germany. His eminence in such and kindred knowledge procured for him the title of " The Geometer." For a considerable period, too, a difference of opinion more serious, more prolonged, and more exciting, prevailed in the Irish Church at home, on the question of the proper day for the celebration of the Easter. It was not, of course, a vital dogma of faith, only a matter of discipline ; and though for a while the anxiety of the Irish to retain the usage introduced by St. Patrick brought them into conflict with the rest of the Church, which had, after his time, adopted the more correct Alexandrian computation, yet the feeling of loyalty to the Chair of Peter inculcated by the Irish apostle set the question at rest. The Irish Church became one on this point of discipline with the Church Universal. The names of the Saints who shed a bright lustre on those first three centuries of Christianity in Ireland need not be recorded here. They are on every one's lips. They succeeded in welding, as it were into one, Catholic faith and Irish character, thus preparing the country for the fierce struggles it had to undergo, and out of which it came victorious in the succeeding ages.

It is easy to understand how, under all these healing and civilising influences, old rivalries and animosities softened down. That worst of all curses, intestine war, almost entirely disappeared. Upon a country thus lapped, almost continuously for three centuries, in Christian peace, came that terrible avalanche of paganism and barbarity the Danish invasion. It supplied, as the sequel will show, only too much material for history.

After this rapid survey of the general conditions of the country, we turn to events occurring in Clare, or with which the county had intimate connection.

History of Clare from 800 to 952.

Earthquake in West Clare—Danish Invasion—Cormac MacCuilenan—Flahertach, Abbot of Iniscatha—Both defeat Flann, the Ard-Righ, at Tullamore—Defeated near Carlow—Cormac surrenders the crown of Munster to Lorcan, Prince of Thomond—His Death and Character—Callaghan, King of Cashel—Brian Boroimhe born—His father, Ceinnidigh, defeated and slain by Callaghan.

THE Four Masters, under the year A.D. 799, *recte* 804, give the following description of a terrible convulsion of nature along the west coast of Clare : “ There happened great wind, thunder, and lightning, on the day before the festival of St. Patrick in this year, so that one thousand and ten persons were killed in the territory of Corca-Bhaiscinn, and the sea divided the island of Fitha into three parts.” This island is now called Iniscuireach, or Mutton Island. The other Irish annalists all bear the same testimony, differing only in the year, a proof that they quoted from different but very ancient MSS., now unhappily lost. For instance, here is how the *Ann. Clon*, write of it : “ A.D. 801. There was such horrible great thunder the next day before St. Patrick’s day, that it put asunder a thousand and ten men between Corca-Bascynn and the land about it ; the sea divided an island there in three parts, the seas and sand thereof did cover the earth near it.” The annalists all agree upon the day, as is natural, it being a remarkable one—the eve of St. Patrick—and upon the number lost ; but it is not unlikely that the “ ten” affixed to the “ thousand” means idiomatically some considerable but in-definite addition to the multitude surely destroyed. It is quite clear that this was much more than a mere thunderstorm. The “ dividing of the island into three parts” implies disturbance by an earthquake ; and thus well-authenticated history gives support to the tradition handed down among the people of West Clare, that in one of those awful convulsions of nature the whole coast-line was changed. The land lying between Baltard and Hag’s Head, with all its inhabitants, was engulfed in the ocean ; leaving only Iniscuireach, with its neighbouring little rocky islands, visible, and making navigation along the submerged sunken reefs so difficult and so dangerous. Though the account of this disastrous event marks the first notable glimpse after a long interval, thanks to the destruction by Dane and Saxon of Irish records into Clare life, yet, before the present chapter closes, we will find the country of the Dal-Cas leaping out into the light of authentic history, taking henceforth a foremost and a justly famous part in Irish affairs.

During this century the Danes began their organised incursions into Ireland. It is stated, but it has not been clearly established, that their first inroad was along the Shannon, making their way up even into Lough Derg. If so, they passed close to a place which became afterwards, to their nation, a name of terror—Kincora. In the year 830 they first plundered Armagh, and this city of the See of St. Patrick must have afforded tempting loot to those pagan marauders, for we read that three times within one month they seized its spoils. The Irish evidently were completely taken by surprise, never imagining that a place so holy could be so ruthlessly and so sacrilegiously assailed. Besides, they had no standing army or navy ; and enemies like the Danes hovering about the coast could choose at their leisure the time and place for attack most suitable to them, and had always their ships to retreat to when they had reason to fear their being outnumbered or overpowered. So, during the years following, from year to year we find in the Four Masters a dismal record of the incursions of these northern barbarians into all parts of the kingdom. Wherever they had reason to expect that objects of value were to be found, there they fixed their hungry eyes, and, watching a favourable opportunity, pounced like hawks upon their prey. Churches and monasteries were unmercifully and repeatedly plundered ; and sometimes men of note were carried away as hostages, and also with a view to their afterwards securing a good reward for their ransom. The Danes gratified at once, in these ravages, their rapacious instincts and their hate of the Christian religion.

Nor were they alone guilty of such sacrilege. We find Feidlim, son of Crimhthan, of the race of the Eoghanachts, King of Munster, imitating their barbarous example. In the year 831, and again in 832, he ravaged and burnt to the very door of the church the property of the monastery of Clonmacnoise. [9] This sacrilege was well and justly avenged by Cathal, King of Connaught, who defeated, with much slaughter, Feidlim and the Munster forces in two battles—the first in 834, the second in 836. It is more than probable that the Thomond clans had no share either in the sacrilege or its punishment, as the continued usurpation of the throne of Munster by the Eoghanachts caused constant feuds between them and the Dalcassians. The first approach to a right understanding between the two great Munster families was made by Cormac MacCuilenan, Archbishop of Cashel and King of Munster. This prince ascended the throne in the year 895. Though already charged with the solemn duties of an archbishop, the burden and cares of the crown of Munster devolved on him. His reign was a very memorable one. As might be expected, he was a great patron of learning and a strenuous upholder of Church rights ; but the unseemly spectacle was presented of a bishop of the Prince of Peace driven frequently into the field of battle. He may have tried to avoid it, but could not. We have proof that it was forced on him. In the year 901, Muireach, son of the King of Leinster, led an attack on the Munstermen, but was defeated and slain. In the same year, and probably by concert, Flann, the monarch of Ireland, who had signalised the first year of his reign in 877 by an assault on the province of Munster, plundering “ from Boraimhe to Corcagh,” *i.e.* from Killaloe to Cork, [10] made another successful raid on the dominions of King Cormac, plundering “ from Gobhran to Luimneach.” [11] But Cormac, ecclesiastic as he was, being a prince of more than ordinary vigour, determined to avenge this unprovoked insult. He conciliated the Dalcassians by a promise, which he afterwards honourably fulfilled, of restoring to their prince the right to the throne of Munster, of which they were so long wrongfully deprived. Flahertach, his kinsman, the warlike Abbot of Iniscatha, rallied them to the standard of the King-Bishop of Cashel. With the united clans of all Munster, Cormac marched to give battle to the monarch Flann. The latter had with him the united forces of Leathcuin, *i.e.* the northern half of Ireland. The opposing forces met at Magh-Lena, near the present town of Tullamore, and here the Eoghanachts and Dalcassians paid off old scores, by defeating, with great loss, the monarch and his army. Cormac and Flahertach did not rest content with this victory. They turned their arms against the southern Hy Nialls and Connaughtmen, who had in all probability taken sides with the monarch Flann, and, defeating these also, “ they carried away the hostages of Connaught in their great fleets on the Shannon ; and the islands of Loch Eibh were plundered by them.” [12]

These events deserve special notice in this history, as they brought for the first time for centuries into bold prominence the strength and valour of the Dalcassian race, and gave promise of the greater prominence which they were soon afterward to acquire. Elated by these successes, some of the Munster princes, and notably Flahertach, the restless Abbot of Iniscatha, urged Cormac to revive the long-abandoned claim for tribute from Leinster. The son of the King of Leinster had indeed invaded Munster three years before, but paid for his rashness the penalty of his life. Cormac felt that this could be no justification for such an arrogant claim. Against his will he was dragged, however, into the assertion of it ; and it was perhaps this sense of the injustice of the demand that filled him with a foreboding of disaster. Before venturing on the unlucky expedition, he made presents of gold and silver and altar vessels to the religious establishments at Ardfinnan, Lismore, Cork, Cashel, Armagh, and Iniscatha. Having a presentiment—some say a Divine forewarning—of defeat and death, he called to his side Lorcan, prince of the Dalcassians, and, presenting him to the Eoghanacht chiefs, declared him as his successor in obedience to the will of their common ancestor, Oilioll Oluim. The latter looked with disfavour on this arrangement, being determined to retain the right of succession to the throne of Cashel among themselves, and did retain it till superior force, as we shall soon see, compelled them to yield. Having thus in so far relieved his conscience in this matter, Cormac, after a vain attempt to turn aside the Munster chiefs from this adventure, marched with them into Leinster. This was the signal for a coalition between the Ard-Righ

Flann and the King of Connaught, both of whom he had chastised so severely, with the King of Leinster. Their united forces outnumbered four times Cormac's army, and inflicted on him a severe defeat. [13] He himself, with many of the Munster princes, and no less than six thousand of their followers, was slain.

Thus fell by the sword one of Ireland's greatest sons, in a cause in which his heart was not. He was not only a wise and powerful prince and bishop, administering with firmness and skill both temporal and spiritual affairs, but he was also a man of profound learning, as the *Cormac Glossary* and the *Psalter of Cashel*, part of which was probably written by him, testify. Pity that such a fate befel such a man. He lived long enough, however, to turn to good account in his country's cause the splendid abilities with which he was endowed, and to deserve being ranked among the most illustrious of our Irish kings.

The Abbot of Iniscatha, Flahertach, who, though living in the Dalcassian territory, was a prince of the Eoghanacht line, being the son of Inmhainor, King of Cashel, Cormac's predecessor, was made prisoner in this fatal battle by Carball, King of Leinster. The latter prince dying within a year, Flahertach was restored to liberty, and, churchman as he was, being full of ambition, succeeded, in spite of the will of Cormac, in getting himself recognised as King of Cashel. It would appear that Lorcan and the Dalcassians were unable to assert their right to the succession, and had once again to submit to the old injustice. Might for some time longer prevailed over right. It is not unlikely that conscience smote Flahertach for this usurpation, as we find in the Four Masters that "in 920 he went upon his pilgrimages; and Lorcan, son of Conlingan, assumed the kingdom of Cashel."

How long he held the throne is uncertain. In five years afterwards an event occurred destined to change the whole current of Irish history. In 925 was born Brian, surnamed Boromhe, son of Ceinnidigh, son of Lorcan, twenty-four years before Maelseachlain, monarch of Ireland, whom he deposed." [14] The date of Lorcan's death is not given; nor can it be ascertained whether Ceinnidigh, Brian's father, made any effort to succeed him on the throne. If he did, he failed, as the Four Masters under the year 934 record the plundering of Cluain-Mic-Nois, first "by the foreigners of Ath-Cliath, : " *i.e.* by the Danes of Dublin, and afterwards, alas! "by Ceallaghan Caiseal and the men of Muuster." In the very same year this sacrilegious act was avenged on the Danes. Donnchadh, son of Flann, the King of Ireland, attacked them in their principal stronghold, burning Ath-Cliath (Dublin) to the ground; nor was retribution on Callaghan and his Munster men very long deferred. This king deserves to be regarded as one of the worst and most ignoble in Irish history. We find him again, three years later on, devastating and plundering the territory of Meath in the congenial company of the Danes, who had established themselves in his own territory at Luirnineach (Limerick), sparing not even the churches or monasteries, and carrying away the abbots as prisoners. [15]

We may hope that the Dalcassian clans had no share in the sacrilegious raids of their ancient rivals. It is certain that no special mention is made of their participation in the unholy work, as might be expected, if they actually engaged in it. Callaghan suffered his first defeat at the hands of the Ard-Righ Donnchadh in the following year, and had to deliver hostages for his future good behaviour. This did not last long. He soon turned his arms against the Leinster tribes, in revenge for, their having submitted to his rival, and made great slaughter of them. The latter, uniting all their forces, in turn attacked Callaghan, and defeated him with great loss. This defeat was completed, when, in the same year, Muircartagh, King of Ulster, swooped down on Leinster and Munster, taking captive and bringing with him into bondage, among others, the two provincial kings, Lorcan and Callaghan. In this he acted for Donnchadh, the Ard-Righ of Ireland, having his forces under his command; and on his return delivering up to him his prisoners, the most formidable of whom was his old enemy

Callaghan, “ that unruly king of Munster, that partaked with the Danes.” [16] Muireartagh was so famed for his exploits that the Four Masters styled him “ the Hector of the West of Europe.” He fell as such a prince would like to fall, in battle with the enemies of his religion and his country, at Ardee, in Louth, on the 26th March of the year following, A.D. 941, or 943 according to the revised correct computation. [17] Two noteworthy events in Clare history took place the following year. Flahertach, Abbot of Iniscatha, and for a time King of Munster, died ; and Ceinnidigh, prince of Thomond and father of Brian, was defeated in battle at Magh-Duin, by Callaghan of Cashel.

- [1] It is recorded in the Acts of St. Benignus, the successor of St. Patrick, that, while yet a priest, he preached in Clare and Kerry, as St. Patrick himself was unable to visit those places.
- [2] St. Brigid of Feenish Island, at the mouth of the Fergus, is said to have have sent him a vestment, setting it afloat down the river in a basket. Hence the mistake about St. Brigid of Kildare sending one round by the sea.
- [3] It is believed that it was to the little oratory at Ross Bay, still standing, where St. Cassidan gave him the religious habit.
- [4] St. Colman, who, with the aid of his relative, Gauaire, King of Connaught, founded Kilmacduagh, A.D. 620, lived for the seven years preceding as a hermit in the gloomy wooded valley of Carron in Burren.
- [5] *Book of Rights*, Introduction, p. 23.
- [6] *Book of Rights*.
- [7] *Book of Rights*, p. 31.
- [8] *Book of Rights*, p. 31.
- [9] Four Masters, *Ann. Clon.*
- [10] *Ibid.*
- [11] Four Masters.
- [12] *Ibid.*
- [13] Keating calls it the “ Cath Beallagh Mumghna,” battle of Ballymore, near Carlow.
- [14] Four Masters.
- [15] *Ibid.*
- [16] *Ann. Clon.*
- [17] *Annals of Ulster.*

History of Clare and the Dalcassian clans of Tipperary Limerick, and Galway (1893)

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