

Clare

from

Atlas and cyclopedia of Ireland.

The general history

(1905)

NAME.

The county is named from the little town of Clare, near the mouth of the Fergus : and this got its name from a bridge of planks by which the Fergus was crossed in old times : the Gaelic word *clar* signifying a board or plank.

SIZE AND POPULATION.

This county has water all round (namely, the Atlantic, the Shannon, and Lough Derg) except for 40 miles of its north and northeastern margin, where it is bounded by Galway. Greatest length from Loop Head to the boundary near Lough Atorick on the northeastern border, 67 miles ; breadth from Limerick to Black Head (nearly, but not quite, at right angles to the length), 42 miles ; breadth from Black Head to the shore west of Bunratty (at right angles to the length), 35 miles ; area, 1,294 square miles ; population, 141,457.

SURFACE.

It may be stated in a general way that the northern part and the eastern margin are mountainous or hilly ; and the middle and south form a broad plain, occasionally broken up by low hills, and in one place by a considerable mountain (Slievecallan). The barony of Burren in the north is an extraordinary region of limestone rock, rising into hills of bare gray limestone, the intervening valleys or flats being also composed of limestone, with great blocks strewn over the surface, both hills and valleys being relieved here and there by lovely grassy patches of pure green.

MOUNTAINS AND HILLS.

The highest summit of the Burren district is Slieve Elva (1,109), a conspicuous flat-topped mountain ; Cappanawalla (1,028) rises direct over Ballyvaghan Bay ; and in the east of the same district is Slievecarran (1,075).

On the northeast margin are Turkenagh and Cappaghbaun (1,126), which may be regarded as offshoots of the Slieve Aughty range, on the Galway side of the boundary. Further south, near the east border, runs the Slieve Bernagh range to which belong the two adjacent hills of Glennagalliagh (1,746 and 1,458), rising over Lough Derg near Killaloe, and a mile further west Cragnamurragh (1,729).

Slievecallan (1,282), 6 miles east of Miltown Malbay, though not the highest, is the most remarkable mountain in Clare, rising isolated from the plain, and commanding a view of the whole county. On its side is a celebrated cromlech, with an Ogham inscription. Northwest of Limerick is a low range of heights locally well known as the Cratloe Hills.

COAST LINE.

From Limerick to Loop Head — not following the windings of the coast — is about 55 miles ; and from Loop Head to Black Head on the Atlantic side, about 50 miles. This last coast, for almost its whole length, is a succession of cliffs. At Ross, 3 miles northeast from Loop Head, are two very wonderful natural bridges spanning the waves. At Kilkee the coast abounds in caves, sharp-edged cliffs, and castellated rocks, standing up like pillars in the sea, and quite detached from the mainland. But the Cliffs of Moher are the crowning glory of this coast. They begin at Hag's Head, and form a continuous rocky wall, perpendicular or over-hanging, for four miles, varying in height from 400 to 668 feet, broken into the most fantastic forms and tunneled into innumerable caves by the action of the waves. At the northern extremity there is a steep and dangerous pathway down the face of a cliff called Aillnasharragh, by which the sea margin may be reached ; and when the tide is out one can walk for a long distance at the very base of the great wall of rock.

HEADLANDS.

Beginning at the north-east, and going regularly round the coast : Aughinish Point, on the north of the entrance to Aughinish Bay. Black Head, forming the northwest angle of the county, is a fine rocky promontory, rising at its highest point to 1,041 feet, not perpendicular like the Cliffs of Moher, but in a gradual slope, with a road winding all round halfway down between the summit and the sea. Doolin Point : Hag's Head, the end of a bold projection which defines on the north Liscannor Bay : Cream Point and Spanish Point two rough scarped projecting sea rocks near Miltown Malbay : Lurga Point, opposite Mutton Island : Donegal Point, defining Farrihy Bay on the north : Foohagh Point, a little south of Kilkee. Loop Head, the extreme end of the long peninsula between the Shannon and the Atlantic Ocean, is a bare headland rising 200 feet straight from the waves. At the very extremity of the head is an island — a mere pillar of rock with perpendicular sides standing out of the waves — separated from the mainland by a fearful chasm, not more than 20 or 30 feet wide, and 200 feet deep ; at the bottom of which the sea is always raging even in calm weather. The island rises exactly to the level of the mainland, from which it seems to have been separated by some convulsion : and though it looks perfectly inaccessible, it contains some remains of primitive buildings of ecclesiastical or sepulchral origin. The people call the old building Dermot and Grania's Bed, which is the usual popular name for a cromlech. On the Shannon shore are Kilcredaun Point, near Carrigaholt, and Kilkerrin Point, on the south of Clonderalaw Bay.

ISLANDS.

The whole group of islands in the estuary of the Fergus belongs to Clare. The chief are Inishmore or Deer Island, close by the western shore : Inishmacowney, south of it ; near which is Canon Island, crowned with the ruins of a monastery (for Augustinian canons) : Inishloe, east of this : Inishcorker lying just outside the village of Killadysert : and near the eastern shore, Inishmacnaghtan.

In the Shannon, outside Kilrush, is Scattery Island, by far the most remarkable island belonging to Clare, once a celebrated seat of religion and learning (founded by St. Senan in the fifth century), and now containing the ruins of " seven churches " and a round tower, as memorials of its former importance. Hog Island lies between Scattery and the mainland.

A little south of Kilkee is Bishop's Island, a mere sea rock, flat and grassy on top, with a perpendicular wall of rock all round, nearly inaccessible, yet containing the ruins of a primitive religious establishment. Mutton Island, or Inishkeeragh, rough and rocky, lies

outside Miltown Malbay. This is the island anciently called Inis-Fithi, of which there is historical record that in the year 804 it was severed into three parts in one night by a great storm. The portions severed from the main body are two lofty masses of rock rising out of the waves immediately north of the island.

St. Thomas' Island lies in the bend of the Shannon, a mile and a half above Limerick.

BAYS AND HARBORS.

In the Shannon : the broad estuary of the Fergus, containing a large number of islands, all low and grassy, affords ample facilities for navigation : the deep bay of Clonderalaw is further west : next is Kilrush Harbor, and the landlocked shallow bay of Poulanishery, with its oyster beds : Carrigaholt Bay lies outside the village, from which it has its name : between which and Loop Head are Rinevella Bay and Kilbaha Bay.

On the Atlantic coast, three miles from Loop Head, is Ross Bay, which is noted for its two natural bridges, under which the sea is continually dashing, very beautiful, and almost as regular as if put up by human hands. Next is Moore Bay at Kilkee, horseshoe shaped, and sheltered from the Atlantic swell by the low reef called the Duggerna Rocks. What is called Mal Bay is merely the sea west of Miltown, and is really no bay at all : Liscannor Bay, at Lehinch, is defined on the north by the promontory of Hag's Head. On the north is Blackhead or Ballyvaghan Bay, near which to the east are the two deep bays of Muckinish and Aughinish (or Corranroo). On the shore near the hamlet of Burren are the famous Burren oyster beds.

RIVERS.

The Shannon, with Lough Derg, bounds Clare for about 70 miles, viz., from near Scarriff Bay in Lough Derg, the whole way to Loop Head, except for about 6 miles at Limerick city, where a small portion of the county Limerick lies on the right bank of the river. Between Killaloe and Limerick are the " Falls of Doonass," where the river rushes over a series of rocks, forming one of the finest rapids in the kingdom. The Fergus, which, with its tributaries, drains a large area of the middle of the county, rises in the barony of Corcomroe, a few miles northwest of Corrofin, and flowing through Inchiquin Lough, Lough Atedaun, and others, it passes by Ennis and Clare, and opens out by a broad estuary into the Shannon. The Moyree River coming from the borders of Galway in the northeast, joins the Fergus after flowing through Dromore Lake ; the Claureen River runs east through the barony of islands, and joins the Fergus just above Ennis. The Latoon Creek, called in the earlier part of its course the Ardsollus River, falls into the Fergus at the top of the estuary. This river, in several parts of its course, disappears in limestone canvers, especially near Tulla, where it rushes through the extraordinary Caves of Tomeen.

The River Graney issues from Lough Graney in the barony of Tulla, and passing through Lough O'Grady, falls into Lough Derg at Scariff bay ; its headwaters are two streams that fall into Lough Graney, viz., the Bleach River, which comes from the east, rising in Lough Atorick, on the boundary between Clare and Galway, and the Drumandoora coming from the west. Just where the Graney issues from Lough Graney it is joined by the Caher River. The Owenogarney issues from Doon Lake, in the barony of Lower Tulla, near Broadford ; after passing Six-mile bridge it takes the name of the Bunratty River, and joins the Shannon at Bunratty ; at the mouth, just where the last bridge crosses the river stands Bunratty Castle, built in the 13th century, the largest and finest ruin of its kind in the whole county.

The Inagh or Cullenagh River rises about 4 miles southeast of Slievecallan ; flowing to the northwest it passes through Drumcullaun Lake : in Ennistimon it falls over a ledge of rocks,

forming a beautiful cascade ; and 8 miles lower enters Liscannor Bay at Lahinch. The Doonbeg or Cooraclare River falls into Doonbeg Bay, northeast of Kilkee ; and a little north of this are the Creegh River, and the Annageerah. The Aille River flows from Lisdoonvarna into the ocean near Doolin Point.

LAKES.

Clare abounds in small lakes, many of them bleak, and surrounded by bog and heath ; but others among the most picturesque in Ireland. Inchiquin Lake, near Corrofin, is a lovely lake, a mile in length, with a hill (Cantlay or Countlay), celebrated in legend, rising over its western shore ; and a fine castle ruin on the north side, the ancient residence of the O'Briens, earls of Inchiquin ; the lake gives name to the barony of Inchiquin. This is the westernmost of a chain of small lakes, of which the principal are Lough Atedaun, Lough Cullaun, Lough George, and Muckanagh Lake ; to the north of this last is Lough Bunny ; and to the south of it Dromore Lough. East of Dromore Lough, near the village of Crusheen, is the beautiful Inchicronan Lake, with a fine demesne, and the ruins of an abbey and of a castle on its shore.

Another group lies in the southeast, between the village of Six-mile bridge and Tulla. Beginning on the west, the chief of these are Fin Lough and Roscroe Lough, 3 miles east of New market-on-Fergus ; northeast of these is Lough Cullaunyeeda, nearly round, and 1 mile in diameter ; next, Clonlea Lake; and still further east Doon Lough.

Lough Graney, in the east, 2½ miles long by ½ mile broad, lies in the midst of hills ; south of which is the smaller Lough O'Grady; and 6 miles northeast of Lough Graney is Lough Atorick, on the boundary with Galway.

Lickeen Lake, Smiles northeast of Ennistimon, is 1½ mile long. Doo Lough, 1½ miles long, lies 6 miles southeast of Miltown Malbay.

TOWNS.

Ennis (6,307), the assize town, stands on the Fergus, nearly in the center of the county. In the town are the ruins of the Franciscan abbey, founded in the 13th century ; and 2 miles to the north are the church ruin and round tower of Drumcliff : a far more ancient foundation. Kilrush (3,805) is at the head of a little inlet of the Shannon, into which steamers ply ; a very prosperous town, with an extensive trade. Kilkee (1,652), on the shore of a lovely little inlet of the Atlantic (Moore Bay), is one of the finest watering places in Ireland, and is celebrated for its splendid cliff scenery. Killaloe (1,112), in the east, on the Shannon, just where it issues from Lough Derg, 14 miles above Limerick, was in old times a great religious center, and is still a bishop's see: it has several interesting church ruins ; and near the town are the remains of Kincora, the ancient palace of Brian Boru.

The other towns on the margin, going regularly round, are : Scarriff (785), near the head of Scarriff Bay, in Lough Derg ; Now market-on-Fergus (618), 2 miles east of the Fergus estuary ; Killadysart (560), on the Shannon, at the western corner of the estuary of the Fergus ; the fishing village of Carrigaholt (360), west of Kilrush, with its old castle ruin on a rock over the bay, is the capital of the Loop Head peninsula ; Miltown Malbay (1,400), in the west, a mile and & half from the coast, near the beautiful horseshoe bay inclosed by Spanish Point and Caherrush Point, is much frequented as a bathing place. Ennistimon (1,331), on the Inagh or Cullenagh River, 2 miles from the head of Liscannor Bay, is beautifully situated among pretty hills and plantations, and just beside a lovely waterfall. On the north coast is Ballyvaghan, a small but prosperous village, locally important from its position on the shore of Galway Bay.

The other inland towns are : Clare or Clare Castle (790), near the mouth of the Fergus ; a mile from which, toward Ennis, near the shore of the Fergus, are the interesting ruins of Clare Abbey, erected by Donald O'Brien, king of Munster, at the close of the 12th century. Tulla (758), 10 miles east of Ennis, which gives name to the two baronies of Tulla ; south of this is Sixmilebridge (446), on the Owenogarney, 8 miles northwest of Limerick city. In the north-west are Corrofin (579), on the Fergus, in a lovely situation between Inchiquin Lake and Lough Atedaun ; and Lisdoonvarna, at the head of the little river Aille, 6 miles north of Ennistimon, which was until lately a mere hamlet, but is now a noted health resort, on account of its sulphur spas, and is growing fast in population and prosperity.

MINERALS.

Sandstone flags, like the flags of Carlow, are produced round Kilrush, Kilkee, and Ennistimon. Excellent slates are found at Broadford, near Killaloe ; but the principal quarries of Killaloe slates are in Tipperary, at the other side of the Shannon. At Ballyhickey, east of Ennis, and at Miltown near Tulla, there are valuable lead mines, which produce also silver combined with the lead.

ANCIENT DIVISIONS AND DESIGNATIONS.

Clare anciently belonged to Connaught, but was annexed to Munster in the 4th century A.D. It formed a portion of the ancient kingdom of Thomond. The old territory of Corco-Baskin included the whole of the south-western peninsula, namely, that portion now occupied by the two baronies of Moyarta and Clonderalaw. Hy Caisin, the territory of the Macnamaras, lay in the baronies of Upper Bunratty and Upper Tulla. Hy Fermaic or Kinel-Fermaic, the district of the O'Deas, was in the present barony of Inchiquin. Immediately south of Hy Fermaic was the old district of Hy Cormac, the territory of the family of O'Hehir, lying between the river Fergus and Slievecallan, and comprising the whole of the barony of Islands, except the parish of Clondagad, which belonged to Corco-Baskin. The old district of Corcomroe occupied all that territory in the north now covered by the two baronies of Corcomroe and Burren. From this territory the celebrated Corcomroe Abbey took name, the fine ruins of which lie 4 miles east from Ballyvaghan.

Kincora, the ancient palace of Brian Boru, king of Ireland (slain at Clontarf, A.D. 1014), was at Killaloe; and the ruins of the old mounds and fortifications still remain.

The Cratloe Hills, northwest of Limerick, were anciently called Slieve-oy-an-ree, the mountain of the death of the king, from the following circumstances. Ohy Moyvane was king of Ireland from A.D. 358 to 365 ; his queen was Mongfinn, whose brother, Criffan, became king on the death of Ohy. Mongfinn, wishing that her eldest son Brian should be king, administered poison to the king her brother on a little island in the river Moy in Mayo, and in order to hide suspicion, she herself drank some of the poison before giving it to Criffan. Mongfinn died of the drink, and Criffan, feeling that he had been poisoned, instantly set out for Munster ; but on crossing the Cratloe Hills he sank under the effect of the draught and died : hence the name. Mongfinn's wicked act was vain, however ; for on Criffan's death, the great king Niall of the Nine Hostages, son of Ohy Moyvane by another wife, Carinua, ascended the throne of Ireland.

KILLALOE.

This ancient and historic town is connected with the Tipperary side of the Shannon by a curious old bridge of nineteen arches. The town once enjoyed great celebrity as the residence of the Munster kings, among them Brian Boru who reigned there both as king of Munster and

chief monarch of Ireland. A mound or fort is all that now remains of the palace of Kincora, so famed in song and story. Killaloe was formerly an important military position, placed as it is between the Arra and Slieve Bernagh Mountains at the only fordable part of the Shannon. Here it was that Sarsfield performed his splendid feat of intercepting and blowing up King William's artillery train on its way to aid in the siege of Limerick. It is a noted place for angling, the broad meres and rapids of the Shannon here affording excellent opportunity for that sport.

ENNISTYMON.

The county of Clare possesses many interesting remains and a memorable record, though in latter days, like many other, especially of the western counties, it has fallen off in commercial importance and population. Within its boundaries the O'Briens, Lords of Thomond, exercised control for centuries, and at Kincora, King Brian Boru, when chief monarch of Ireland, dwelt. This territory was "granted" by King Edward I., of England, to Thomas de Clare, Earl of Gloucester, but the O'Briens maintained their struggle for the retention of their domains with such energy and persistence that the intruders were ultimately driven out. Not until 1565, was Thomond converted into shire-ground; the last Irish sept who possessed control were the McMahons — a different family from the McMahons of Monaghan. Of the towns, Ennistymon — near the head of Liscannor Bay — is one of the most noted, though not the largest, in Clare. The name is derived from Inis-Dimain-Dimain's holm, or island — and is situated in a setting of exquisite natural surroundings. The cascades or rapids of the Cullenagh River, which flows through it, are attractive, and elicit the admiration of visitors.

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