

Curses on the McInerneys of Clare

Recently, **Maire Ni Ghruagain** of Kilnasoolagh, Newmarket-on-Fergus, copied an old manuscript written by **Conor Ryan** of Sixmilebridge in 1825 when he was in his 81st year. The manuscript, for the most part, is written in English, and describes the life of the patroness of *Tradraighe* parishes, St Catherine. In particular, the manuscript details the story that St Catherine tried to build a convent on the lands of Tomas McInerheny (Tomás Mac an Oirchinnigh) which located nearby Newmarket-on-Fergus in present day Ballysallagh West. He refused and so she cursed him and other McInerheny families in various locations along the Shannon estuary. The survival of this old manuscript is interestingly, not least because Conor Ryan wrote it down in order to preserve the oral account of the story. While we can speculate on whether the story has a basis in truth, it should be noted that it does correctly identify the original patrimony of the Mac an Oirchinnigh in and around Newmarket-on-Fergus. Also, according to the Mac an Oirchinnigh genealogies, there was a Tomás Mac an Oirchinnigh who lived in the fifteenth century - so elements of the story could have a historical basis (see RIA MS 23 H.22 p.11 - pedigree written by Maolín óg Mac Bruadheadha in c.1588). This Tomás was likely to be the toiseach of the sept and resident at Ballysallagh. For further information on the McInerney family please refer to the article "*Survey of the McInerney Sept of Thomond*" which can be found on this website: www.aughty.org and is also published in the 2007 and 2008 editions of the *Other Clare* journal. The curses, which were in Irish, have been translated, though some words are difficult to now discern. -

Luke McInerney

Any comments/further information are appreciated and I can be contacted on ljmcinerney@hotmail.com.

*A special thanks should go to **Maire Ní Ghruagain** for breathing 'new life' into this old manuscript.*

From a Writing by Connor Ryan of Sixmilebridge, c.1825

This copy of a legend given to me by Miss Wilson was in error as to its author being a mermaid and the composition much corrupted by unskillful translators in every age. The real author was Catherine patroness of Kilfintinnan, Templemartin, Templecatherine, Kilnasoola, Newmarket –on-Fergus, which last place bears her name in the Irish language to this day Coir Chaitrin. This Catherine in her youth and old age dwelling in Ballysteen Church then a Bishop's See united with Killaloe in the 6th century at the instigation of Colgan, Bishop of Ileity, an aged lady of great devotion, piety and sanctity. Note: Kilfintinan is a small church at the foot of Gallows Hill formerly a place

of rest between Minter and Quin. Templemartin the ruins of a small church on the Limerick Road near Sixmilebridge. Templecatherine is in Sixmilebridge where now stands the Protestant Church and across from the new chapel in the Green.

This Catherine was contemporary of Holy Cormac, son of Cullinane, Archbishop of Cashel and King of Munster, who was a prince, a prelate, a prophet, a priest and poet. When the descendants of Olliol Olum were monarchs of Ireland, and the dynasties of younger branches of that line filling and occupying the Royal Palace of North Munster consisting of Bunratty, Ennistymon, Killowen, Carrick s gConaill etc, etc. Saint Catherine being named in a dream to build a church and dedicate it to St Patrick, pitched on and thought to build it on the lands of Trinahow (Trian na hAbhadh) and the fat lands of Tearman Trian or the Liberty of Limerick to Tiermaclane, being then in the occupation of Thomas the Talian of Clann T, the ancestor of Mac an Oirchinn, or McInherney, -Irish surnames not then invented, - pitched on the place aforesaid in the possession of Thomas. She addressed Thomas asking for a mam [?] of land, which she called Moinear Faigh, to build her chapel, thereon. He bluntly refused using harsh words to dismiss her. She curtsied and said she would renew her petition to him for said grant in each of the two next Saturdays, then following, protracting the time for the good of him, (Thomas) alledging if he acquiesced within that period, he would have her benediction and, if he did not, her malediction.

The time elapsed and the merits of the petition not granted, but strong in his defiance, her next application was to O' Brien of Cnoc na nGiomanach (Knocknamana a townland near Clare LOB Note by 1841) ancestor to Lord Clare and to O'Brien of Ennistymon reviled her with the epithet *cailleach* and the two O'Briens partook of the interdiction and malediction.

Now the McInherneys before the said curse or malediction were in possession of almost all the good ground between Limerick and Clare alongside the Shannon.

Here follows some of the words of the several curses beginning with O'Brien of Killeoin who called her *cailleach*.

- 1. As the salmon returns to the sea/ as a sluggard without blood or flesh,/ may that be the way that Siol mBriain/ goes/...**
- 2. The Ui Bhriain of Cnoc na nGiomanach/ on the lovely hill as we like out....,/ may our saddle and your horse never be available in the land of Tuamhain.**
- 3. Like the murrain among cattle,/ everyone who sees it is killed by it,/ may that be how it will be with McInerheney of Cuanach.**

4. May sorrow not part from the folk of his house,/ [i.e] McInerheney of Middlethird Cratloe,/ may he never have in his possession garden, calf, cow nor fun-loving girl.

5. The McInerheney descendants of Cnoc Durlain,/ may famine come to them...they prefer to get,/ may none of that miserable band(?)ever get [as much as] fifty stades of land'.

6. The McInerheney descendants of Baile na nGaibhne/ may their side be thin from lack of food / may everyone who gives them a morsel get a beating/ andevery tasting the drink.

7. Though Tir Mac Calainn is a bright place,/ may weakness not leave it until the very last man/ of that perverting(?) band/ who must be the worst-famed of all who ...from a tree.

The curse being fulminated by Saint Catherine and Thomas having repented had recourse to the Abbey of Quin in the County of Clare and there petitioned for the prayer of 800 monks then inhabiting that abbey for their prayers to obtain his pardon and the blessing of God upon himself and his undertaking, being then engaged in building a house at Cowlclogher between Newmarket-on-Fergus and Shepperton, was answered by the prior that Catherine's curse had ascended before Almighty God as soon as given, and had been decided on, said if all the abbeys in the world asked all the angels and saints in Heaven, and the Virgin Mary, had interceded for him on their knees till the Day of Judgment, they would not be heard nor would he alter his judgment. Thomas in despair reviled St Catherine again and proclaimed a feast and invited the nobility of Thomond or North Munster to the entertainment. He had his long table laid out at the south side of the building and having seated his guests sitting down himself, the first bit he took choked him, and not a stone was since laid on the building. Its ruins are to be seen to this day between Newmarket- on-Fergus and Shepperton.

Thus ends the tale founded on truth and deduced from Irish History announcing the total extinction (?) of McInherney's whole race from enjoying 50 acres of fee farm, an estate in the lands of Ireland for ever and the fate of Lord Clare from Knocknamanna and also O'Brien of Killeoin from that beautiful seat.

Mr McMahan may plainly see from this how dangerous it was to meddle with the saints of old and now that history is corrupted into fable by length of time. Witness: St Catherine transformed into a mermaid recited and credited by some, I crave, the gentle readers protection to this tale being in the 81st year of my age. Signed: Connor Ryan May 11th 1825 Sixmilebridge

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