

Ely O'Carroll

•

The
Early History
of the
Town of Birr, or Parsonstown
*The particulars of remarkable events there in
more recent times.*
Also the towns of
Nenagh, Roscrea, Banagher, Tullamore,
Philipstown, Frankford, Shrinrone, Kinnetty and Ballyboy
and
The ancient septs, princes, and celebrated places of
the surrounding country
By the late
Thomas Lalor Cooke
1875

The Abbe Macgeoghagan tells us that this territory was called Eile, or Ely, from Eile-Biagh-Deargh, one of the ancestors of the tribe of O'Carroll, who lived in the fourth age ; and that this family of the O'Carrolls was from Heber, by Oliol Ollum, and Kian, his son. We are indebted to a note in the *Book of Rights* as translated and edited by Dr. O'Donovan, and printed for the Celtic Society for the following information as to the ancient Ely O'Carroll : “ Eile was the name of a tribe and an extensive territory all in the ancient Mumha, or Munster. They derived the name from Eile, the seventh in descent from Cian, son of Oliol Ollum. According to O'h-Uidhrin, this territory was divided into eight ‘ tuatha,’ ruled by eight petty chiefs, over whom O'Cearbhaill (O'Carroll) was head, or king. The ancient Eile (Ely) comprised the whole of Eile Ui Chearbhaill (Ely O'Carroll), which is now included in the King's County, and comprises the baronies of Clonlisk and Ballybritt ; also the baronies of Ikerrin and Elyogarty, in the County of Tipperary. The boundary between ‘ Ely O'Carroll’ and the ancient Midhe (Meath) is determined by that of the diocese of Killaloe with the diocese of Meath, for that portion of the King's County which belongs to the diocese of Killaloe was ‘ Ely O'Carroll,’ and originally belonged to Munster. The other portions of the original Eile, such as Ikerrin ' and ‘ Elyogarty’ were detached from O'Cearbhaill shortly after the English invasion, and added to ‘ Ormond’ ; but the native chieftains, O'Meachair (O'Meagher) and O'Fogartaigh (O'Fogarty) were left in possession, but subject to the Earl of Ormond.”

In the *Book of Rights* the stipends to be paid by the King of Caiseal (Cashel) to the King of Eile, are thus mentioned :

“ Eight steeds to the King of Eile of the gold,
Eight shields, eight swords are due,
Eight drinking-horns, to be used at the feast,
Eight coats of mail in the day of bravery.”

And again,—

“ The stipend of the King of Eile of the gold
From the King of Caiseal of the banquets,
Six shields and six bright swords,
Six bondsmen, six bondswomen.”

It thus appears that Ely was formerly celebrated for gold. In the same valuable work we find :—

“ Entitled is the King of Eile, so it happens,
To (have) his country free as far as Sliabh Bladhma,
And unless when he makes battles for himself,
He is exempt from furnishing forces beyond each other king.”

O’Heerin, who died in 1420, thus alludes to the O’Carrolls, princes of Ely :—

“ Lords to whom great men submit,
Are the O’Carrolls of the plain of Birr ;
Princes of Eile as far as tall Slieve Bloom,
The most hospitable land in Erin.
Eight districts and eight chiefs are ruled
By the prince of Ely of the land of herds ;
Valiant in enforcing their tributes,
Are the troops of the yellow-ringletted hair.”

The war-cry of O’Carroll of Ely was Showethaboe, and the arms of Sir Daniel O’Carroll, one of the family, will be found in Dermot O’Connor’s translation of Keating’s *History of Ireland*.

•

O’Kinnedys, MacEgans, and O’Mearas.

LORHA or Lothra, Saint Ruadhan and the Cursing of Tara.—“ The Ferry” and Neighbourhood.—Tir DaGlas, Now Terryglas.—The O’Kennedys and Mac Egans.—Irish Brehons and Brehonism.—The O’Mearas and Toomavara.

THE celebrated abbey known as Lorra, Lorha, Lorrhagh, or Lorho, is about eight miles west from Birr, in a village to which, as well as to the parish, the abbey has given its name,—in the barony of Lower Ormond and County of Tipperary. Lorha is situate in a quiet, romantic looking valley almost surrounded by hills, and seems just such a place as would be selected for their residence, by men intending to live in peace, if permitted to do so.

Lorha is generally called Lothra in the old annals, and it was also named Lothair. It was likewise known as Rathnagranagh, that is, “ fort of the sun ford” ; and it is so named even so late as the 22nd of March 1702, in the enrolment of appointments for augmentation of livings, where we find “ Rathnagranagh *alias* Lorho to augment the Vic. of Lorho Killaloe Diocese.” It is curious to find still a very remarkable fort or moat on the verge of the river near one of the bridges at Lorha, and where, of course, there was formerly a ford. There appears to have been at least three religious houses at Lorha, the remains of one being near the present Roman Catholic Church, another where are portions of two ancient stone crosses at the Protestant Church, and between these, the third, known as “ *Monaster-a-cuinain*” which probably means Kennedy’s monastery. Near this latter, but on the opposite side of the present road, there is a covered spring, commonly known as “ Ruadhan’s well.”

According to Colgan, St. Patrick visited Lothra or Lorha, as also Tirdaglass, now Terryglass, in the neighbourhood. St. Ruadan, Ruadhan, or Ruathan, the founder of Lothra, was likewise called Rodanus, and may have been called Ruadhan from *ruadh*, which means “ red

haired." He was of royal blood, having been, according to the O' Clerighs, fourth in descent from Oilioll Olum, King of Munster, in the third century. St. Ruadan was also counted one of the "Twelve Apostles of Erin." In an Irish poem on Tara, Teamhair, Teamair, or Temor, by Cuan O'Lochain, a celebrated bard who died in 1024 (as translated), St. Ruadan and a synod held by him there, are thus referred to :

" In this rath was held the synod of Patrick,
And the synods of Brendan and of Ruadan,
And afterwards the synod of Adamnan."

The cursing of Tara by St. Ruadhan, is mentioned by different writers with slight variations. The circumstances appear to be as follows :— Dermot or Diarmaid, King of Ireland, called MacCarroll, took prisoner a brother or near relative of St. Ruadhan, and the Saint in consequence having laid a curse on Tara, no other king resided there after the death of Dermot in 565. The *Book of Rights*, as translated by John O'Donovan, Esq., describes this occurrence thus : " The cause of the extinction of the regality of Teamhair was the fasting of Patrick and his people against Laeghaire, the son of Niall, and the fasting of Ruadhan of Lothair, the son of Aengus, with the Saints of Eire, against Diarmaid, son of Cearbhall, and against the four tribes of Teamhair ; and these saints promised (*i.e.*, predicted) that there should not be a house at Teamhair of the race of Laeghaire, or of the seed of Niall (but) that there should be of the race of Oilioll Olum." An ancient Irish bard, as translated, thus refers to it :—

" From the reign of the brown haired Dermot,
Son of Fergus, son of Carroll,
From the judgment of Ruadhan on his house,
There was no king at Temor."

A full account of the cursing of Tara by St. Ruadhan of Lorha, will be found in Petrie's *History and Antiquities of Tara Hill*. The following information regarding Lorha is taken from Mr. Archdall's *Monasticon* and other sources :—

An abbey for Regular Canons was founded at Lothra or Lorha in the sixth century by St. Ruadan, who presided over 150 monks there, and died in 584, when he became patron of the abbey. The abbot Cailknie died in 652, and in 708 died the abbot Colman Mac Seachnasy ; Columb Mac Faelgusa, called the bishop, died in 783, and the abbot Brickine in the year 842. In 845, Turgesins with his Norwegians set fire to and destroyed " this town," with the churches and other religious houses ; but Maolseachlain, King of Meath, having taken him, put an end to his sacrilegious crimes, by drowning him in Lough Ainin, in Meath.

The abbot and bishop Dinearlagh died in 864 ; the abbot Maolgorgais in 888 ; the abbot Core, son of Coinligan, died in 946 ; and in 957 died Moenach, " archdeacon or vicar of Lorrh." In 1050, the archdeacon Maolduin O'Heigarthy died; the abbot Moelmuire O'Scoly died in 1106 ; and O'Scobaig, " comorb of St. Ruadan," died in 1108. In the year 1154, an accidental fire destroyed the abbey ; a like calamity occurred in three years afterwards; and again in 1179, another conflagration destroyed " this town." We have already seen that in 1207, the castles of Lothra, Birr, and Kinnitty were " broken down and destroyed" by Murtagh O'Bryan.

Walter de Burgh, Earl of Ulster, founded in 1269 a Dominican friary at Lorrh, and in 1301 a general chapter of the order was held there. Ware states that the hand of Saint Ruadhan, the patron, was preserved in a silver case in Lorrh abbey until the suppression ;

and we learn from the *Four Masters*, that in 1599 “ the prior of Lothra, in Ormond, namely, John, the son of John, son of Giollapattrick O’Hogan, was slain by a party of the O’Kennedys in the month of July precisely.” Dr. Burke, in the *Hibernia Dominicana*, informs us that this friary was so complete in 1688, that a provincial chapter of the order was held there, and 150 friars clothed in their proper habits, attended on the occasion. It appears, however, from the same work, that in the year 1756, being sixty-eight years afterwards, there were only two monks of the order of St. Dominick at Lorraha ; and there were then likewise two at Portumna in the vicinity. It is remarkable to find two clergymen of the order, still in the neighbourhood of Portumna.

When the Volunteers were being raised in Ireland, a corps called “ The Lorha Rangers,” was formed at Lorha. A meeting of this corps—Captain Walsh in the chair, and Robert Purcell, Esq., acting as secretary—was held at Lorha on the 16th of April 1782, and the following patriotic resolutions were passed :

“ Resolved unanimously—That the perfect emancipation of this country ought to be the primary object of each individual, and should not only be wished, but sought for, by every patriotic and constitutional mode.”

“ Resolved—That we conceive it a duty we owe to our country, to disavow the authority of any body of men to make laws for this independent kingdom, save only, the King, Lords, and Commons of Ireland ; and we pledge ourselves to our brother Volunteers, to co-operate with them in every effectual measure, for the establishment of our rights on the most permanent basis.”

“ Resolved—That we shall be always ready to assist our sovereign, against his natural enemies.”

The remains of former ecclesiastical buildings at Lorha give, even in late years, a good idea of what must have been the extent and grandeur of the place, when more than a thousand years ago Turgesius destroyed “ the town with the churches and other religious houses.” It must have been grand and extensive indeed, even before Walter de Burgh founded the friary here, eight hundred years since. There are elegant carvings, and several remarkable mural slabs and tombs, some belonging to the Mac-Egan and O’Kennedy families, yet to be seen at Lorha ; and altogether this very interesting and celebrated place, is well deserving of a visit. The residence of the Venerable Archdeacon Knox at Lorha is a fine house, beautifully situated, and surrounded by elegant and well kept gardens and pleasure grounds, to which a stranger will be freely admitted.

About two miles from Lorha, on the bank of the river Shannon, there is a place still known as “ The Ferry,” from a very ancient ferry formerly kept here. This ferry was the principal place for crossing the Shannon from Ormond to Connaught, or Connaught to Ormond, in former times, and here many persons of note with their followers, passed from one side to the other. In these past times when bridges were almost unknown, a ferry and the proper keeping of it were matters of great importance, but the fine bridge now over the river Shannon here, leading to Portumna on the opposite side, is no doubt a great improvement on this ancient “ ferry.” Again, the facility for getting from Birr to Portumna now in less than an hour, by the Parsonstown and Portumna Railway, the station of which is near “ The Ferry” and the bridge, is much more satisfactory than travelling the same route was in the year 1620, when, as Francis Morley was obliged to hire a guide to conduct him from Birr to Portumna, which journey cost him five shillings and eightpence—a large sum in the currency of the time. In

the Irish language the word *port* means “ a ferry,” as also a port or harbour, a fort or garrison. We accordingly find the names of several places in the neighbourhood of “ The Ferry,” commencing with the word *port*, as the town of Portumna, formerly Port Omna, and Portland on the bank of the river Shannon, where are the elegant mansion and beautiful demesne of Thomas Butler Sidney, J.P. Higher up the river is the ancient Baile-ui-Eachdach, now called Ballyhocter, which formerly belonged to O’Kennedy ; and not far from this is Coillte Ruadha or Redwood, where are the remains of a castle heretofore the residence of the MacEgans. At the opposite side of Portumna Bridge from Portland, but on the same side of the river, is Bellisle, the fine seat of Lord Avonmore.

About four or five miles from Lorha, and near the banks of Lough Derg, is the ancient Tirdaglass, now Terryglass. The name of this place seems to be derived from the Irish *Tir-daglais*, which means, “ the land of the two streams.” We learn from Mr. Archdall and other writers, that St. Columba, the son of Crimthan, “ founded, and became the first abbot of Tirdaglass about the year 548. He died of a pestilence in the year 552, on the 13th of December, and his festival is observed on that day.”

The abbot Mochoeminus died in 584, and his festival is observed on the 1st of May ; the abbot Colman Stellain died in 625 ; and in 652, the abbot Aihgean died. Clemens was abbot in 801, and in the same year the town and abbey were destroyed by an accidental fire. St. Moyle Dichru, “ anachorite” of Tirdaglass, “ who was usually styled the Sage, and who uttered many remarkable prophecies,” died in 838. In 842 the Danes destroyed the fortress of Dunamase in the Queen’s County, and there slew Hugh MacDuffe Dachrich, abbot of Tirdaglass ; and the same year they destroyed by fire Tirdaglass, with the abbey and churches. Hugh M’Duffe’s festival is held on the 8th of July. In 880, Cormac, “ prior of Tirdaglass and of Clonfert-Brendan,” died ; the “ abbot and bishop” Maelpeadar MacCuan, died in 890 ; Maelciarán, “ abbot of Tirdaglass and Clonenagh,” died in 898, and in 927, the abbot Virgill died during his pilgrimage at Rome. In 1014, died Donnghal O’Cantene, “ overseer of this monastery” ; in 1112 this abbey was destroyed by fire ; Tirdaglass was burnt by the people of Hy Mainy in 1140, “ who with their accustomed barbarity, destroyed the shrine of the Saint” ; and in 1162 the abbey was again consumed.

It has been mentioned (p. 215), that St. Patrick came from Tirdaglass by Lorha, to Brusna near Birr.

Near Tirdaglass is Carrigahorig, which appears to be the place referred to by the *Four Masters* at the year 1548, as follows :— “ The Red Captain (one of the Butlers), marched with a force against O’Carroll to Carraic-an-Chomhraic, and O’Carroll gave them battle, in which he slew two or three score of them. The Red Captain marched at three different times with his forces in one quarter of a year to Carraic-an-Chomhraic, but he did not succeed in gaining the castle, or any part of the country, and was obliged to return without obtaining any advantage after having sustained much injury, and losing many of his men.”

The principal families of this part of Ormond were the O’Kennedys, MacEgans, and O’Mearas. The last mentioned appear, however, to have been placed more south. The territory of O’Ceinneide, O’Cinneididh, O’Cineide or O’Kennedy, appears to have extended along the Shannon from the neighbourhood of Lorha. The O’Kennedys were of the Dalcassian race, were generally called “ Lords of Ormond” and were very powerful from the twelfth to the sixteenth century. O’Heerin thus refers to them :—

“ O’Kennedy who reddens his spears,
Rules over the smooth, extensive Glen Omra,

By his tribe is possessed the brown plains gained by valour ;
He obtained the land without opposition.”

The following relative to the O’Kennedys, merely since the English invasion, is taken from the *Annals of the Four Masters* : In 1180, Donal, son of Teige O’Cinneididh, “ lord of Urmhumha” (Ormond), died ; Murogh, son of Awlave O’Kennedy, was killed by Loughlin O’Kennedy in 1194 ; and Sadhbh, daughter of O’Kennedy, died in 1240. The Irish name Sadhbh signified “ goodness,” and is now represented by Sabina. Bryan O’Kennedy, “ lord of Ormond,” was treacherously slain by the English in 1371; and in the same year, Edmond O’Kennedy, “ heir to the lordship of Ormond,” died. In the year 1382, Donal, son of Mahon Dunn O’Kennedy, died ; in 1396, O’Kennedy, “ lord of Ormond,” died ; and in 1427, the son of Donal, son of Mahon Dunn O’Kennedy, “ lord of Upper Ormond, was slain by “ Walter Tobin, with a single cast of a javelin.” In 1441, “ O’Kennedy Roe, *i.e.*, Roderick, the son of Philip Liath (the gray), lord of Ormond ; and Thomas, the son of O’Kennedy Don,” died. O’Kennedy Fionn (the fair), namely Bryan, the son of Donal, died in 1588 ; and Anthony and the Giolla Dubh O’Kennedy, being in contention “ about the lordship,” they made peace by dividing it between them, and conferring the title upon Anthony. This Anthony O’Kennedy Fionn, who was “ son of Donogh Oge, son of Hugh, son of Awlave of Baile-*ui*-Eachdach in Lower Ormond (Ballyhocter) died in November 1599 ; and Giolla Dubh O’Kennedy was nominated the O’Kennedy.

The MacEideadhain or MacEgans, were also chiefs having possessions in the neighbourhood of Lorha, in Ormond, although their principal seat seems to have been at Clan Diarmada in the County Galway. The MacEgans, however, did not pride themselves on territorial possessions alone, for they were distinguished as the chief Brehons of Ireland, and hereditary Brehons of Munster and Connaught, and they were also renowned for learning and hospitality. O’Dugan thus refers to them :

“ Precedence for his valour and fame
Be given to MacEgan the noble.
Record him for the activity of his warriors,
Of his prosperity and great renown,
The Clan Diarmada north and south
To place them in my poem is a duty.”

The following extracts from the *Four Masters* alone, since the English invasion of Ireland, are sufficient to show how eminent as Brehons, and for learning and hospitality, were the MacEgans. In 1309, Giolla-na-*neev* MacEgan, “ chief Brehon of Connaught and the most learned judge in his time,” was killed. The Irish name Giolla-na-*naomh*, which is pronounced Giollananeev, signifies “ the servant of the saints.” Maolisa Roe MacEgan, “ chief professor of Ireland in laws and Brehonism,” died in 1317. MacFirbis gives the pedigree of the MacEgans from a very early period down to this Maolisa Roe MacEgan, whose name “ Maolisa” or Maol-Iosa, means, “ the servant of Jesus.” In 1399, Boetius MacEgan of Ormond, who was “ learned in the laws and in music, and was eminent for hospitality,” and Giollananeev, son of Conor MacEgan, “ chief professor of laws,” died. The young Cosnamack MacEgan, “ chief professor in Brehonism” of O’Conor Faily, was slain “ by the sons of O’Melaghlin, by an accidental cast of a javelin,” in 1422 ; and in 1430, Fergal MacEgan, “ chief Brehon of North Connaught, a man learned in the laws and sciences, and who kept a house of hospitality for all persons who came to his place, died after a well spent life.” In 1436, died Gillaisa MacEgan, “ chief Brehon to MacWatten, a pious, charitable, and humane man, and professor of a school of laws and poetry ;” and in 1438, Conor MacEgan, “ chief Brehon of Clanrikard,” died. Hugh MacEgan died in 1443, “ in the tide of his pros-

perity ; and he was the most learned and eloquent man of the Irish in his time, and chief professor of laws in North Connaught ;” and in the same year died Gillananeev MacEgan of Ormond, “ chief professor of Brehonism in Munster, a man versed in various arts, and who kept a house of general hospitality ;” while in 1447, Gillananeev MacEgan, “ chief Brehon and professor of laws in Ireland,” died.

The Castle of Annameadle, near Toomavara, appears to have been the chief seat of this ancient family in Ormond, but we find Dionysius MacEgan living in 1602, in the Castle of Coillte Ruadha, or “ Redwood” as the place is still named, *coillte* being Irish for a wood, and *ruadha* signifying red. Even within late years Darius John MacEgan, solicitor, the representative of this branch of the MacEgans—they appear even yet to have a taste for the profession of laws, in which they were so eminent held in the neighbourhood of Redwood a portion of their former possessions, yet known as Ballymacegan, “ the town of MacEgan,” and he is still the owner in fee of Ballyoughter, within five miles of Lorha Abbey, the burial place of the family.

The Brehons having been so often alluded to in connexion with the MacEgans, a few observations as to the nature of Brehonism may be acceptable to some of our readers. The Irish term *Breitheamh*, from which comes Brehon, signifies a Judge, the Brehons having been judges and professors of the law, who in former times proclaimed the laws, and delivered judgments to the chiefs and people. This was generally done on hills and raths on public occasions. Brehonism and Bardism, as well as Druidism, prevailed in Ireland from the earliest times, but the introduction of Christianity caused the Druids, or pagan priests, to disappear, while Bards and Brehons were still found in Christian, as well as in pagan times. Many of these ancient Brehons flourished from the first to the eighth century, and perfected a code of laws which, from their spirit of equity, were called *Breithe Neimhidh*, which signifies “ Celestial Judgments.” Moran, son of the King of Ireland in the first century, was one of the most eminent of these Brehons, and he is represented in his office of chief judge of Ireland, wearing on his neck a golden ornament called *Iodhan Morain*, or “ Moran’s collar,” which is said to have pressed tightly on the neck of the wearer, and to have nearly choked him if he attempted to pronounce an unjust judgment. The Brehons presided at the inauguration of kings, princes, and chiefs, and as judges and exponents of the laws they had much power in the country, and considerable portions of land were assigned for their use. Each of the Irish princes and chiefs of note had his own Brehon, the office being hereditary in some families, as the MacEgans, who were hereditary Brehons in Connaught, in Leinster, and in Ormond, and it has been seen that several of them were also chief Brehons of Ireland.

In a note to the translation of the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, where the death of Maolisa Roe MacEgan (there called Maceigan), who died in 1317, is mentioned, Mageoghegan, in reference to the office of Brehon, states as follows :— “ This Fenechus, or Brehon Lawe, is none other but the civil law, which the Brehons had to themselves in an obscure and unknown language, which none could understand except those that studied in the open schooles they had. Some were judges, and others were admitted to plead as barristers, and for their fees, costs, and all, received the eleventh part of the thing in demand of the party for whom it was ordered ; the loser paid no costes.” And again : “ Every contrey had its peculiar Brehon dwelling within itself that had power to decide the causes of that contrey, and to maintain their controversies against their neighbour contreys, by which they held their lands of the Lord of the contrey where they dwelt.”

To return to the old Irish families of this part of Ormond. The country of the O’Mearas, as already mentioned, appears to have been more south than Lorha, and probably extended to the Silver Mines and the village of Toomavara. O’Heerin refers to O’Meara as follows :—

“ O’Meara, who is a goodly prince,
The chief of Hy Fahy, obtained extensive lands,
And the Hy Nialls of the race of Eogan the Fair,
All the lions whom I enumerate.”

The present name, Toomavara, is formed from the Irish Tuaim-*ui-Mheadhra*, or according to Mr. Seward’s *Topographia Hibernica*, Twamywharra, which names signify “ the tomb of O’Meara.” This place was also called Toome, and Mr. Archdall says there was here a priory of Regular Canons, “ dedicated to Saint Donan, although others give it to the Virgin Mary,” and that it was a cell to Inchnemeo. In 1325, “ the guardian of the house of the Blessed Virgin of Thome, or Theym, was sued by the Prior of Conall for the advowson of the church of Athenemedele”—now Annameadle, in Ormond. The Priory of Toome was secularized by King Henry VIII., but was afterwards dissolved by Queen Elizabeth ; and on the 30th of December, in the 28th year of her reign, it was granted for 21 years to Miler Magrath, Arch-bishop of Cashel. The north part of Toome was granted to Robert Cole, the 29th of January, in the 18th year of Charles II., and the castle, abbey, town, and houses of Toome, the abbey lands and various other lands, were granted to John Dawson, the 17th of August, in the same year.

A few remarks as to the use and disuse of *and Mac*, in the names of many old Irish families here, will be excused. It appears that in former times, when surnames came into use in Ireland, each family or clan was at liberty to assume a surname from some particular ancestor, and such name was usually taken from one distinguished for valour, wisdom, or some other great quality. In this way, some prefixed *Mac*, which originally signified a son, but in after times was applied to descendants of the same ancestor ; while others prefixed *O*, signifying a grandson but afterwards applied to all descendants. This use of *and Mac*, was at one time so customary, as to suggest the old verse

“ Per *O*, atque *Mac*, veros cognoscis Hibernos
His duobus demptis, nullus hibernus adest.”

Thus translated :

“ By *Mac* and *O*, you’ll always know
True Irishmen, they say ;
But if they lack both *and Mac*,
No Irishmen are they.”

It seems, however, that many old Irish families were afterwards forced by English penal laws, either to assume English surnames, or at least to mutilate their Irish names, and in this way many a *Mac*, and an *O*, was dropped. These changes having been generally made several centuries ago, it is at present matter of taste, whether even those having an admitted right to do so, should now again change their names by assuming an *O*, or a *Mac*. It does not appear, that the adding of *or Mac* to his name in late years, can confer any superiority, as regards Irish descent, on him who does so ; and much less should the want of these, imply inferiority in the many genuine and undoubted Irishmen of ancient families, who—their ancestors having lost the *or Mac* in the way mentioned—now prefer to leave their names as they were transmitted to them.

The MacCoghlan and Dealbhna Eathra.—Thomas Coghlan, Esq., “ The Maw.” From Bier to Babagher, including the “ Ridge,” and “Rape-mills ;” Ballaghanoher, and Garrycastle. The town of Banagher.

ON the way from Birr to the neighbouring town of Banagher, we pass the little bridge at Cappaneal, close to Birr and enter the parish and barony of Eglis in ancient Fearcall, the country of the O'Molloys, this portion of which is separated from Lower Ormond by the Little Brusna river, not far from here. This slip of Fearcall is narrow, however, for after proceeding through it a mile or so, to near the range of sand-hills known here as "the Ridge," we pass into the barony of Garrycastle, and at same time into ancient Dealbhna Eathra, Delvin Eathra, or Delvin Ahra, the country of MacCochlain or MacCoghlan, in the ancient Meath. There were several Dealbhna or Delvins, districts in Meath, of which Delvin Eathra, the territory of Mac-Cochlain, comprised the greater portion of the present barony of Garrycastle. This ancient territory was not, however, of quite the same extent as the modern barony, for the parish of Lusmagh, now included in that barony, did not form part of Delvin Eathra or MacCoghlan's country, being portion of Siol Amncha, of which hereafter. The name Dealbhna is taken, according to Mr. O'Donovan, from tribes of the Dalcassian race, who derived the name from Dealbhaedh, the third son of Cas, ancestor of the tribe O'Brian of North Munster. The MacCoghlan were chiefs of much importance in former times, and the head of the clan is styled by an ancient poet, "*MacCochlain na Caisleain Ghleagal*" which is, "MacCoghlan of the Fair Castles." He is thus alluded to by O'Dugan

"MacCoghlan is the valorous mainstay,
And prince of delightful Delvin Ahra."

The MacCoghlan are frequently mentioned in the ancient annals, but it will be sufficient to refer here to a few of the many notices of them by the *Four Masters*, since the English invasion of Ireland. In 1175, "Giolla Coluim O'Maolmuaidh (O'Molloy) lord of Ferkale, was treacherously slain by Roderick, son of Conor MacCoghlan." In 1199, "Murchadh MacCoghlan, lord of Delvin Eathra," died; in 1292, "MacCoghlan lord of Delvin More," was slain by Sinn MacFeorais (Birmingham), at the instigation of the Earl (of Ulster); and in the year 1371, Fergal MacCoghlan died, while imprisoned by O'Kennedy. It has been seen (p.163), that Edmond a Faihy, or Fahy, gained a battle in Delvin in 1548, and brought the heads of the slain to Bally-mac-Adam (Cadamstown). The *Four Masters* say that this battle, in which Cormac MacCoghlan and his people were beaten, took place at *Bel-atha-na-geaorach*, the ford of the sheep, on *Dubh Abhain*, the black river. This is a small river now called the Blackwater, in the barony of Garrycastle, and about two miles north of the Greater Brusna river. There is much information as to the MacCoghlan and his territory, to be found in the *Annals of the Four Masters* under the dates of 1547 and 1548, and thereabouts, and some of which will be noticed hereafter, in connexion with particular places. These writers also mention, that MacCoghlan, lord of Dealbhna Eathra, "namely, John, the son of Art, son of Cormac," attended Queen Elizabeth's Irish Parliament in Dublin, in 1585. It has been seen, however, that notwithstanding this, MacCoghlan, towards the close of the Irish wars in this Queen's reign, joined the O'Connors, O'Molloys, and O'Dunns, in the King's County, with two hundred men against the Queen. The *Four Masters*, at the year 1590, record the death of this John MacCoghlan, and add that "there was not a man of his estate, of the race of Cormac Cas, whose mansions, castles, and good dwelling houses, were better arranged, or more comfortable than his; and his son, John Oge, was appointed his successor." They also state, that at the request of O'Neill (Earl of Tyrone), Redmond Burke, Anthony O'Moore and Capt. Tyrrell, proceeded to the "northern end of the Slieve Bloom mountains to get the Irish of Ormond and Westmeath to join them in alliance, namely, O'Mulloy, and Conal the son of Cahir; MacCoghlan, *i.e.* John Oge, the son of John, son of Art, son of Cormac, and O'Carroll, namely, Calvagh, the son of William Odhar, son of Ferganainm, son of Maol-roona;" and they add that "although these chiefs had been for some time acting on behalf of the sovereign, they were better pleased to receive peace from those leaders who were traver-

sing every country.” The foregoing affords an example of the custom of the early Irish writers, to identify the particular person to whom they referred, by naming his father, and perhaps a long line of ancestors.

The last descendant of this ancient sept, who was in any position, appears to have been Thomas Coghlan, or MacCoghlan, commonly known as “ the Maw,” who died about the year 1790, after having for many years represented the King’s County in the Irish Parliament. The Chevalier Colonel de Montmorency thus describes him :— “ Thomas Coghlan, Esq., or, in attention to local phraseology, ‘ the Maw’ (that is, Mac), for he was not known or addressed in his own domain by any other appellation—was a remarkably handsome man ; gallant, eccentric ; proud, satirical ; hospitable in the extreme, and of expensive habits. In disdain of modern times he adhered to the national customs of Ireland, and the modes of living practised by his ancestors. His house was ever open to strangers. His tenants held their lands at will, and paid their rents, according to the ancient fashion, partly in kind, and the remainder in money. ‘ The Maw’ levied the fines of mortmain when a vassal died. He became heir to the defunct farmer ; and no law was admissible, or practised, within the precincts of MacCoghlan’s domain, but such as savoured of the Brehon code. It must be observed, however, that most commonly, ‘ the Maw’s’ commands, enforced by the impressive application of his horse-whip, instantly decided a litigated point ! From this brief outline, it might be supposed that we were talking of Ireland early in the seventeenth century, but Mr. Coghlan died not longer back than about the year 1790. With him perished the rude grandeur of his longdrawn line. He died without issue, and destitute of any legitimate male representative to inherit his name, although most of his followers were of the sept of the Coghlan, none of whom, however, were strictly qualified, or were suffered by ‘ the Maw’ to use the Mac, or to claim any relationship with himself. His great estate at his decease passed to the son of his sister, the late Right Hon. Denis Bowes Daly, of Daly’s-town County of Galway, who likewise had no children, and who, shortly before his death in 1821, sold the MacCoghlan estate to divers persons.” To judge by this account of “ the Maw,” his astonishment and indignation would be great indeed, could he revisit his broad domain and witness the changes since made there, and find the Justices of the various Petty Sessions Courts now in his ancient territory, sitting under the modern Petty Sessions Act.

The early history of the town of Birr, or Parsonstown : with the particulars of remarkable events there in more recent times, also the towns of Nenagh, Roscrea, Banagher, Tullamore, Philipstown, Frankford, Shinrone, Kinnetty and Ballyboy and the ancient septs, princes, and celebrated places of the surrounding country (1875)

Author : Cooke, Thomas Lalor

Subject : Birr (Ireland) — History ; King’s County, Ire. — History

Publisher : Dublin : Robertso

Digitizing sponsor : MSN

Book contributor : Robarts — University of Toronto

Collection : robarts ; toronto

Source Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/earlyhistoryofto00cookuoft>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

March 28 2011