

The History & Antiquities
of the
Diocese of Kilmacduagh

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Preface

There are few parts of Ireland of the same area that contain so large a number of memorials of the past, as the portion of South Galway comprised within the diocese of Kilmacduagh. Rath and dun, and frowning castles and crumbling churches, are to be met with everywhere ; and there, too, our ancient “ pillar towers ” have kept watch over Christian cemeteries for over a thousand years.

I felt that those monuments, Christian and pagan alike, must have had a history ; but I found that that history was for the most part unknown. The fortresses spoke of conquerors and of conquered, but the names of victors and vanquished were alike forgotten. And what was true of the monuments of the Norman aggressors of the remote past, and of their brave Celtic opponents, was for the most part true of the Saints whose names lived on only in the names of their ruined churches.

There was at least one exception — a notable one — in the case of Kilmacduagh ; for the personality of the holy patron of the diocese survived in the hearts of the people. His name was venerated and his memory cherished with a singular affection. And yet, even of the history of St. Colman Mac Duagh there was but little known outside of the vague and the undefined.

A little patient study convinced me that the history of the district was not irrevocably lost It was buried, but it could be disinterred. I felt, too, that the buried treasures would amply repay the labour of giving them once more to the public. I trust that the public will estimate in a spirit of kindly sympathy the partial character of my success, considering the difficulties necessarily connected with such an effort, and the limited opportunities within my reach of prosecuting my researches.

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St. Colman's, Gort,
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It is necessary to fix with as much clearness as possible the position of the principal districts to which reference shall be made in those pages; to identify under their present names the remarkable localities to which our annalists refer under designations long forgotten ; to give the Celtic names of the distinguished men of the olden periods, harsh though they may sound to readers unfamiliar with Irish history. We know the effort is not without its difficulties ; and we are conscious also, that even though successfully done it may fail to elicit general interest. Yet we must not forget that they are the dry bones indispensable for the unity of our narrative, through which alone the past can be made to live again. And if they can be made to live

again, and take their proper place in the story of their country's life, we shall feel amply rewarded for our labours in having them disinterred from their long-forgotten graves. The aim is a legitimate one, the effort a laborious one ; and we shall trust that an indulgent public may find in the character of the narrative some evidence of success.

The field of inquiry, so long neglected, which our narrative opens up, is one well worthy the attention of the antiquarian and historian. We know few districts in Ireland, of the comparatively limited area of the diocese of Kilmacduagh, that offer a richer field for antiquarian research. Its ruined churches carry the mind back to the period when Ireland's sancity was the marvel of the Western world. Its numerous crumbling castles speak of powerful chieftains, who took their part in the continued warfare in which the country's energies were weakened and its life seared.

And as the venerable monuments at Kilmacduagh suggest holy thoughts and solemn reflections, as do those of Clonmacnoise and Glendalough, so too the thoughtful reader of history will feel that the events decided on Turlogh Art, at Carn Conail and Ardrahan, and other battlefields within the diocese, are amongst the momentous events which have gone to mould our nation's career.

In the glimpses which we shall have of Colga and Colman and Foila, and other saints of the diocese, we shall have evidences of the manner of men our solitaries and saints of the " Third Order " were when Ireland's faith and fervour were in the glow of its early vigour. In the " generous and pious " Guaire we shall see the good Christian king, not, however, without evidences of the human weaknesses from which even kings can claim no exemption.

In the chieftains who inherited the district from one of the bravest of Ireland's kings, we shall see men who bravely resisted the aggression of the invader, whether Dane or Norman ; and whose valour at Raheen, Kilmacduagh, and Ardrahan showed them not unworthy of their brave and royal ancestor. And when their power had passed away, and with their power their independence, we shall see the men of " new interests," who, taking the tide at the flood, came into possession of the lands of the ruined chiefs, by means which, in many instances, must be regarded as equivocal, whether as regards honour or probity. But the career of the new owners, and their influence in their new sphere of authority, cannot be without its interest to the thoughtful.

And if a view of this character possesses interest, it shall be equally interesting to follow, from the foundation of the See in the early part of the seventh century, the episcopal succession during those eventful centuries, with few broken intervals of interruption, to the reign of the present Supreme Pontiff, — from Pope Honorius to Pope Leo the Thirteenth.

The diocese of Kilmacduagh, which extended over the southern districts of Galway, was conterminous with Tuam and Clonfert on the north and north-east, and with Killaloe on the south and south-east. The dioceses of Kilfenora and Galway, with which it is now incorporated, adjoin it on the south-western and north-western sides. It was coextensive with the ancient territory of Southern Hy Fiachrach, more usually known as Hy Fiachrach Aidhne.

Its ancient territorial boundaries were the territories of the O'Flahertys and O'Kellys, on the north and north-east, known as Moy Seola and Hy Maine ; on the east and south it was bounded by the Echtge Mountains and portions of Thomond, while on the west its limits were fixed by the Burren Mountains and the Bay of Galway.

Its extreme northern point was near Athenry, where it touched on the territories of Moy [1] Seola and Hy Maine. The plain, which extends from Athenry to Loughrea, and forms the southern limit of the O'Kelly country, was known as the Plain of Maenmoy.

The portions of Thomond which bounded Hy Fiachrach on the south composed chiefly the present barony of Inchiquin, formerly known as Kineal Fearmaic, a territory of which the O'Deas and O'Briens were the hereditary chiefs.

The Echtge Mountains, which form the eastern boundary in part, compose a large portion of the mountain ranges which extend from near Limerick to Loughrea, and rise to a height of from 1000 to 1200 feet. We shall see that their picturesque features were such as to inspire the fertile muse of Flan Mac Lonan, the Irish Laureate of his time.

The venerable O'Flaherty tells us that the Bay of Galway, which divides Corcomroe from Iar Connaught, was formerly called "Lough Lurgan," and he thinks it not improbable that it had been at one time entirely separated [2] "from the sea by strong banks, till the western ocean, undermining the confines, united it with itself. The remains of the barrier seem to be the three islands of Aran." Similar natural phenomena were not unusual in Ireland in the remote past. It is recorded that the lake of Loughrea appeared in the year of the world 3506, and that of Loughgraney, near Lough Cutra, in the same year. There is a passage in O'Flaherty's *Iar Connaught* which speaks still more clearly of Lough Lurgan. It refers to it as one of the three most ancient lakes in Ireland.

The Burren Mountains, which still retain their ancient name, form on the west a natural barrier which divides Hy Fiachrach from Corcomroe, a territory coextensive with the diocese of Kilfenora. Though bold, and in many places very striking, the Burren Hills do not attain to an altitude of much more than 1000 feet. Though so bare and barren now as to remind modern travellers of the stricken hills of Judea, they were in the remote past clothed with dense forests of oak and waving pine.

The area of the diocese, about 137,520 acres, comprises only the baronies of Kiltartan and Dunkellin, with considerable portions of Loughrea. Seaward, and along the Munster border, the features, if barren and rugged, are often interesting. Inland, however, the rugged surface and light soil disappear. Extensive woods and secluded lakes give attractiveness and variety to the landscape. Indeed, the western province can boast of few scenes more picturesque and attractive than Lough Cutra, to which the Firbolg chieftain Cutra has given his name. O'Flaherty states [3] that Carn Conail, situated in the modern parish of Kilbecanty, and on the north side of Lough Cutra, has its name from another Belgian chieftain, Connail, brother of Cutra. He also informs us that Medrigia, which he identifies as the peninsula of Maree in the Bay of Galway, had its name from the same race.

It is evident, therefore, that at the time of those chieftains there must have been extensive Belgic settlements in Hy Fiachrach Aidhne. [4] We also find that they were at the period also established in Hy Maine and in Clare, then a portion of Connaught.

It was in the reign of the celebrated Meave, Queen of Connaught, that those Belgic chieftains were allowed to settle in Connaught. The circumstances under which the permission was obtained is given in detail by O'Curry.

After the defeat of the Belgic colonists by the Tuatha Da Danaans, they were driven from Ireland. A little before the period of the Incarnation of our Lord, a remnant succeeded in returning and in obtaining from King Cairbre permission to rent some of the lands of Meath. A crushing rent was, however, exacted for their tenancy, while hostages for their good behav-

our were also required. They were then generally known as Umorians, or sons of Omar, and governed by Aengus, their chieftain. Finding their burdens in Meath too oppressive, they fled stealthily to the west, bringing all their property with them, and crossed the Shannon in safety.

While Cutra and Connail settled in those districts of Hy Fiachrach to which they have given their name, Aengus, their chief, who was also their brother, established himself in Aranmore. The vast stone fort which he erected there, and which is known as Dun Aengus, remains to the present day to astonish visitors by its extent and massive character.

The King of Tara sent soon after to exact through his hostages the guarantees forfeited by the fugitive Umorians. It was agreed that the demand should be decided by the arbitrament of single combat, in which, amongst others, [5] Connail was slain by Cuchulain. It “ was over this young chief that his father and friends raised the heap of stones which from him took the name of Cairn Chonaill.” O’Donovan identifies the site of the contest as the same on which, more than six centuries later, more important issues were settled by the sword between Guaire, the King of Connaught, and the King of Cashel.

Though there are remains of several Belgic cahirs in Hy Fiachrach Aidhne, which in structure and character resemble Dun Aengus, there is none there which perpetuates the name of either Cutra or Connail.

In the townland of Ballabane, near Gort, there is a very striking monument of the Belgic period, called Cahir Mugachau. It commands a very extensive view of the plain of Aidhne. The woodlands of Coole and Lough Cutra are visible, though the lakes over which they cast their leafy shelter are mostly hidden. On the east and west, the mountain ranges, which are not indebted solely to distance for their enchantment, are seen to special advantage.

The cahir is a massive circular fort, built of stone, without cement. Though much ruined, it still stands about 11 feet over the level of the interior surface. The masses of stones now strewn around its base show that it was originally much higher. Its circumference may be about 120 yards. The width of this extraordinary piece of masonry seems not less than 14 feet. The entrance, which looks east, is entirely blocked up. From the local traditions, as well as structural indications, it is pretty certain that there is a cave within the fort. It is much to be regretted that no efforts have been hitherto made to have it cleared and examined.

About a quarter of a mile farther south there are the remains of another stone fort, of about the same circumference. It is, however, nearly levelled to the earth.

But the most important and interesting of those monuments in the district is that of Cahir Cugeola, on the western side of the Garryland Forest, and in the parish of Kilmacduagh. Though much ruined, quite enough remains to mark it out as worthy of special attention.

Its circumference is about 144 yards exterior measurement. Its height over the level of the interior at the highest point is about 13 feet. It is constructed of stone, without cement, and measures in width at the base about 18 feet, and at the top about 13 feet. Its entrance is eastward, and shows the remains of two massive piers built in cement. There is, however, a considerable portion still remaining, and standing about 18 feet over the surface level. From the entrance there was a raised passage leading to some stone enclosures in the interior. Though these enclosures do not seem uniform in style, there can be little doubt that they are “ claghans,” similar in character to those at the “ ancient city of Fahan,” and also to the remains in the Dun of Ballyheabought, county of Kerry, which are minutely described by

O'Sullivan in his Introduction [6] to O'Curry's learned work on the *Manners and Customs of Ancient Erin*.

The cahir has two concentric stone enclosures. The inner one stands about twelve yards outside the cahir. It is nearly entirely ruined ; but enough remains to enable us to ascertain its direction. The outline of its foundation would not justify us in assuming that it was more than 3 feet in width.

The outer enclosure stood at a considerable distance from the fort. It was a much more formidable rampart than the inner one just referred to. Even in its ruined state, we can judge that it was about 5 feet in thickness.

Within those enclosures there are the remains of four circular ruins. That on the south side of the cahir is the most perfect. It consists of a circular wall of massive uncemented masonry. It rises about 5 feet above the surface level. The enclosure measures about 24 feet in diameter.

On the south-west side there is another of those ruined structures of the same character. On the west side there is another, which measures about 22 feet in diameter. There was another on the north side, of which the outline of the foundations alone remains.

But the territory of Hy Fiachrach Aidhne was remarkable in our annals even before the Belgic chiefs were permitted to settle there through the benevolent kindness of Queen Meave. The Four Masters tell us, under date A.M. 3727, that Magh Aidhne — *i.e.* the Plain of Aidhne — was the scene of one of the many battles in which the monarch Eochaid was engaged, who ruled Ireland for twenty years.

In A.M. 3872, [7] the monarch Muineamhon died of the plague in Aidhne, after a reign of five years. He was the first who caused chains of gold to be worn on the neck by the kings and chieftains of Ireland as a mark of nobility.

In A.M. 4606, we find that the celebrated king, Uganie Mor, had given the territory of Aidhne to Orb, one of his sons.

We find the name of the celebrated general of the Irish forces, Fin Mac Cumhail, associated with the legendary as well as the purely authentic history of the territory. It should be remembered that, though he is the hero of many incredible bardic legends, there is no reason to doubt the historical certainty of his existence. It is regarded by O'Curry as indisputable as "that Julius Caesar lived." In the compositions of our early bards, it is often difficult to distinguish between the real and the purely heroic ; and the eventful career of Fin lent itself easily to poetical exaggeration.

O'Curry refers to an early poem which is ascribed to Fin himself, (for it seems he could wield the pen as skilfully as the sword,) in which certain events are recorded, supposed to have occurred in Aidhne. In one of his expeditions to Connaught — such is the narrative [8] — "he defeated the chieftain Uinche in a battle at Ceann Mara, now known as Kinvara, on the Bay of Galway." Uinche escaped, however, with a few faithful followers, who immediately marched to Leinster, and, attacking Fin's residence in his absence, succeeded in destroying it completely. Fin soon returned home ; but, finding his residence destroyed and several of his people killed, he went, with his son Oisín and his cousin Cuilte, in pursuit of the enemy, whom he overtook and slew at a ford, called ever since "Uinche's Ford." Both the ford and the district are well known in the parish of Kilmacduagh ; they bear the name of the ill-fated chief to the present day.

In the well-known prose epic, “The Pursuit of Diarmait and Graine,” we find the name of Fin again mentioned in connection with the territory of Hy Fiachrach Aidhne. He had pursued the errant pair to the woods of Doire Dha bhoth, where they had taken shelter. The wood referred to was situated within a valley in the Echtge ranges, which is identified as the present valley of “Chevy Chase.” It is in our day a well-wooded valley, about equidistant from Lough Cutra and Loughgraney, [9] “of the bright salmon.” The broad stream, which still retains its ancient name, “Abain da Loilgheach,” rushes through those picturesque valleys to Lough Cutra, from its home in the mountains of Derry Brien. The name of the river is explained in the *Duinsenchus*, which O’Curry appropriately styles “an ancient and very curious topographical tract.” It also explains the circumstances under which the Echtge Mountains received that particular designation.

The Lady Echtge, grand-daughter of Finde, one of the Tuatha Da Danaan colony, gave her name to those hills. She married Fergus Mac Ruidi, who held those mountains by right of his office of cupbearer to the king. He gave the mountain valleys referred to, to feed the cows which his lady brought with her as her dowry. Two of the cows, which were previously remarkable for their fruitfulness and abundant milk supplies, were placed one on either side of the river. But, as the river divided the fertile from the barren districts, the result was naturally a diminished yield on the part of the less fortunate of those interesting cattle. And so the river had from the circumstance been called by the name above given — *i.e.* “the river of the two milch cows” — a designation which it claims to our time.

It may be interesting to note that Hy Fiachrach Aidhne extended over a considerable portion of that district which in Ptolemy’s map of Ireland is marked as the country of the Gangani. Ware infers that this tribe extended themselves not merely over the southern part of the County Galway, but over some adjoining portions of Clare. Camden thinks that they were descended from the Concani of Spain, who were Scythians originally. Such opinions manifest much learned ingenuity. But we think it better to pass at once from the region of unprofitable speculation, ingenious though it may be, and deal with certainties. It is certain that the district of Hy Fiachrach Aidhne was occupied and held from an early period by the descendants of Prince Fiachra, from whom also it derived its name. They were a brave and martial race, who seemed to have inherited much of the spirit of their royal ancestor.

Prince Fiachra, brother of Niall of the Hostages, [10] was twelve years King of Connaught. After the death of his brother Brian, he was appointed to command the army of Niall, the supreme monarch. It was while holding this high official position that Prince Fiachra marched into Munster, and at the battle of Kenry defeated the Munster forces, and exacted hostages for the future allegiance of the Kings of Munster to Niall. But through the treachery of the hostages he failed to reach Tara. They succeeded in seizing him, and having him buried alive at Hy Mac Uais, the present barony of Moy Goish in Westmeath. So died Fiachra of “the Flowing Hair,” the ancestor of the tribes of Hy Fiachrach Aidhne, leaving five sons, the youngest but most distinguished of whom was Dathy. So remarkable was he as a successful and brave soldier, that he was proclaimed king and successor to his illustrious father Fiachra. In 406, on the death of Niall, he succeeded as supreme king, having placed his brother Awley on the throne of Connaught.

Dathy was a monarch of vast ambition, and of extraordinary military powers. He was also remarkable for his skill in the science of self-defence. [11] His high position as supreme King of Ireland did not satisfy his ambition. Like his heroic predecessor Niall, he resolved to lead his victorious troops to other countries. Our annalists refer to him [12] as “King of Erin, Alba, Brittain, and as far as the mountains of the Alps.” Though this language may savour of exaggeration, it helps us to judge of this prince’s extraordinary military successes. His authority was respected through every province in Ireland. Perhaps we can refer to no better proof of

this than the fact that he exacted and obtained, without opposition, the Borumean tribute on three successive occasions. Unopposed at home, he was able to assert his authority abroad. Indeed, we see him bearing the Irish flag triumphantly over the remote provinces of Gaul. It must have been with strange feelings that the legions of Gaul found themselves compelled to fly before this invincible barbarian from an almost unknown island in the Northern Ocean. Our historians and annalists abound with glowing accounts of his prowess, which impart a poetic interest to his career. From the following quotation it will be seen that his triumphant career has inspired not only the annalists of the venerable and remote past, but also poets of our own age : —

“ Little those veterans mind
Thundering hail or wind,
Closer their ranks they bind,
Watching the storm.
While a spear-cast or more
On the front rank before,
Dathy the sunburst bore,
Haughty his form. ”

The circumstances under which his extraordinary career was cut short at the foot of the Alps, A.D. 420, accord in their character with that marvellous career, though some of the circumstances may, we think, be received with caution. His death is recorded by O’Flaherty [13] in the following simple words: “ Dathy, the last of the Irish pagan kings, was killed by lightning at the foot of the Alps, after coming off victorious in one hundred and fifty battles, according to history.” He adds : “ They write that his death was a judgment for having violated the cell and hermitage of St. Firmin.” The hermit here referred to with some hesitation is said to be Firminus, a supposed King of Thrace, who had resigned his kingdom and crown, that he might serve God in that remote solitude. He had built himself a tower there, in “ which he saw not a ray of the sun or other light.” But it would seem that neither the king nor his soldiers hesitated to violate the hermit’s retreat. In punishment for this impiety, the monarch was, [14] it is recorded, struck dead on the spot by lightning. Thus perished the last of the pagan kings of Ireland, the ancestor of the tribes of Hy Fiachrach Aidhne.

Of his many sons, Ollioll Molt succeeded as King of Connaught, and after some time as monarch of Ireland. But it was from his third son, Eochaid Breac, that the chief tribes of Aidhne are descended. This Eochaid had a son Eoghan, who was fostered by one of the Firbolg tribes then resident in the territory of Aidhne. He is known in history as “ Eoghan Aidhne,” from the fact that he was “ fostered in the territory of Aidhne.” [15] The tribes who resided there at the period were the “ Oig Beathra,” [16] who held the northern portions of the territory, and to whose fostering care the young prince was entrusted ; the Caonrighe, who occupied Ard Aidhne, or Ardrahan ; and the Cainraigh Oga Beathra of Dubh-ros, or Durus. The simple record of the descendants of “ Eoghan Aidhne,” the son of Eochaid Breac, as recorded in the *Tribes and Customs of Hy Fiachrach*, may be interesting here.

“ Eoghan Aidhne, son of Eochaid Breac, was called Eoghan Aidhne because it was in the territory of Aidhne he was fostered by the tribe called ‘ Oga Beathra, the third tribe who inhabited Aidhne before the Hy Fiachrach,’ as already mentioned. The Oig Beathra came from the country of Ealla, and were of the tribe of Eoghan Taidhleach. They took possession of the northern part of Aidhne, and it was they that fostered Eoghan Aidhne, the son of Eochaid Breac.”

The country of Ealla is identified by O’Donovan, in his Notes to the *Tribes and Customs of Hy Fiachrach*, [17] as “ a well-known district, and now a barony in the county of Cork, and

takes its name from the river Ealla, or Alloë, which flows through it.” The *Book of Hy Fiachrach* adds that the Oga Beathra also fostered Eoghan Beul, the son of Ceallagh, “ grandson of Dathy, and they were his faction when he was assuming the government of Connaught.” And it continues : “ Eoghan Aidhne was the foster-son of those tribes, and it was the Oga Beathra, as we have already stated, that maintained the territory of Aidhne for him and his descendants after him.” The fidelity of this tribe to the descendants is thus clearly attested. They were faithful to him and to his descendants. Eoghan Aidhne [18] had four sons — Conall, Cormac, Seuona, and Seachnasach, from whom St. Sarnait was descended, and the several tribes of the territory, the O’Heynes, the O’Clerys, the O’Kilkellys, [19] the O’Shaughnessys, and others.

The line of descent of the tribes of Southern Hy Fiachra may be more concisely given in the following quotation from O’Flaherty’s *Ogygia* : [20] “ King Dathy had Achy Breac, from whom are descended the Hy Fiachrians in the county of Galway, near Thomond. ”

CHAPTER II

The provincial kings who resided in the territory of Hy Fiachrach Aidhne — Mac Earc, Colman, Loigneun, and Guaire — Royal Ratha at Kinvara and Gort— Guaire entertains the Bards at Gort — He is the kinsman of Cummian, St. Colman, and St. Caimin ; the friend of St Fechin and St. Maidoc — Guaire defeated at Carn Fearadhaigh by Failbe Flann — The battle of Carn Conail, near Gort— The murder of St Ceallagh — Guaire does penance, and is buried at Clonmacnoise, A.D. 663 — His character.

The references made by our Irish poets to the chiefs and territory of Hy Fiachrach Aidhne are very flattering. To illustrate this, we shall quote from O’Duggan’s topographical poem, cited at considerable length by O’Donovan : [21] —

“ Let us approach Aidhne of the steeds,
 Their nobility and hospitality ;
 Let us follow their kings, who are not few ;
 Let us touch upon the race of the nobles.

Let us treat of Aidhne, it is a duty without condition ;
 Let us leave the tribes of Connaught ;
 Let us sweetly sing their chieftains out ;
 Let us celebrate the chiefs of Hy Fiachrach.”

We are informed in the *Book of Hy Fiachrach* [22] that “ Colman, Guaire Aidhne, Muireheartach, and Loighnen were four kings of Connaught, who dwelt in Aidhne.” The ancient poem quoted by Mac Firis gives us a very similar record : —

“ Four kings of the province of Connaught
 Dwelt in *great Aidhne, land of saints*, —
 Muireheartach, one of the perfect breed,
 Laighnen, Guaire, and Colman Caomb.”

Muireheartach, as O’Donovan assures us, [23] was great-grandson of Niall of the Hostages. He also tells us that in the year 515 he attained the position of supreme King of Ireland. He was known by the surname of Mac Earc. His reign, which was very eventful, continued for twenty-four years. [24] During those twenty-four years, the annals contain the records of the deaths of many of our early saints. It was in the twenty-second year of his reign that St. Bridget died. Reference is made by our annalists, in the twenty-third year of his reign, to his

“ virtues on the hill of Tara and on the plains of Kildare, also on the hill of Kinneigh, adjoining Wicklow.” The battle of Aidhne, in the same year, is also referred to. His death is recorded in the year 527.

The battle of Claonloch in Cinel Aidhne is recorded A.D. 531, in which the victory was gained by Goibhneann, chief of Hy Fiachrach Aidhne, against the chief of Hy Maine. This Goibhneann was, O’Donovan tells us, great-grandfather of the celebrated Guaire Aidhne, King of Connaught.

Colman succeeded Muireheartach, after a short interval, as King of Connaught. He reigned for twenty-one years ; and fell at the battle of Cambo, near Roscommon, by the hands of Ragellach. Colman [25] was son of Cobhtach, son of Goibhneen, son of Eoghan Aidhne. He married the mother of St. Caimin of Inis Cealtra. [26]

Colman’s sons were Loigneun [27] and Guaire Aidhne.

Though Loigneun is enumerated amongst the kings of Connaught, the Four-Masters have preserved no notice of him. We find, however, in the *Book of Hy Fiachrach* a brief reference to his reign, which tells us that he was “ seven years in the government of Connaught when he fell.” He was succeeded by his celebrated brother, the “ renowned Guaire Aidhne. ”

The royal residence, subsequently transferred to Cruachan, was then at “ Rath Durlais.” [28] In the *Book of Lecan* it is styled “ the fort of lasting fame,” and also —

“ The white-sheeted fort of soft stones,
Habitation of poets and bishops.”

The fort of Durlais occupied the site of the existing Castle of Dunguaire, which was erected by Rory More O’Shaughnessy in the early part of the sixteenth century, on the site of the royal Rath. It stood on the most inland point of Galway Bay, and close to the present town of Kinvara.

It was not, however, the only royal residence in the territory of Hy Fiachrach Aidhne. There was another which occupied an interesting situation on an island formed by the river of Gort. It was known as “ *Gort insi Guaire* ” and occupied the site of the present military barracks of the town.

Guaire, King of Connaught, stands out prominently amongst the illustrious characters of the important period in which he lived. He was the friend and generous patron of the holy and learned men of his time ; so that poets and bishops alike were usual and ever welcome guests at his royal “ fort of lasting fame.” Indeed, the bards did not fail to celebrate his generosity in the privileged language of poetic exaggeration. They represented his right hand as longer than his left, owing to the almost unremitting exercise of generous beneficence. “As generous as Guaire” was accepted then, and for centuries after, as the recognised formula for expressing the most lavish generosity.

The following narrative, referred to by O’Curry, will illustrate the extent to which the poets of his time — a privileged class — calculated upon and experienced the hospitality of the generous king.

After the celebrated Seanchan Torpest had been elected to the high and important position of chief poet of Ireland, he visited the hospitable King of Connaught at his palace at Gort-

insiguairé. He came attended by a goodly portion of his official retinue. It consisted of “ one hundred and fifty learned poets, one hundred and fifty pupils, with a corresponding number of women, servants, dogs,” etc.

Guaire received his distinguished visitor in the kindest manner, and entertained him and his learned and numerous retinue for “ a year, a quarter, and a month,” and in a fashion truly royal.

O’Curry broadly insinuates that the conduct of the scholars was not on the occasion all that could be desired. The conversion of the palace into a sort of college of Irish bards may have been interesting for a period, but it must have proved inconvenient to his Majesty and his court ; so the wise Mearbhan, brother of Guaire, with a delicate appreciation of the difficulties in which his Majesty was placed, suggested a stratagem. It was to ask the Laureate Seanchan to recite the much-prized epic of the “ Tain Bo,” which, it was well known to all, had long been lost. Mr. Ferguson, in his *lays of the Western Gael*, tells the story in imperishable verse. He represents Guaire as addressing the poet in the following words : —

“ ‘ Bear the cup to Seanchan Torpest ;
Yield the bard his poet’s meed ;
What we’ve heard was but a foretaste ;
Lays more lofty now succeed.
Though my stores be emptied well-nigh,
Twin bright cups there yet remain ;
Win them with the raid of Cuailigne ;
Chant us, bard, the famous “ Tain.” ’

Thus in hall of Gort spake Guary ;
For the king, let truth be told,
Bounteous though he was, was weary
Giving goblets, giving gold —
Giving aught the bard demanded.
But when for the ‘ Tain ’ he called,
Seanchan from his seat descended ;
Shame and anger fired the scald.”

Though rising in “ shame and anger ” to depart, he does not appear to have been ungrateful for the attention he received at the hands of his royal host. He accordingly presented his Majesty with a farewell poem, from which we take the following stanzas, which mark his appreciation of the favours of his royal patron : —

“ We depart from thee, O stainless Guaire ;
A year, a quarter, and a month
Have we sojourned with thee, high King.

Three times fifty poets, good and smooth ;
Three times fifty students in the poetic art,
Each with a servant and a dog, —
They were all fed in the one great house.

Each man had his separate meal.
Each man had his separate bed ;
We never arose at early morning
Without contentions, without calming.

I declare to Thee, God,
Who canst the promise verify,
That, should we return to our own lands,
We shall visit thee again, O Guaire, tho' now we depart."

This Mearbhan to whom we have referred is not merely styled "wise," but he is also called a "holy hermit" But his hermitage of "Glean na Scail," referred to by O'Curry, does not appear to have been identified by our antiquarians.

It may, however, be asked whether the ancient church of Kilomorán, situated on the margin of Lough Deechan, may not be one with which the name is identified. As it would be difficult to find a place more suggestive of weird loneliness, the pious solitary may have erected a hermitage there ; and Kil Ui Mearbhan may have been anglicised Kilomorán.

As the generous king was patron of the bards and learned men, so too he cultivated the friendship of the principal Saints of his time and district. Some of the most celebrated of these were his own kinsmen and relatives.

St Caimin of Inis Cealtra was, as we have noted, his half-brother. Referring to this subject, the learned editor of the *Customs of Hy Fiachrach* [29] tells us that Colman, who was father of Guaire Aidhne, married the mother of St. Caimin of Inis Cealtra. This, of course, clearly implies that St. Caimin's mother, whose name was Cummianea, had been married previously. Colgan attests the same fact in the following words : "Cummianea, daughter of Delbronius, was mother of Caimin and Guaire."

The fact is also attested with equal clearness by the Four Masters : [30] "Guaire and Caimin of Inis Cealtra had the same mother, as is said, 'Cumman, daughter of Dalbronach, was the mother of Caimin and Guaire.'"

Our annalists make an additional statement in reference to this remarkable lady, too strange not to be referred to here, though it will appear to many as obviously incredible. It is that "seven and seventy was the number born of her." This statement is practically repeated by Colgan. It is, however, pretty clear that he merely wishes to convey that seventy-seven reputed Saints were *descended from her*. "Ex ejus semini prodiisse feruntur septuaginta septem reliqui sancti."

The celebrated St. Cumman "the Tall" — one of the most remarkable of the Saints of his time — is also referred to as a half-brother of the king, by Colgan. The statement is repeated by Dr. Healy in his well-known work on *Ireland's Ancient Schools*. [31]

A knowledge of the king's relations with those two celebrated Saints adds additional interest to a curious legend which Dr. Moran has extracted from the *Felire of Aengus*, and which we think may be quoted here : —

"Once upon a time that the Guaire Aidhne and Cumman Fota and Caimine of Inis Cealtra were in the church of Inis Cealtra in Loch Deirgheire, namely, the great church that was built by Caimine there ; they were then giving spiritual counsel to Guaire. 'Well, Guaire,' said Caimine, 'what wouldst thou wish to have this church in which we are, filled with ?' Guaire answered him and said, 'I would wish to have it full of gold and silver ; and not from covetousness of this world, but that I might give it for my soul to saints and churches, and in like manner to every one that would ask for it.' 'God will give thee help, Guaire,' said Caimine,

‘ and will grant thee the expectation thou hast formed for the good of thy soul ; and hereafter thou shalt possess heaven.’ ‘ We are thankful,’ said Guaire. ‘ But thou, O Cummian,’ said Guaire, ‘ what wouldst thou wish to have in it ?’ ‘ I would wish,’ said Cummian, ‘ to have it full of books to instruct studious men, and to disseminate the word of God into the ears of all, to bring them from following Satan unto the Lord.’

“ ‘ But thou, Caimine,’ said they, ‘ what wouldst thou wish to have in it ? ’ Caimine answered them and said, ‘ I would wish to have the full of it of disease and sickness to lie on my body, and myself to be suffering my pain.’ And so they obtained their wishes from God, — viz. the earth to Guaire, wisdom to Cummian Fota, and sickness and disease to Caimine, so that not one bone of him remained united to the other on earth, but his flesh dissolved, and his nerves, with the excess of every disease that fell upon him.”

Apart from any historical value this legend may be supposed to possess, it throws into an interesting and striking light the distinguishing features in the character of each of the parties to this little episode, viz. Guaire’s generosity, Caimine’s penitential spirit, and Cummian’s love of learning.

Though Guaire Aidhne had no inconsiderable share in the wars of his time, we cannot establish for him a high military fame. The fixing of the boundaries between the kingdoms of Munster and Connaught had proved even before his time a fruitful source of misunderstanding between the royal claimants. It would suit the Connaught kings to make the Shannon the boundary of the southern limits of their kingdom. On this subject we are assured by Hardiman, [32] that “ Luig Meann deprived the Connacians of Clare and Thomond. He converted the whole into ‘ Fearan Cliomh’ or sword land, for the maintenance of his knights, in order to secure his country against the Connacians, In an endeavour to recover this back in the year 550, Guara, King of Connaught, was defeated with dreadful slaughter.” The inaccuracy of the date is obvious, as Colman, father of Guaire, reigned till 617. It may be a misprint for 650 — which is given by some as the date of the victory gained by Diarmot over Guaire, at Carn Conail, near Gort.

In 622 we find that he was defeated at Carn Fearadhaigh, near Limerick, by Failbe Flann. The annalists expressly record that “ he fled from the field.” Though the annalists do not record the cause of the battle, there can be no doubt that it was connected with the frontier question. In this defeat of Guaire, Conail, the King of Hy Maine, with several other nobles, was slain.

His defeat at Carn Conail in the year indicated, at the hands of Diarmot, son of Aedh Slaine, cannot be the defeat referred to by Mr. Hardiman. O’Donovan identifies this Carn Conail as the present Ballyconnell, in the parish of Kilbecanty, near Gort, and states that it was certainly within the ancient territory of Aidhne. He writes : “ It appears from an account of this battle preserved in *Leahhar na h’ Uidhri*, in the library of the Royal Irish Academy, that Carn Conail is situated in the territory of Aidhne, which was co-extensive with the diocese of Kilmacduagh, in the county of Galway. This place is probably that now called ‘ Ballyconnell,’ in the parish of Kilbecanty, near Gort.” This battle is noticed in the *Annals of Ulster* and in the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*.

We are informed by the annalists that King Diarmot, on his march to meet the forces of Guaire, had visited the shrine of St. Ciaran at Clonmacnoise. “ He was met by the abbot, prelates, and clergy of Clonmacnoise, in procession, when they prayed God and St. Ciaran to give him the victory over his enemies, which God granted at their requests.” And Diarmot returned to Clonmacnoise to congratulate the clergy, “ by whose intercession he gained that victory,” and to confer upon them substantial proofs of his gratitude. There can be no doubt

that Guaire's defeat was complete, and that many distinguished personages, [33] amongst whom was the King of Munster, were slain on the occasion.

As he was supported by the King of Munster with his chieftains on this occasion, we cannot assume that the battle of Carn Conail was in any way connected with the question of the rectification of boundary between Munster and Connaught.

There can be very little doubt that Diarmot, who, with his brother Blathmac, [34] was joint monarch of Ireland, crossed the Shannon, and marched against Guaire and his allies, for the purpose of deposing him from the sovereignty of Connaught, for his complicity in the murder of St. Ceallagh, the Prince-Bishop of Kilmore Moy. The bishop's brother, Cugiongelt, who urged his deposition with all his influence, was married to the Princess Aifi, [35] daughter of Blathmac and niece of Diarmot. And in the murdered bishop's connection with Clonmacnoise we shall find an explanation of the interest manifested by the religious there in Diarmot's success against the " pious and hospitable " Guaire.

St Ceallagh was eldest son of Eoghan Beul, who ruled Connaught thirty years, and had succeeded Amailghaigh in the sovereignty. Though heir to the crown of his native province, his ambition was not for earthly honours. It was of a higher and a holier kind. He renounced the world, and placed himself under the guidance of St. Ciaran, the holy Abbot of Clonmacnoise, leaving an only brother, Cugiongelt, who was also called Muireadhach, to inherit the crown. [36] At the battle of Sligo, in 537, Eoghan Beul was defeated by Fergus and Domhnall, and wounded mortally, and as he felt the approach of death, he advised his people to induce his son Ceallagh to leave Clonmacnoise, and assume the sovereignty, as his brother was not of age. In an evil hour, the young prince, attracted by the prospect of the immediate possession of royal power, left the safe enclosure of his monastery without the permission or knowledge of its holy abbot. But the intelligence of his rashness, when it reached St. Ciaran, naturally excited his displeasure. He probably foresaw the dangers to which, through intrigue and faction, his young disciple would necessarily be exposed by the circumstances of his royal birth. We are assured that St. Ciaran not merely denounced, but cursed him solemnly for his conduct. Meantime, his learning and piety were so conspicuous, that he was appointed Bishop of Kilmore Moy.

The bishop lived in comparative retirement, probably influenced by the terrible denunciations of his venerated master. Yet he was regarded by Guaire as a powerful and dangerous rival, who, if he did not wear the crown himself, would at least secure it for his brother Cugiongelt. [37] He accordingly laid a plot for his immediate assassination. The *Book of Hy Fiachrach* [38] tells us that the assassination was carried out by the bishop's four foster-brothers, who were his habitual attendants, at the instigation of Guaire Aidhne, son of Colman, through envy about the sovereignty.

The murder was soon after discovered, and summary vengeance wreaked on the murderers by the young Cugiongelt, who slew them in " revenge for their fratricide." After this, Cugiongelt received the hostages of Northern Hy Fiachrach and Tirawley, and the sovereignty of Guaire was limited to Aidhne. The effect of the crime upon the public mind was necessarily a strong public feeling against its instigator. And as the murdered bishop had been so intimately connected with Clonmacnoise in his early years, it was natural that the community should show publicly, that the instigator of the murder had forfeited their sympathy and regard.

It is certain that Guaire's defeat at Carn Conail heralded the decay of his authority. Cugiongelt, as the son-in-law of Blathmac, compelled him to retire to Hy Fiachrach Aidhne, and limited his authority to that particular district for the remainder of his life.

It is sad that so bright a career should have been stained by so great a crime. But the penances with which he endeavoured to atone for it were such as won for him, even before the close of his life, the esteem of his fellows. Dr. Healy, [39] after informing us that Diarmot “secured the right of sepulture at Clonmacnoise, and was himself buried there,” immediately adds, “What is stranger still, his rival Guaire, towards the close of his life, came to do penance at Clonmacnoise; and he too, the Generous and the Hospitable, was buried there in a.d. 663.”

The record of his death, as given in the *Book of Hy Fiachrach*, is worth citing here.

“Guaire Aidhne, son of Colman, son of Cobhtach, was thirteen years in the government of Connaught, when he died penitently, and was interred at Clonmacnoise, *with great honour and veneration.*” [40]

In the foregoing narrative we have abstained from referring to many legendary narratives in connection with Guaire, though there are many such given by the Venerable Keating in his history. It may, however, be interesting to direct the attention of our readers to one which in part illustrates strikingly the characters of both kings, Diarmot and Guaire.

It appears that, after the battle of Carn Conail, the rival kings were reconciled. Diarmot, as a proof of his esteem, invited Guaire to the great national fair of Tailtean. “The two princes with a noble retinue came to Tailtean, and Guaire carried with him a great quantity of money to dispose of in acts of charity, and upon other occasions as opportunity afforded. But Diarmot, understanding the generosity of his nature, gave secret orders through the whole fair, that no person should presume on any account to apply to Guaire for his charity. Three days after his arrival, Guaire, perceiving no miserable object to implore his relief, was so dejected, that he desired the king to allow him the attendance of a good bishop, to whom he might confess, and from whose hands he might receive absolution and the holy ointment. The king, surprised, asked him what he intended by this request? He answered, that his death he was certain was approaching, because he was unable to live without exercising his charity. The king immediately revoked his order, and by that means opened away to the bounty of his royal companion,” etc.

But from the gleanings of his history which we have given, we may form a fairly correct estimate of the “pious and charitable” King of Connaught. As long as impartial history must record the murder of St. Ceallagh at the instigation of Guaire, so long shall we have to deplore in his character the evil results of an inordinate ambition, a not uncommon vice at every period of the world’s history.

Yet there can be no doubt that extraordinary benevolence, combined with strong religious feelings, formed the most prominent and striking features in his character. As his hospitality was unequalled, so too was his zeal in the cause of religion without a parallel, during the long and eventful term of his reign.

We have seen that it is recorded, that “he died penitently.” Even the community of Clonmacnoise seemed satisfied as to the sufficiency of his “penances”, for they threw open their church to celebrate his obsequies, and his remains were laid within its walls with “great honour and veneration.”

[1] *Iar Connaught* p. 364,

[2] *Ogygia*, vol ii. p. 6.

- [3] *Ogygia* vol. ii. p. 21.
- [4] O'Curry, *Manners and Customs of Ancient Erin*, vol ii. p. 122.
- [5] O'Curry, Vol ii p. 123.
- [6] Pp.310-316.
- [7] Four Masters. O'Cronnolly gives A.M. 2920.
- [8] O'Curry, MSS. Materials, p. 303.
- [9] *Hy Maine*, p. 145.
- [10] *Tribes of Hy Fiachrach*, p. 309.
- [11] Keating.
- [12] *Tribes of Hy Fiachrach*, pp. 17, 33.
- [13] *Ogygia*, Part ii. p. 361.
- [14] *Customs of Hy Fiachrach*, p. 21 ; *Ogygia*, loc. cit.
- [15] *Tribes of Hy Fiachrach*, p. 55.
- [16] *Loc, cit.*
- [17] P. 53.
- [18] *Tribes of Hy Fiachrach*, p. 53.
- [19] Keating.
- [20] Vol. ii. p. 260.
- [21] *Hy Fiachrach*, p. 61.
- [22] *Ibid*, p. 93.
- [23] *Ibid*, p. 311.
- [24] Four Masters.
- [25] *Hy Fiachrach*, p. 313.
- [26] *Ibid*. p. 391.
- [27] *Loc. cit.*
- [28] *Ibid*. p. 279.
- [29] P. 391.
- [30] Anno 662.
- [31] p. 230.
- [32] *History of Galway*, p. 38.
- [33] Four Masters, A.D. 642 (*recte* 649).
- [34] *Ogygia*, p. 374.
- [35] *Hy Fiachrach*, p. 415.
- [36] Four Masters.
- [37] *Hy Fiachrach*, p. 415.
- [38] *Loc, cit* p. 33.
- [39] *Irish Schools*, p. 271.
- [40] *Hy Fiachrach*, p. 314.

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