

The Diocese of Limerick — Ancient and Medieval.

Rev. John Begley, C.C.

1906

Hy Fidhgente — Topography.

The Diocese of Limerick [1] is almost co-extensive with the ancient territory of Hy Fidhgente. This tribe was so called from Fiacha Fidhgente, [2] a descendant of Oilioll Olum, through his eldest son Eoghan Mor, who fell in battle near Athenry in A.D. 250. Fiacha flourished in the fourth century, and received the cognomen of Fidhgente for having constructed a wooden horse at Colman's fair, which was anciently held on the Curragh of Kildare.

Hy Fidhgente is called a tuath, [3] a term of indefinite meaning. It originally meant a tribe of people, but after a time came to signify the place where they dwelt. When so used, it designated a district with a complete political and legal administration, and varied considerably in extent. When the tuath embraced a large tract of country such as Hy Fidhgente, it was called a tuath mor, and the sub-divisions simply tuaths. The present Diocese of Limerick would fairly represent the one and the parishes the other.

Being descended from Eoghan Mor, the Hy Fidhgente were considered a free state, and exempt from paying an annual tribute to the King of Cashel, [4] but were obliged to supply forces at their own expense to aid him in his wars.

The king generally resided at the royal Dun of Bruree, and received —

From the King of Erin without sorrow,
Ten tunics, brown red,
And ten foreigners without Geadhealga (Irish). [5]

The territory of Hy Fidhgente was divided into two great divisions, Hy Conaill and Hy Cairbre Eva, and these were further sub-divided into tuaths of smaller dimensions, each enjoying the right of managing their own affairs.

The Hy Conaill.

The Hy Conaill derive their name from Conall, the third in descent from Fiacha, and were seated in the present baronies of Upper and Lower Connelloe, Shanid, and Glenquin. The sovereignty of the tribe fluctuated between them and the Hy Cairbre.

The king was accustomed to receive from the King of Cashel —

Ten steeds to the King of Ui Ghabhra,
Ten shields, ten swords fit for battle,
Ten drinking horns in his protective fort,
Without hostages from him, without pledges. [6]

And

Entitled is the King of fair Ui Conaill
To an Easter dress from the King of Cashel.
His beautiful sword of shining lustre,
And his spear along with it. [7]

The Sub-Divisions of Ui Conaill.

Corcoide.

The exact position of the Corcoide sept has not hitherto been identified. At the dawn of Irish history Owen Mor [8] divided all Ireland into twenty-five parts among his children, and Corcoide fell to the lot of his son Bard. It ranked as one of the free tribes [9] of Erin, at the time of the Aitheach Tuatha rebellion, which is said to have taken place about the beginning of the Christian era.

They were renowned for their skill in music, and had the honour of supplying the court of the King of Cashel with harpers. [10] When the glory of Cashel was no more, they sung the praises of the Earls of Desmond, and when the princely chiefs of that house passed through their territory, they were bound to entertain them for a day and a night, a custom that prevailed to the time of Elizabeth. [11]

When Boen, the father of St. Palcherius, was expelled from Connaught by his enemies, he obtained a home in the tuath of Corcoide, [12] through the influence of St. Ita, at whose monastery he was employed as a worker in the fine arts. From this it may be inferred that the district was not far distant from Killeedy. O'Heerin thus describes it : —

Corco Oiche of beautiful wood,
A fair surfaced territory of fresh inbhers,
A fair land of best showers.
Under the vigorous hero, O'Macassa.

In Anglo-Norman documents it is written Corkoyghe, being a slight variation of the original.

In the year 1251, Gerard de Prendegast held of David de Barry a half cantred in Corkoyghe, by the service of one knight, and John FitzThomas held the land of Gerard by the same service, which was never rendered. [13]

In an inquisition, held in A.D. 1298, relative to the manor of Novo Castro (Newcastle West), the sergeancy or receivership was valued at 6s. 8d., which shows that it was a rather extensive district. [14]

In a document called the " Rental of Connelloe," [15] which dates back to the year 1452, one of the divisions is styled Corkoythe ; and the townlands mentioned under that heading furnish the first definite clue to the real identification and extent of the ancient Corcoide. In another MS. [16] called " Peyton's Survey," which was made in the year 1586, a still more definite description of it is given, under the title Toghe Gortcoythe, a very corrupted form of the word. The names of the townlands at the present day are identical with those mentioned in Peyton's Survey, and a good many with those in the Rental, and the inquisition of 1298.

From the foregoing authorities the Corcoide would be co-extensive with the poor law parishes of Monagea, Abbeyfeale, and that part of Killeedy parish included in the townlands of Glengort, Knocknadiha, and the district round Mount Collins, which was anciently known as Knockroedermot, a name that is now an alias for Ballybeg. All these places were in the parish of Monagea in the year 1586, which was then written Monagh Adare.

O'Bathan.

Whatever information has come down to us relative to this tuath, is derived from Anglo-Norman sources.

In the inquisition of A.D. 1298, [17] concerning the manor of Newcastle, it is first mentioned. In the Rental it is written O'Bathyn, and would correspond with that portion of the county lying between Newcastle and Ardagh, extending westward over Rooska hill as far as the village of Athea.

In Peyton's Survey it is styled Toghe Meaghan, and another part added on, called Toghe Yeaghtragh, or the lower part of the tuath Meaghan, and would be represented by the district running northward as far as Kilcoleman, between Cahermoyle and the mountain.

Cleanglass or Cleanghlais.

Let us proceed across Luachair hither,
A journey which is fit for poets ;
To the cold and festive Cleanglais,
Of the green irriguous wooded land.

— O’Heerin.

In the year 1155, Cuilen of Cleanghlais [18] the lord of Hy Conaill-Gabhra fell by Ui Cinnfhaelaidh (Kinealy) In 1266 Mahon O’Cuilein [19] (O’Collins), lord of Cleanglais, was killed by his own wife, with a stab of a knife, through jealousy. He seems to be identical with ‘ Macchulan’ O’Kelly de O’Chonyl, who, with other chiefs, received letters from Henry III to join him in an expedition, to Scotland in year 1244. [20]

After Mahon’s death, the Geraldines seem to have appropriated his territory, and the branch of the family that settled down there were known as lords of Cleanglass. The chieftain of this tuath was sometimes elected to the sovereignty of the tribe. The district corresponding to the present parish of Killeedy would fairly represent this tuath. In Anglo-Norman documents it was known as Killeedy. In Peyton’s Survey it is divided into two half tuaths called Killeedy and Killheylaghe (Killilagh). In another part of the same MS. they are included in the manor of Clenlish,

The Toghe de Tawnaghe.

There is no mention of this tuath in any Irish authority, but it very often occurs in Anglo-Norman documents.

Early in the thirteenth century Geoffry de Marisco gave land in Waterford to William de Prendegast, in exchange for the tuath of Maccaveni [21] in Occonil (O’Conaill).

In an inquisition held into the property of Thomas de Clare, [22] it is called the manor of Moyavenach, and its extent is fairly defined, as many of the townlands are given, and they are the same as those mentioned in the Rental and Peyton’s Survey. It was equivalent to the present parish of Mahoonagh. In every document I have seen the name is spelt somewhat differently though easily recognisable.

Corca Muichead.

Corca Muichead ranked as one of the free tribes [23] of Erin. O’Heerin thus describes it : —

MacInnerigh, hero of Gems,
Over the mellow Corca Muichead,
A fine host, who constantly ramify.
Like the white blossom of the branching appletree.

In early Anglo-Norman documents [24] it is called Corkemoyd, and Corkemoyst. It is not mentioned in detail in any document down to Peyton’s Survey, where it is styled the Toghe of Clonehennery, in the parish of Ballyin castellane Corkmohur, *i.e.*, Castletown Corcamohide ; and would be coextensive with the present parishes of Corcomohide, Kilmeedy, Drumcollogher, and Cloncrew. The chieftain of this district was MacEney, and the family succeeded in retaining a portion of their ancient patrimony down to the Cromwellian confiscations.

Brughrigh (Bruree).

Bruree was the ancient royal tuath where the king of the tribe usually resided. Judging from the list of townlands in Peyton’s Survey, it would correspond to the present parishes of Bruree and Colman’s Well.

Gortculligon.

The earliest notice of Gortculligon is to be found in the Rental, where it is mentioned as paying forty shillings when royal service was proclaimed in Hy Conaill, and is there written Gortcolgyn. In Peyton's Survey the different townlands are given in detail, and they are the same as those in the present parish of Ballingarry, with which it must have been co-extensive.

Olybane.

There is no mention of this tuath in any document earlier than Peyton's Survey. As it is there described it would correspond to that part of Rathkeale parish, south-east of the town.

Croth (Croagh).

Croagh as a tuath is first referred to in Peyton's Survey. The name frequently occurs in the Black Book of Limerick, and is the same as Maycuro. [25] It would correspond with the present parish of Croagh and parts of the parishes of Kilfinny and Drehidarsna.

Nantenan.

The earliest reference to this district is in the Black Book, and it occurs there in the year 1237. [26] The name is derived from Neanntanin, [27] and means land abounding in nettles. According to the Peyton Survey it would be equivalent to the present parish of Nantenan, and that part of Rathkeale west of the town.

Magreny.

Magreny is first mentioned in the Black Book. [28] and there is no mention of it in any document until Peyton. In that Survey it is called Treanmoregney, a district corresponding with the parishes of Clonely and Cloncagh. It is called a half-tuath, and attached to Askeaton. There is another half-tuath adjoining called O'Gallawhore, which would be equivalent to the present parish of Grange. Perhaps the two originally formed one tuath,

O'Fergus.

O'Fergus, or Fargus, is mentioned in the Black Book, [29] and also in the Rental, where some of the townlands are given in detail. It is called Farrensessergh in Peyton, and the townlands correspond with those in the Rental. It would now be represented by the parish of Clonagh and part of Kil-scannell.

Drynan and Lismakerrye.

Drynan [30] occurs in the inquisition relative to the manor of Shanid, in the year 1298. It is there set down as the 'half-tuath of Poble Minter Drynan,' *i.e.*, the half-tuath inhabited by the people called Drynan. I find no other mention of it until Peyton's Survey, where it is also called a half-tuath, and would correspond to the present parish of Kilbradran. The name is now totally forgotten. Lismakerrye (Lismakeery) is set down in Peyton as containing a half tuath, and would be equivalent to the parish of that name. Perhaps both in ancient times formed one tuath.

Eas Geibhtne (Askeaton).

This tuath was considered as one of the unfree tribes. [31] After the Aitheach Tuatha rebellion they were dispersed through the free clans of Hy Conaill. It is one of the earliest places mentioned in Anglo-Norman documents. [32] According to the Rental and Peyton's Survey, it would correspond to the present parish of Askeaton and portions of the surrounding parishes.

Dunmoylan.

Dunmoylan is mentioned in the inquisition [33] relating to the manor of Shanid as a tuath. In Peyton's Survey it is set out in detail, and would be equivalent to the parishes of Robertstown, Dunmoylan, and Kilcoleman.

Shanid.

At Shanid, [34] in the year 834, the chieftain of Hy Conaill defeated the Danes. This is the first refer-ence to the name that is to be found. It is mentioned early in the thirteenth [35] century as being a cantred, and in possession of Thomas FitzThomas. It is said to be the ancient home of the Geraldines in the county of Limerick, and from it they took their war cry, *Shanid aboo*.

According to the Rental it would be co-extensive with the manor. In Peyton's Survey the tuath is co-extensive with the parishes of Kilmoylan and Shanagolden.

Glancorby (Glin).

It is mentioned in the Black Book [36] at the beginning of the thirteenth century. In the inquisition relating to the manor of Shanid, in 1298, it is called a half-tuath, and also in Peyton. It would be represented at present by the parish of Kilfergus or Glin. The manor of Loughill, which belonged to the Bishop of the diocese, was probably equivalent to the other half-tuath.

Cairbre Eva.

The Ui Cairbre [37] were so called from Cairbre Eva (beautiful), the second in descent from Fiacha. They were located in that part of the diocese east of the Maigue, [38] extending northward to the Shannon, and included the barony of Kenry. In the prose portion of the *Book of Rights* [39] the King of Ui Cairbre was entitled to receive from the King of Cashel —

Seven steeds,
Seven horns from which wine is drunk.
Seven swords, it is a happy engagement,
Seven serving youths ; seven bondwomen.

In the poem that follows he is styled King of Bruree, indicating that he was King of the Ui Fidhgente at the time the poem was composed, which would be some time in the ninth or tenth century, as it was during those centuries the chieftains of Ui Cairbre principally figure in history ; and that through alliances with the Danes.

Being a rich and fair land, situated for the most part in an open plain, it fell an easy conquest to the Anglo-Normans soon after their arrival in the country. The limits of the tuaths that lay in this district are not so well defined as in Ui Conaill. The information that has come down from Irish and Anglo-Norman sources is very meagre.

Sub-divisions of Ui Cairbre.

Dromin Cleirchm.

The name of this tuath is still preserved in the parish of Dromin. The chieftain [40] of the sept was king of the tribe in the year 1014,. In Anglo-Norman times it was included in the Manor of Athlacca, and was probably co-extensive with the present parishes of Dromin and Athlacca.

O'Heerin thus describes it : —

The share of the noble Dal Cairbre Eva,
Of the Kings of Cashel, of white wattles ;

Lasting is his profit of the land,
The brave pillar, Cleirchin.

Desi Beg

Three septs of high hilarity
Are over Desi beg of trees.

Bruff [41] was called Brug na Desi, and was in the northern part of the tuath.

It is stated in an inquisition held in 1251, that the manor of Tobbernea [42] was situated in Desi beg. From other sources [43] we learn that the manor was co-extensive with the parishes of Effin and Ballingaddy. The old tuath would appear from these statements to be equivalent to the parishes of Bruff, Uregare, Effin, and Ballingaddy.

Cliu Mail. [44]

Cliu Mail was like Corcoide, one of the twenty-five divisions made by Owen Mor. It fell to his son, Muireadhach Mal.

According to old authorities it would include the district between Knockainey and the Slieve Riach mountains. According to the *Annals of the Four Masters*, Athneasy was in the centre of this territory. It may be the same as that Anglo-Norman cantred, Fontimel, which occurs frequently in medieval documents.

Adare and Croom.

Adare and Croom are mentioned in Anglo-Norman documents as cantreds. The cantred was used as an equivalent for tuath, irrespective of extent, from which it may be inferred that they were old Irish divisions, though there is no allusion to them in old Irish documents.

Escion or Eschluana.

This district is mentioned in the State Papers as a manor. In the Black Book [45] of Limerick, about the year 1203, there is reference to it, and at that time belonged to William de Burgo. Early in the fifteenth century it passed under the sway of the O'Briens, and was henceforth known as Pubble Brien, and would, in olden times, include the greater portion of the present barony of that name.

Tuath Luimnigh.

Tuath Luimnigh, about the noble Sionain,
Two chiefs are over it on one side.
O'Cadhla (Kealy) and O'Maille (O'Malley) the swift,
Beautiful ravens of the two inbhers.

— O'Heerin.

From other sources that will be mentioned later on we learn that part of O'Malley's land would correspond with the parish of Knocknagaul, from which it would appear that this territory lay round the city in the direction of this parish.

Caonraighe (Kenry).

The hero of Caonraighe of fair land.
Is O'Maolcallan (Mulholland) of branches.

— O'Heerin,

It lay west of the Maigne, bordering on the Shannon. The present barony of Kenry would include itself and Iverus.

Ui Rosa.

O'Bearga of the fair mansion obtained
The cantred of Ui Rossa of rich course.

It would now be represented by the parish of Iveruss, and perhaps part of Kilcornan. The family name of the chieftain seems to be obsolete.

The Manners and Customs of Hy Fidhgente.

The government [46] of the tribe was vested in the king, who was chosen from one of the princely houses of the two great divisions of Ui Conaill and Ui Cairbre. For this reason the King of Hy Fidhgente is often styled King of Ui Conaill, or Ui Cairbre, indicating that he was a native of one or other of these divisions. If there were more than one aspirant to the throne, [47] every freeman of the rank of Aire had a vote. They met on an appointed day, at the court of the Brey, or hosteller, of the district, and after three days and three nights' deliberation, they selected the most eligible candidate.

He was inaugurated with great ceremony, promising to rule with justice and preserve the ancient rights and customs of the kingdom. All the chiefs or sub-kings were bound to obey him, and assist in the government of the State.

The Subjects.—The subjects of the king were divided into different grades, namely, nobles, non-noble freemen with property, non-noble freemen without property, and the non-free classes. The first three grades possessed property, and were the privileged classes. A person who belonged to this class ranked as a chief.

The nobles were divided among themselves according to the amount of landed property each one possessed. The non-noble freemen had no land of their own, their wealth consisting of cattle and other movable goods ; hence they were called Boaires or cow chiefs. When they had no land of their own the Flaiths or nobles supplied the want by letting some of their lands at a certain rent. They were the magistrates that presided at local courts to administer justice, for which they were entitled to certain allowances and privileges according to rank.

The non-noble freemen without property were of the same class, but much poorer ; and if fortune favoured any of them with a sufficient amount of wealth, they could become Boaires,

The non-free classes were that portion of the community who had no claim, to any part of the tribe-land, but were allowed under certain conditions to cultivate little plots for their maintenance. The laws regulating these various ranks of society are minutely laid down in the Brehon Code, with a clearness and precision which reveal the high pitch of civilization that existed in Ireland, long before it was sub-jected to the influence of foreign states.

Dwellings. — The houses of the inhabitants were built of very perishable and fragile materials, but rich and costly, according to the rank of the occupier. All that now remain of them are the circular mounds popularly known as forts, which are scattered over the country, and generally attributed by the natives to the Danes. Rath, Dun, Lis, were the terms usually applied to them. The dwelling-house of a chief was surrounded by two or more concentric mounds, the space between the inner circles was filled with water, but of late years the outer ramparts of many of them have been removed by improv-ing tenants for manuring their land.

Where stone abounds some of them were built of that material. These were called Cahers, and generally gave their names to the townlands where they are founds such as the two cahers in Abbey-feale parish, and Caherlevoy, near Mount Collins. There are perfect specimens of stone forts, but now nearly covered with brushwood, in the townlands of Coolcappa, and Lissatotan—the only ones existing in that locality. In the west of the county there exists, roughly speaking, one of these old forts for every thirty acres of land ; and when it is borne in mind that they were mostly all intended for human

habitations, the population was of considerable extent. They were usually built in a pleasant situation, commanding a good view, and in sight of each other. Sometimes they are to be found in clusters, as at Ballyegna, forming pastoral villages, which would be the nearest approach in ancient Ireland to our modern towns.

Residences were often erected for greater safety in the middle of lakes and marshy places. The house was constructed on beams of timber forming an artificial island, thereby ensuring great security to the occupants. There is a beautiful specimen of this kind of dwelling still to be seen in Lough Gur, and Coolcronogue, near Ardagh, suggests the site of another. Judging from the remains that have been found in some of those that have been explored in other parts of Ireland, they are of a very high antiquity, while some have been inhabited as late as the reign of Elizabeth.

The King of Munster [48] had many royal residences in different parts of his dominions, where he was accustomed to spend a part of the year enjoying the hospitality of his subjects. The following are the principal ones that can now be identified in Hy Fidhgente,

Bruree (seat of the kings) was from remote times a seat of royalty. It was also called Dun Eochair Mhaighe (the fort on the brink of the river Maigue). About a mile north of the village, on the western bank of the river, in the townland of Lower Lotteragh, there is a large circular fort with three rings, locally known as Lissoleem, [49] which signifies the Liss of Olum. King Oilloll Olum, who resided here, and from whom it derives its name, flourished in the second century, A.D. He was the ancestor of the chief families in Munster.

Catherchinchon (Caherkincon), a stone fort, near Rockbarton, in the barony of Small County.

Dungair. [50] The ruins of this fort are to be seen on the hill of Doon, overlooking Lough Gur.

Aenach Cairpre, *i.e.*, the fair of the territory of Cairbre, which is called Aenach Cloghur in old authorities.

Geibhtine. Eas-Geibhtine, now Askeaton on the Deel.

Asal. This fort was at Knock drum Asal, now Tory-hill, near Croom.

Treda na righ, *i.e.*, the triple fossed fort of the King, supposed to be the great fort near Kilfinnane.

Ratharda, *i.e.*, the fort of the height, evidently the place called in the Annals Ratharda suird, now Rathurd, a townland in the parish of Donaghmore, near the city.

Miscellanea.

The territory is watered by many fine rivers and streams, of which the principal are : —

The river Maigue, with its tributaries, drains the greater portion of the east of the county. The name is derived from An Maig [51] = river of the plain. It bore the several epithets of Maigreach [52] = salmon full ; Mall, [53] sluggish ; and Na Mart,[54] of the beeves. It rises in the borders of Cork and Limerick, flows through Bruree, Croom, Adare, and falls into the Shannon a few miles below Carrigogunnel Castle. “ The yew tree of the son of Aingcis, at Eas Maigue ; its shadow is seen below in the water, and is not seen itself on the land.” [55] This remarkable sight was supposed to be seen at Caherass, near Croom, and ranked as one of the wonders of Ireland:

Its tributaries are the Loobagh, flowing through Kilmallock; Samair (Morning Star) rises in the south-east of the county, and flows through Bruff ; the Comoge rises near Knocklong, and after a circuitous course joins the Maigue, near Croom.

The other rivers in the east are : — Mulkear, Bilboa, Dead River, Groody, Graigue, Glenminnaan, Awbeg, Keale.

The Deel rises in the County Cork, flows through the west of the county, passing through the village of Mohoonagh, east of Newcastle West, through Rathkeale, and falls into the Shannon below Askeaton.

Tributaries :— Bunoke, Ara, flowing through Newcastle West, Daar.

The other rivers in the west of the county are :— The Feale, flowing between Limerick and Kerry.

Its tributaries are the Allaghan, flowing through Tournalulla enters Abbeyfeale parish at Goolbourne bridge, a short distance from which it is joined by the Eaghan river that flows through Templeglantine. It joins the Feale a short distance to the north of Abbeyfeale.

The Caher river joins the Feale at Mount Collins.

The Oolagh river flows into the Feale, near Purt Castle.

The Gale flows through the village of Athea, and joins the Feale beyond Listowel. All these rivers abound in fish, and the Allaghan and Eaghan are mentioned by Peyton as containing salmon. The White river enters the Shannon at Loughill.

Mountains.

The range of hills that rise up from the plain at Drumcollogher, and run round the west of the county to the Shannon, were known as the Luchra Mountains down to the time of Elizabeth. This was a generic term, as every district was known by a particular name, but when the situation of such districts was described it was said to be in the Luchra [56] mountain. There is a large earthen mound running through this mountain from Abbeyfeale hill through the parishes of Killeedy and Drumcollogher to Charleville. It is called the Cladh Dubh na Ratha, or the black mound of Rathgogan, the old name of Charleville. This mound was well known by the above name to the working-men who followed its course as a guide to Charleville in the last century when in search of harvest work. Tradition says it runs westward from Abbeyfeale hill to Kerry Head ; if so it must be identical with Clee Ruadg mentioned by Smith in his history of Kerry, and may have been some territorial boundary in ancient times.

The other great range of hills in the county were called the Slieve Riach, and are south of the hill of Ardpatrick. Ceannfeabhra was the ancient name of a part of this range, and remarkable for the great battle that was fought there between Oilloll Olum and his stepson Maccon, who was badly beaten and compelled to fly to Wales.

There are also two historic hills that rise like cones from the plain, namely, Knockdrumasal, now Tory hill, near Croom, and Knockfierna, around whose name many legends cling.

Samhain, now Knock Souna, between Bruree and Kilmallock, is a hill of very little importance in height, but is mentioned here as being the scene of some battles in ancient times. In the middle of the sixth century of the Christian era, the King of Ulster raided Munster, and advanced as far as Knock Samna without opposition. Cathal, King of Munster, happened to be at the time at Bruree, and when his household arose in the morning they saw the enemy encamped on the hill. When Cathal discovered who they were he immediately sent for St. Findchua of Brigown, [57] to help him in the conflict. When the Saint arrived at Bruree he tried to make peace between the kings, but owing to the obstinacy of the Ulster king, his efforts were fruitless. Findchua then led the Munster forces against the enemy and totally defeated them. The King of Ulster and his consort fell in the battle, and were buried on the hill.

Introduction of Christianity.

St. Patrick during his missionary travels visited the south of Ireland. After baptizing Aengus at Cashel, he went westward through the present diocese of Emly, and Kiltelly [58] is the last place mentioned in connection with him before entering the territory of Hy Fidhgente.

Taking, then, that part of the district lying near Killeely as a starting-point, and tradition as a guide, the first traces of him are to be found at Donaghmore, [59] the name itself being a standing memorial of his presence. At Singland, near the city, a holy well is pointed out as sacred to his name, beside it his rocky bed, and a little further on a graveyard where once stood a church dedicated to him, not a vestige of which now remains.

Turning to the south-west of the city traces of him are to be found at Patrick's Well. There does not seem to be any tradition surviving to connect our Saint with any locality between this and Knockpatrick, overlooking Foynes. Here there is an old church, a holy well, and his chair, consisting of five rude stones, all treasured as sacred mementos of his visit.

Ardagh is the only place in the south-west of the county where the tradition of his visit lives in the memories of the people. Turning to the east, there is a small enclosure in the southern slope of the hill running between Knockaderry and Ballingarry, near Cloncagh church, where it is said he rested for a night. Near Castletown Conyers and in Howardstown, near Bruree, there are wells sacred to his name. In the townland of Ardpatrick his name is wedded to the nomenclature of the county. Scarcely any of these names are to be found in the *Tripartite Life* of the Saint, but some of them are substitutes for the old names mentioned therein.

We now take the *Tripartite* as our guide over the same region. When St. Patrick entered the territory of Hy Fidhgente, he was welcomed by the ruling chieftain, Lonan, and entertained at a banquet on the hill of Knockea, 'over against Carn Feradhaigh on the south.' While the feast was preparing a band of strollers came to the Saint, and asked him for some food. He immediately sent them to Lonan and Deacon Mantan, who were looking after the preparation of the repast. Patrick feared, if they were re-fused, they might spread unfavourable reports among the people concerning him, which might interfere with the success of his mission. Lonan and Mantan refused to supply the suppliants with food. Just at the time a youth was ascending the hill with his mother, the latter carrying on her back a cooked lamb for the king's supper. Patrick asked the youth for the lamb which he cheerfully gave, though the mother demurred, fearing the wrath of the king. He then distributed the meat among the strollers. When they had partaken of it, the earth opened and swallowed them, and they were seen no more. Patrick then informed Lonan that there would not be a king, heir apparent, or bishop of his family for ever. He told Mantan that his church would not be exalted on earth, but should be the home of the dregs of the people, and that swine and cattle would trample on his remains. But Nessian who saved his honour should be honoured among the nations. Patrick then baptized and ordained Nessian a deacon, he built a monastery at Mungret, and placed him over it.

The situation of Knockea is to be determined from the position of Carn-Feradhaigh or Feradhaigh's sepulchral mound, which was a well-known historical spot, and the scene of many a battle, as our annalists abundantly testify. There are many conjectures as to the locality where it lay. The most reliable of our antiquarians are of opinion that it was situated in the south-east of the county. But in the compound word Carn-Feradhaigh, [60] the *F* is silent, and would be pronounced *Carnary* or *Carnarrie*, forms that occur in official documents down to the Cromwellian confiscations, when it is written Carnarrie and Cahernarry. [61] The latter form of the word has prevailed to our own time, and obscured the origin of the name. Cahernarry, as it is now written, is a well-known hill and parish, about three miles south-east of the city. On its summit are the remains of a large heap of stones, evidently a vestige of the ancient carn that was raised over the grave of Feradhaigh. In the same parish, and about half a mile to the south, is the hill of Knockea, answering exactly to the description given in the *Tripartite*. St. Patrick after leaving Knockea, travelled towards the present city of Limerick, spending some time in the plain at Donaghmore, where he baptized and instructed the inhabitants, and laid the foundations of a church, from which the parish derives its name.

While in these parts Cairthen, [62] son of Blod, the senior of the Clan Turlogh, whose territory was at the Clare side of the Shannon, came to St. Patrick, and, after making a profession of faith, was baptized by him at Singland. Here, too, he wrought a miracle in favour of Cairthen, by curing his son, Echu Ballderg, from some infirmities he was labouring under. The fame of this miracle no doubt spread from one tribe to another, and influenced the men of North Munster to the north of Luimnech,

to come in fleets of boats southwards as far as Donaghmore of Maghaine—that is Dun Nocfene—and he baptized them at Terryglass, where he was when they arrived. He afterwards went to Finne, to the north-west of Donaghmore, a hill from which he could see the country to the north of the Luimnech, and blessed their land. Pointing to the green isle in the west in the mouth of the sea, he said that the lamp of the people of God should come into it, who would be the head of the council to this district.

This event is also recorded in the Life of St. Senan, [63] and is worth quoting here, as it helps to identify the locality whence the men of North Munster came, as well as the place where they met St. Patrick :—Now the chief prophet and the chief apostle whom God sent to preach to Ireland, even St. Patrick, prophesied Senan's birth. For when Patrick was preaching to the Hy Fidhgente, and baptizing them at Donaghmore of Cinel Dine, the Corco Baiscinn came with their King Bole, son of Derc, in a great sea fleet over Luimnech from the north, and they besought Patrick to preach to them that day, and baptize them at once. ... St. Patrick repeats the order of baptism on the river which was near them, and all the hosts were baptized therein. Patrick said to the Corco Baiscinn : “ Is there a place from whence your district will be clear to me so that I myself may descry it from my seat and bless it from that spot ? “ There is, forsooth, say they. “ The hill there that is Fidne.” St. Patrick then went to the top of Fidne, and said to them : “ Is this your district to the north of Luimnech as far as the ocean in the west ? ” “ It is,” say they. “ Doth your territory,” said Patrick, “ reach the mountain there in the north even Sliab Elbe in the district of Corcomruod in Ninneus ? ” “ It reached not,” saith they. “ It shall reach before the judgment,” said Patrick. “ Doth your territory reach the mountain there in the east, that is Echtge in the territory of Desa ? ” “ It reached not,” saith they. “ It shall reach after a long time,” saith Patrick. . . . Then Patrick blessed the Corco Baiscinn and said, “ Ye need me not to go with you into your country for ye have a child in a woman's womb, and into him your country hath been given by God. After him shall ye be, and him shall ye serve, and this race of the Ui Fidhgente, and the island there in the west in front of the sea that is Iniscathaigh, is there one dwelling in it ? ” “ There is none,” say they, “ for there is a terrible monster therein named Cathach who doth not allow it to be inhabited.”

From both these narratives it may be inferred that the men of North Munster were natives of Corca Baiscinn, a territory in the south-west of the present county of Clare, and originally comprised the baronies of Clonderlaw Moyarta and Ibricen. They came southwards across the Luimnech, which was the ancient name of the Shannon from the city of Limerick to the sea, and must have landed somewhere in the vicinity of Foynes. They then proceeded to Donaghmore of Maghaine, or Cinel Dine. It would seem as if these descriptive epithets were added on, to distinguish this Donaghmore from an-other in the territory. It might have been in the district of Shanagolden and disappeared during the Danish wars. After preaching and baptizing them St. Patrick went to the hill of Finne or Fidhne, from which he saw their country and blessed it. From this hill he also saw the Atlantic ocean ; Slieve Elbe, the ancient name of Slieve Elva, in the parish of Killonaghan, barony of Burren, Co. Clare ; Slieve Echtge, or Aughty, on the frontiers of Clare and Galway ; and Scatterry Island in the mouth of the Shannon.

Knockpatrick, overlooking Foynes, is the only hill in the territory from which all these places so far distant from each other could be seen as St. Patrick saw them. In the metrical [64] life of St. Senan, this event is said to have taken place while St. Patrick was in Hy Conaill. Foynes seems to be a modern form of the ancient Finne or Fidhne. In the Rental of Conaill it is written Foynd, and in Peyton's Survey there is a wood called Kyllfoyne in the locality. Tradition points the route St. Patrick followed from Knockpatrick, namely, through Ardagh and Knockaderry, to the east of the county. Here, in the southern part of Desibeg, which apparently he visited for the first time, he laid the foundations of a church on a hill now known as Ardpatrick. While engaged in the blessed work he was opposed by the ruling chief, who after a little persuasion, consented to allow the Saint to finish the church, provided he would remove the mountain called Cen-Abhrat, that intercepted the view of Lough Lunga, in the barony of Fermoy. When St. Patrick caused the mountain to dissolve and formed the pass called Belach Legtha (or Melted Pass), Derball the chieftain became more obdurate, declaring that he would not believe, no matter what the Saint might accomplish.

After spending a considerable time in the territory baptizing and teaching the people, he went to evangelize other districts, leaving behind him well-trained missionaries, as was his custom, to organize and minister to the spiritual wants of the newly-formed Christian community.

- [1] Rev. Dr. Reeves quoted in the *Memorials of Adare*, p. 233. See also *Annals of the Four Masters*, vol. iii., p. 46, note.
- [2] *Anns. Four Masters*, vol. vi., Appendix, p. 2434.
- [3] O'Curry's *Manners and Customs*, vol. i., p. 79.
- [4] *Book of Rights*, p. 63.
- [5] *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- [6] *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- [7] *Ibid.*, p. 259.
- [8] *Anns. Four Masters*, vol. i., p. 74.
- [9] O'Curry's *Manners and Customs*, vol. i., p. 27, note.
- [10] *Ibid.*, vol. iii., p. 208.
- [11] "Lands held by the rimers of the Earl in the mountain of Slewlocra are named Brosenaghe [now Brosna in Kerry, near Mount Collins], and by the rimers of Templay Egleantane [Templeglantine], and Ballywroho [Ballymorrugh]." The names within brackets are the modern ones.
 "Rents and duties when the Earl doth cross the mountain or take his journey betwixt Kerry and Connelough, the foresaid rimers are wont to bear the charge for a day and a night, coming and going."
 —State Papers Series, Carew MSS., 1515-1574.
- [12] "Corcoic in the country of Hua-Conaill-Ghabhra." O'Hanlon quoting an old Irish life of St. Pulcherius, translated by Professor O'Looney.—See *Lives of Irish Saints*, vol. iii., pp. 339, 340.
 (Boen) "Venit ad regionem Momoniae et habitavit in terra Hua-Conaill-Ghabhra cum suis, in plebe quae dicitur Corcobhaiscinn."—Colgan's *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae*, p. 389.
 Corcobhaiscinn in the above sentence is evidently a scribe's error for Corcoic, as that territory was confined to the south-west of the present Co. Clare. This will appear more clearly when we come to the life of St. Senan.
- [13] See Sweetman's *Calendar of Documents relating to Ireland*, under the year 1251. As many references are to be made to Sweetman's Calendar, the following abbreviation will be used in future viz.: *S.C.D.I.*
- [14] *Ibid.*
- [15] A document preserved in the Public Record Office, Dublin.
- [16] Also in the Public Record Office, Dublin.
- [17] See *S.C.D.I.* under that year.
- [18] See *Anns. Four Masters*, vol. ii., p. 1117, second edition. The one quoted in this work.
- [19] *Anns. Four Masters*, vol. iii., under that year.
- [20] See *S.C.D.I.*
- [21] *Ibid.*, year 1278.
- [22] *Ibid.*, year 1288.
- [23] See O'Curry's *Manners and Customs*, vol. i., p. 27, note.
- [24] See *S.C.D.I.* from 1171-1306.
- [25] In a document in the *Black Book*, page 90, Croch is given as a heading to it, and in the body of the same document Maynchro is substituted for Croch. This document is dated 1239.
- [26] See page 75, where it is written Mayntaney.
- [27] Ordnance Survey Letters preserved in the Royal Irish Academy will be abbreviated in future references to O.S.L.
- [28] See *Black Book*, page 75, where it is written Mayryne, and in page 93 in an undated document, Magrany.
- [29] See page 76.
- [30] See *S.C.D.I.*
- [31] O'Curry's *Manners and Customs*, vol. i., p. 27, note.
- [32] Hineskefty Castle. See *S.C.D.I.*, year 1215, No. 593.

- [33] See *S.C.D.I.*, A.D. 1298.
- [34] See *War of the Gaedhill with the Gaill*, pp. 61, 66.
- [35] Inquisition, 1282. A cantred in Cunyl (Conaill), called Shennede.—See. *S.C.D.I.*, A.D. 12S2.
- [36] *Black Book*, pp. 27, 28, 116.
- [37] *Anns. Four Masters*, vol. vi., Appendix, 2434,
- [38] See *Book of Rights*, p. 77, note.
- [39] *Ibid.*, pp. 71-77.
- [40] *Anns. Four Masters*, vol. ii., p. 77.
- [41] See O’Heerin’s *Topog. Poems and Charter of Magio*, where it is called Brug. *S.C.D.I.* under the year 1201.
- [42] See *S.C.D.I.* under year 1251, p. 478.
- [43] See *Memorials of Adare*, p. 280, Appendix M.
- [44] See *Anns. Four Masters*, vol. v., p. 1648, note.
- [45] *Black Book*, pp. 14 and 103.
- [46] See *Anns. Four Masters*, vol. vi., p. 2435.
- [47] See O’Curry’s *Manners and Customs*, vol. i., and *Social History of Ancient Ireland* (Joyce), vol. i., chap. iii.
- [48] See *Book of Rights*.
- [49] *Social History of Ancient Ireland* (Joyce), vol. ii p.102
- [50] See *Book of Rights*.
- [51] O’Heerin’s *Topog. Poems*, p. 26.
- [52] *Anns. Four Masters*, p. 1730.
- [53] O’Heerin’s *Topog. Poems*, p. 118.
- [54] *Anns. Four Masters*, p. 1730.
- [55] See *Irish Version of Nennuis*, Irish Arch. Publications, p. 220, note.
- [56] See Peyton’s Survey.
- [57] See St. Findchua, Lives of Saints, *Book of Lismore*, Stokes’s Oxford edition.
- [58] See *Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*, translated by Hennessy. and given in Cusack’s life of the Saint ; also Colgan’s edition of same life in the *Trias*.
- [59] “ The Irish word Domhnach (Downagh) which signifies a church and also Sunday is from the Latin Dominica, the Lord’s day. According to the *Trip. Life* all churches that have the name Domhnach, or its anglicized form, Donagh, were originally founded by St. Patrick, and were so called because he marked out their foundations on Sunday.”—*Irish Names of Places* (Joyce), First Series, p. 318.
- [60] In all compound words, whether the first word be an adjective or substantive, the initial of the second is aspirated, if of the aspirable class. The initials of all genitives, singular of all proper names of men and women are aspirated, except surnames of families.—O’Donovan’s *Irish Grammar*, p. 56. At p. 50 he says, *F* aspirated is silent in every situation.
- [61] See *Abstracts of Lands under Acts of Settlement and Explanation 1666- 1684*, p. 109. Reports from the Commissioners of Public Records, Ireland, 1821-1825.
- [62] I have here changed the order of the *Tripartite* by placing the “ Baptism of Cairthen” before “ the visit of the men of North Munster,” as it appears to be the natural sequence of events.
- [63] The Lives of the Saints, *Book of Lismore*, Oxford edition, pp. 201-2.
- [64] Colgan, *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae*, 8th March.

The diocese of Limerick, ancient and medieval (1906)

Author : Begley, John

Subject : Catholic Church ; Limerick (Ireland : Diocese) ; Ireland — Church history

Publisher : Dublin : Browne & Nolan Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : MSN

Book contributor : Allen County Public Library Genealogy Center

Collection : allen_county; americana

Source : Internet archive <http://www.archive.org/details/dioceseflimeric00begl>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org November 11 2010