

Old Irish Life

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For the earlier portion of this work innumerable authorities have been consulted, including both the periodic literature of the day and the State papers in the Record Office in Dublin. In especial I have availed myself of Hardiman's 'History of Galway,' Roderick O'Flaherty's 'History of Iar-Connaught,' Button's 'Topography of Galway,' Sir Jonah Barrington's 'Personal Sketches of His Own Time,' Oliver Burke's 'Anecdotes of the Connaught Circuit,' D. O. Madden's 'Revelations of Ireland,' and Phillips' 'Curran and his Contemporaries.' I also wish to accord very grateful thanks to Archer Martin, Judge of the High Court of British Columbia, for much valuable information given me concerning the earlier history of the Martin family.

The Curse O' Cromwell [1]

ONLY once throughout its long continuance do we find any revolt against the tribal rule. Upon the 2nd of June 1600, the citizens of Gal way met in full conclave and complained bitterly of "the ymminent loss which the corporation doe dayly sustain for want of the administration of justice in the counties and shires of the province abroad." By the corporation the inhabitants in general of the town were meant, not its ruling powers, as that term would be understood at the present day. The complaint proceeded that for want of such administration of justice, and also "by means of the obstinacie, wilful disobedience, lyinge and deceit of the country gentlemen and inhabitants," no remedy could be had against them for any debts they might have contracted, much less for any robberies and spoils which they had committed. The mayor and council could hardly be held accountable for the lawlessness that existed beyond the walls, but the real gravamen and burden of the charge brought against them by the malcontents was that these ill-conducted persons were "supported and upholden by the mayor and his associats," and that when they visited the town the mayor granted them his word and protection to enable them to come and go unmolested, so that neither without nor yet within the walls could justice be had against the inhabitants of the country, who were represented as void of all charity, and little regarding either their duty to God, nor the goods of the poor merchants. A solemn resolution was therefore passed by the meeting that from thenceforth neither the mayor nor any one else in authority should issue such safe-conducts.

An accusation of undue partiality or tenderness towards the inhabitants of the surrounding country, whether gentle or simple, would appear at first sight the very last that could with any show of reason be brought against the council of Galway. For the preceding half century or more, however, the merchants of Galway had been venturing beyond the walls and investing their accumulated wealth in lands acquired from the Irish, either by purchase or on mortgage. By the end of the sixteenth century the whole of the region round about, excepting only the lands belonging to the Church and to Lord Clanricard, had passed into their hands, and they had become the founders of a new Anglo-Irish aristocracy. The revenues of the town began to suffer severely from this practice, and about this time complaint was made of the number of merchants and others who had built themselves country residences and abandoned their town mansions, ceasing also to pay scot and lot, tax and tallage. It may therefore have been that amongst the reprehensible persons whom the mayor and council were charged with protecting—though, let us hope, not amongst those who committed "roberies and spoiles"—were

some of their own tribal kindred, dwelling now without the walls and converted into country gentlemen.

Notwithstanding any such defections, however, Galway, at the opening of the seventeenth century, had become a place of no small importance. It was admittedly the third town in Ireland, Dublin and Waterford alone being of greater consequence. Its streets were broad and well laid out, according to the standard then prevailing, and its architecture was an astonishment to all who visited the town, being unlike any other to be found within the British Isles. The houses were all of hewn stone, built after the Spanish fashion round a central courtyard, with wide arched entrance doors and stone staircases. They were adorned without with a wealth of magnificent carvings—coats of arms, heraldic emblems, and the grotesque creatures and interlaced designs that Celtic art delighted in—fragments of which look down upon us still from tottering walls and crumbling doorways, or else, wrenched from their ancient settings, adorn the lintels of taverns and drapers' shops. So extensive were these dwellings that they were frequently held in part ownership, a floor in one of these mansions, or even a single room, being considered no unworthy portion to bequeath to a child.

“As proud as a Gal way merchant” became a proverb. But if the Galway merchants were proud, it was not only of their own high standing and prosperity, but of the city that owed its importance entirely to the energy and the business instincts of “that ancient colonie of English” established in the far west. Most of the mayors signalised their year of office by adding to or adorning the church of St Nicholas, the most venerated edifice in Galway, or in founding or endowing other charitable institutions, the most noteworthy of which was St Brigid's Hospital for the maintenance of citizens who had fallen on evil days. Every burges was bound in his turn to send round his maidservant, neatly attired and bearing a silver cup, to collect alms for it on Sunday afternoons, it being supposed that after the greater excellence of the midday repast men's hearts would more incline to charity and goodwill towards their poorer brethren. Other mayors occupied themselves, not less usefully, in strengthening the walls and fortifications of the town. “As Jerusalem seemed to the Prophet Jeremiah the princess of provinces, the beauty of Israel, so thou, Galway, dost to me appear of perfect beauty,” cried John Lynch, author of ‘Cambrensis Eversus,’ as he looked back longingly at his native city from the exile into which Cromwell had driven him and all other Irish priests.

We realise best, however, in what estimation those old citizens held their town from the inscription which, in doggerel Latin verse, they placed under the great map of Galway. Seven hills has Rome, so this lucubration begins, seven mouths has old Nile, seven glittering planets circle round the pole. Galway, Connaught's Rome, twice equals these, and then there are enumerated the many twice sevens whereof Galway could boast. Fourteen noble families, those of the tribes, stand first, thereafter come the fourteen towers that guarded her walls, and the similar number of castled gateways by which admittance was to be had, whilst passing mention is made that every house within the town was built of marble. The river flowed beneath fourteen bridges, twice seven altars were reared in St Nicholas' Church, each dedicated to a different saint, and the praises of God ascended daily from seven convents and seven monasteries. It must be admitted that even poetic license was somewhat exceeded in these high-sounding vaunts, and when after long years of neglect the map was at last completed, the condition of Galway was most pitifully far from warranting such boasts. For the history of this map was a very curious one. During the Civil War Galway espoused the King's cause, and in 1641 Lord Clanricard, President of Connaught, intent upon obtaining a much-needed supply of ready money for his royal master, entered into negotiations with the Duke of Lorraine to advance 20,000 upon the security of Galway and Limerick. The map was prepared duly to impress the Duke with the value of the pledge which it was proposed to

make over to him. But the negotiations came to nothing, and the map lay thrust away and forgotten till after the Restoration.

In 1654 Galway was invested by Sir Charles Coote, and sustained a nine months' siege both by sea and land, being indeed the last place within the three kingdoms that held out for the King. The ancient "Citie of the Tribes" only yielded at last under stress of famine, and on terms highly favourable to the besieged. The inhabitants who had made such valorous resistance were guaranteed not only their lives, but the undisturbed possession of whatever houses and lands they might own within the town and its liberties. No sooner, however, had the enemy got possession of the town than these terms were shamelessly violated. In defiance of the articles of surrender a forced contribution of a hundred pounds weekly was laid upon the hapless and impoverished town, and Saturday became a day of dread, for at the appointed hour the soldiers were mustered with trumpet and drum, and if the levy was not paid to the last farthing they rushed into the houses, demanding money with threats and violence. If none was to be had they seized what they could lay hands on, even to the clothes of the women, and brought their spoils into the market-place, to be sold for whatever they would fetch. The very resting-places of the dead were not respected, for the soldiers broke open the coffins and tombs, and tore the shrouds off the corpses, in the hope of finding jewels buried with them, leaving the poor mortal remains to be dragged about and devoured by dogs. The commandant, Colonel Peter Stubburs, whose original vocation had been that of a pedlar, and who seems to have retained his commercial instincts, converted one specially magnificent monument, which had cost a vast sum, and was, we are told "guilted with gold," into a chimney-piece for his own residence, and shipped the rest of the carved stonework to England to be sold. This worthy's deputy, Lieutenant-Colonel Humphrey Hurd, who had been a carpenter, and had been elected Mayor of Galway by the suffrages of the soldiers, was pleased to forbid the wearing of the Irish mantle, the customary outdoor garb in Galway, an order which the soldiers carried out with such good-will that on the following day the whole town seemed peopled by masqueraders, or a squalid troop of strolling players. Even ladies of quality appeared in the streets attired in men's coats, or with pieces of tapestry, or bed-curtains thrown over their heads and shoulders, whilst other women were fain to cover the rags which were all that the rapacity of the soldiers had left them, with blankets or sheets, or anything else they could procure, the soldiers the while jeering at them, or holding their sides laughing at the ludicrous spectacle which the poor despoiled people presented.

But worse was still to come. A few months later Fleetwood, the Lord Deputy, visited Galway, and notwithstanding all engagements to the contrary he ordered all the inhabitants to be summarily expelled. The mandate was obeyed with such expedition that within three weeks Coote was able to report to the Government in Dublin that the required clearance had been effected, and that none of the former inhabitants remained within the walls save a few who, either from sickness or old age, together with the inclemency of the weather—it was the month of November—had been unable to remove, and to whom he had therefore granted a gracious permission to remain. In reply to this communication another despatch came down from Dublin, desiring that even those few to whom dispensation had been given should be removed as soon as the season permitted.

Then, indeed, had proud Galway fallen and lay desolate. "At this time you might see whole streets not having six families in them," laments John Lynch, the writer, who was eye-witness of the ruin of his native town, "the soldiers that would before content themselves with cellars and cottages, had now houses to live in, until they burnt all the costly lofts and wainscots and partitions, and then would remove to other houses, until they almost destroyed all the fine houses, and left them so full of filth that it was poisoning to enter one of them,

though formerly fit to lodge kings and princes, being the best fitted town in the kingdom, and the inhabitants the most gallant merchants in Ireland for their hospitality, liberality, and charity at home and abroad." Henry Cromwell, who had become Lord Deputy, drew a glowing picture of the town, thus left empty and forlorn. He writes of it as "a town consisting of many noble buildings, most of them of marble, and that for situation, voisenage, and commerce which it had with Spaine, the Strayts, West Indies, and other places, noe town or port in the three nations (London excepted) was more considerable." His object was to induce the inhabitants of Liverpool and Gloucester to accept the houses and lands of the dispossessed proprietors of Galway, in lieu of compensation due to them for losses they had sustained in the Civil War, and no doubt this high encomium was framed with the view of making them willing to accept of the proffered exchange.

And meanwhile those gallant merchants of the old Anglo-Irish race, the owners of those palatial mansions, were sheltering themselves in thickets and thorny brakes from the wildest of winter weather, thankful indeed if they could find refuge in some wretched, smoky cabin. Even there, however, they were not secure, for under the pre-text that the country was invested by vagabonds and idle men, Colonel Stubburs sent his soldiers out in skirmishing parties to roam the country and apprehend all whom they chose to consider vagrants. Many of the poor country folk, going out of doors to attend to their cattle, or crossing harmlessly from one field to another, were seized, thrust on board the hulks that lay in Galway Bay, and shipped to Barbadoes, where they were sold as slaves, to toil in the sugar plantations. So many were swept off in this fashion that the country was wellnigh depopulated, and wages rose to an alarming height. A ploughman demanded a yearly hire of £4, 10s. besides meat and drink, and the most ordinary maidservant could not be had under thirty shillings, an unprecedented rate in those days, and one that added grievously to the difficulties which those of the old proprietors who still clung to their possessions had to contend with. Pestilence followed swiftly in the wake of the war, and so great was the general wretchedness that we are told the people took no pains to avoid the infection, being indifferent whether they lived or died.

The Restoration brought a brief gleam of hope to the souls of these poor harassed folk. During their days of stress and siege, Charles II., from his mock court at Jersey, had sent them a letter under his own hand assuring them that he was fully sensible of their services, and that he would not fail to recompense them in due time, when it should be within his power. They did not doubt that now that he was happily restored to his father's throne, he would make good to them all that they had suffered in the royal cause. As a silent but eloquent reminder of those sufferings the map of Galway was brought forth from its hiding-place. It was adorned with sundry equestrian portraits of Charles himself, and with a Latin inscription, wherein he was styled a lily among thorns, a cedar in Lebanon, a tree planted by the waters, and some other more or less apposite Scriptural tropes. Having been further em-bellished with the Royal Arms of England, Scotland, Ireland, and France, and the armorial bearings of the tribes and non - tribes of Galway, the map was engraved and solemnly dedicated to the king. As far as fair words and gracious utterances went Charles did not prove lacking. He issued an order to the Lords-Justices of Ireland commanding that the ancient inhabitants of Galway should be at once restored to their houses and lands. There, however, the matter was allowed to rest ; no effort was ever made to put the order in execution. It is sad to relate that the only active part which the Merry Monarch took in the affairs of Galway was to present the revenues of that town to one of the Court favourites, Mrs Hamilton, from whose representatives they had subsequently to be re-purchased at heavy cost by the townspeople. Over the gates of Galway Ichabod might from henceforth have been inscribed. The glory of the Citie of the Tribes had departed : it was never to return.

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Nimble Dick.

THE reign of law and order, as evidenced by the holding of assizes, had not been established in Connaught—known comprehensively as “The Wild Territories”—till after the accession of James I. That monarch commanded his judges to go circuit there, as in all other places within his newly acquired dominions. Accounts of some of the hardships which those early ministers of justice had to endure on their progresses through the western wilds have come down to us. Inns were unknown, and they had to depend on such hospitality as was proffered them, and which was not always, it would seem, very gratefully received. Thus a certain Judge Jacob who went circuit through Connaught in 1613 found quarters at the house of some person of quality, where he was well entertained, though we are told “after the fashion of the country.” From this we may infer that, though the viands were abundant, the manner of dressing and serving them was of the simplest. In particular there would appear to have been a lamentable lack of condiments, either because the chatelaine was not versed in the higher culinary arts, or because there was a difficulty in procuring such savoury adjuncts in those remote regions. The worshipful judge took the matter much to heart, and exclaimed wrathfully, “Oh, misery of miseries, must I eat my venison without the proper spices,—a thing which never happened me before !”

Another judge, named Speke, travelling through Connaught a few years later, had to take up his abode for one night at a house the owners of which were far from wealthy. They did their utmost, however, for their illustrious guest, and provided him with a sumptuous supper. But when the judge sought his chamber at night, he found that the bed-clothes, instead of being of the fine and delicate texture to which he was accustomed, were coarse and rough. He refused indignantly to lie underneath the shaggy coverings, and sat up all night beside the turf fire that blazed upon the hearth, bewailing his hard fate, and consoling himself from time to time with the ejaculation, “O my king, what do I not suffer in thy service !”

Occasionally, however, the trouble was more serious. In 1629 John Lynch FitzRichard, the Mayor of Galway, failed to meet the judge upon his arrival in state at that town and to escort him to his lodgings. The assizes were held in the disendowed abbey of St Augustine, just without the walls, which had been given over to the judges of assize and jail delivery for that purpose. The angry judge, much incensed at the insult to himself and his high office, immediately upon taking his seat upon the Bench fined John FitzRichard £100 for his non-attendance. Now, as will already have been gathered, the Mayor of Galway was a great personage in those days, being not only chief justiciar of Galway and of the Liberties that extended some miles round about, but also Admiral of the Port and Bay with all its creeks and harbours, even to the Isles of Aran, and entitled to have a sword borne before him on all public occasions. Furthermore, a new charter, which had been granted to the town by Queen Elizabeth not long before, specially decreed that if any one should speak “undecently and unreverently” of the Mayor, he should be punished “according to the quality of his fault and offence.” John FitzRichard, no doubt, considered the judge’s high-handed action extremely “undecent and un-reverent,” for he was no sooner informed thereof than he came out hotfoot to the abbey, and after rating the offending judge soundly for his temerity, he fined him £200 for presuming beyond his office. History does not relate whether either or both fines were paid.

The assizes so late begun did not long continue. From 1641 till 1660 Ireland was given up to civil war, anarchy, and bloody reprisals ; and though commissions were from time to time

issued to the judges to go circuit as in more peaceful times, yet with commendable prudence they refrained from penetrating beyond the Shannon. One of Charles II.'s first acts after his restoration was to appoint judges to go circuit once more in "The Wild Territories." Even then, however, the course of the western judiciary did not run altogether smooth. Sir Jerome Alexander and Sir William Anson having both been elevated to the Bench upon the same day, a violent dispute as to precedence took place between them, and proceeded to such lengths that Sir Jerome sent Patrick D'Arcy, the doughty leader of the Connaught Bar, to challenge his rival to mortal combat. D'Arcy was a man of some renown, for he had represented Galway in the Irish Parliament of 1640, when Protestants and Roman Catholics sat upon the same benches and legislated together. Later he had been one of the supreme council of the confederate Catholics of Ireland, which assembled at Kilkenny in 1642. Sir William, on the other hand, had commanded one of Cromwell's far-famed regiments of Ironsides, and inasmuch as the Irish legal profession was noted from its earliest inception to within living memory for its readiness to fight duels, we may feel convinced that D'Arcy went upon the behest very willingly. Instead, however, of displaying the martial spirit to be expected of one of his high military record, Sir William declined the combat, and applied to the Court of King's Bench for an information against D'Arcy. The information was refused, and D'Arcy, infuriated at such contemptible behaviour, declared his intention of horsewhipping his lordship upon the first occasion of their meeting. Sir William was so alarmed by the threat that he deemed it prudent to put the Channel between himself and his fiery opponent ; nor did he return to Ireland for several years, till stout Patrick D'Arcy lay in his grave and his horse-whip was no longer to be feared.

Among the despoiled of Galway was the whilom head of our family, Robert Martin of Ross, whose lands had been acquired by purchase from the O'Fflaherties a century before. His town mansion in Galway had been bestowed upon a certain Edward Eyre, who had been Advocate-General under Coote, and was now Recorder of Galway and member for the borough. Recognising that he had a formidable opponent to deal with, Robert Martin deemed it advisable, in addition to his Majesty's general order, to obtain a special warrant, under the king's own sign-manual, directing that his property should be given up to him. With this important document in his pocket, he waited upon Eyre and demanded immediate possession. According to his own account of the interview, however, Eyre laughed him and his pretensions to scorn, and roundly declared that he did not value the king's order at eighteen-pence. Foiled in his first attempt to recover possession of his property, Robert Martin hastened to lay information of this treasonable utterance before the Lords Justices of Ireland, and Eyre was forthwith summoned to appear at the bar of the Irish House of Commons, of which he was himself a member, to answer for what he had said.

Eyre duly appeared, and made defence that the words attributed to him had been distorted out of their proper meaning, and had only been spoken in jest ; and after some delay and consultation, his brother members not only acquitted him of the charge laid against him, but passed a handsome eulogy upon him for his integrity and his loyalty to his Majesty's person. Of the restitution to Robert Martin of the property which was lawfully his, however, no word was said ; and Eyre, whose appraisement of the king's order would appear to have been a very just one, remained in undisturbed possession thereof.

The feud between the Martins and the Eyres was destined to go down to the third and fourth generation, and to break out with increased acerbity and bitterness nearly a century later.

Robert Martin had three sons, who do not seem to have been held in very high esteem by their contemporaries, since there was a saying current concerning them, “From Jasper, James, and Nimble Dick, good Lord, deliver us !” Of these, Jasper inherited what remained of the family possessions and became our forebear, whilst James died and left none behind him. Richard, the youngest and the most able, was more commonly known as Nimble Dick, and tradition asserts of him that his agility and his “cleverness” as a swordsman were such that “no matter what blow was aimed at him, he would defend it with the sole of his foot.” He made up in amplest measure for all that had been reft from his father by the vast domain which he in his turn, in the hurly-burly of confiscation and spoliation, secured for himself.

The wilds of Iar-Connaught and Connemara, lying between the Atlantic and the great lakes of Lough Corrib and Lough Mask, cut off from all the rest of the world, and nearly as pathless and untravelled in those days as the central deserts of Africa, had belonged time out of mind to the O’Fflaherties—“the ferocious O’Fflaherties,” for deliverance from whom the citizens of Galway used in ancient days to pray. The last chieftain of the old race had borne a part in the bloody deeds of 1641, and was therefore hunted down within his own territories, when the hour of vengeance came, like a beast of prey. He was discovered hidden, with his wife, in an underground burrow within a wood, both in most miserable plight. He was dragged out and conveyed to Galway, where he was put to an ignominious death, whilst the huge tract that had belonged to him and his people was sequestered by the Government, and granted, almost in its entirety, to Richard Martin, on the understanding seemingly that he should bring the tribesmen into subjection.

The task was the more easily accomplished, as between civil war and tribal feuds those mountain fastnesses had been wellnigh depopulated. Richard Martin thus became possessed of a huge dominion, extending over more than a quarter of a million acres,—a wild and barren region of towering mountains, moorland wastes, lakes, and deep inlets from the Atlantic, so tangled together that, when viewed from one of the loftiest summits within it, the prospect has been likened to a sea full of high mountains and ridges of land. He and his descendants ruled over this great tract for close upon two hundred years.

When James II. landed at Kinsale on his last forlorn venture to retrieve his crown, Richard Martin was over fifty years of age. None the less he accepted a captain’s commission in the regiment which Lord Bofin raised in the west of Ireland for that prince’s service, and fought for him at the Boyne and elsewhere. Strange to say, he rode knee to knee in the regiment with his enemies the O’Fflaherties, and the first intimation of the final disastrous overthrow at Aughrim was conveyed to the farthest west by the horse of one of these O’Fflaherties returning riderless to its stable. Nimble Dick was one of the very few who were so fortunate as to be granted a full pardon by Dutch William for their espousal of the fallen monarch’s cause, and was also confirmed by him in the possession of his vast estates. It is commonly affirmed that he was thus signally favoured because during the earlier hours of the battle he had saved the lives of some English officers of distinction who were taken prisoners in the Bloody Hollow on the hillside at Aughrim, when the English gave way before the Irish, and for a while it seemed that victory would incline to the Irish side.

Yet, however successful Nimble Dick was in winning and holding his vast domain, there was none the less a bitter price to be paid for it, even the life of his first-born. He married Katherine French, of another of the old Galway tribal families. She and her eldest son, “Robin the Brave, Robin the Beautiful,” as he is called in an old Irish ballad that tells of his tragic fate, were specially devoted to each other, with a bond of the closest and tenderest affection. Richard Martin had made a home for himself at Birch Hall, within his newly

acquired estates, whilst the O'Fflaherties, dwelling some half-dozen miles away at Lemonfield and Aghenenure, upon the edge of Lough Corrib, looked on with sullen ill-will at the stranger ruling over their ancient patrimony. More than one attempt is said to have been made upon Nimble Dick's life ; but as he never went abroad without a guard, mounted and well-armed, he was able to render a good account of himself, and to give back as good as he got. It came to young Robin's ears, however, that O'Fflahertie of Lemonfield, head of the clan, had spoken insultingly of his mother ; and on the spot, hot-headed and impetuous, he mounted his horse, and without telling any one of his purpose, he rode off alone to the home of his enemies to demand satisfaction. The O'Fflahertie of that day was an old man, but he was to the full as ready to accept the challenge as Robert Martin was to give it ; and it was decided that the duel should take place then and there, and should be fought, as duels were customarily fought at the time in Galway, on horse-back, and with the sword, the combatants being stationed some distance apart, and riding at each other full tilt when the signal was given.

Robin took up his station with his back to a shrubbery, which he deemed screened him from attack in that quarter. Unknown to him, however, and also, it would seem, without the knowledge of his adversary, an illegitimate son of old O'Fflahertie's crept in amongst the bushes, and just as the combat was about to begin, he leaped out and stabbed Robin deep in the back. The hapless young fellow fell forward on his horse's neck, and the frightened animal galloped off for home. Mortally wounded though he was, Robin contrived to cling to the saddle till more than half the distance was covered, but there his hold relaxed, and the horse tore on riderless. Its arrival at Birch Hall with empty saddle and trailing reins naturally created alarm, and a search-party, headed, it is said, by his mother, came out to look for the young heir. They found him lying dead where he had fallen, stabbed traitorously from behind. His mother, frantic with grief, raised an altar upon the spot where he was found, a portion of which remains to this day, and which is still called *Leacht-Kathleen-na-Frinsie*, or the monument of Katherine French. Upon it she caused to be graven her bitter malediction on those who had slain her darling :—

“ May there be neither luck nor prosperity, but ever wailing and distraction, and may there never be a rightful heir in the place where the murder of young Robert Martin was perpetrated.”

Another humbler memorial arose beside this record of a mother's passionate love and of her despair. According to an ancient Irish custom, every wayfarer who, upon the anniversary of the deed, passed the spot where a noted murder had been committed, cast a stone upon the place where the dead had lain, and passers-by at other times would also add to the heap in token of their sympathy, so that before long a goodly cairn was raised.

Nimble Dick himself sought a more practical revenge. Warrants were issued against all who had had a hand in the murder, but, secure in those western wilds, they laughed legal process to scorn, and went out on their keeping, as the phrase was. It meant, not that they maintained themselves, but that they lived at free quarters upon those who either sympathised with them or were afraid to refuse the shelter and supplies demanded. Two years later, being still at large, they were solemnly outlawed, and the Earl of Pembroke, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, at the instance of Richard Martin, issued a proclamation against them upon the 10th of October 1707, which may still be read in the Irish State Records. Twenty pounds reward was offered to any one who should apprehend and secure the bodies of Bryan Flaherty Fitzdonnel, Edmond Flaherty, Patrick Flaherty, and John Joyce, or any one of them. All Queen Anne's loyal and loving subjects were commanded to use their utmost endeavours to

assist in bringing them to justice, and dire penalties were denounced against any who should thereafter entertain, harbour, or receive them.

The altar and the cairn were still standing some eighty or ninety years ago. Somewhere, however, in the earlier years of the last century a Captain O’Fflahertie, marching with his men from Oughterard to Galway, was told of the existence of the monument, and turned aside up what had by that time become an old and unfrequented road to visit it. His ire was great on reading the inscription—a true case of the cap fitting not his own but his ancestors’ heads, since Katherine French’s vehement denunciation named no names and brought no charge against any specific individual. As the readiest means of getting rid of this evidence of his forebears’ guilt, he ordered his men to demolish the memorial and to throw the fragments into an adjoining bog. The peasantry, to whom the altar was sacred, looked on in horror at the work of destruction, and after the soldiers were gone a young girl went down into the bog and recovered a fragment of the broken stone that had a portion of the inscription still legible upon it. She kept the relic hidden under her hearthstone for many years, and gave it up at last, when she herself was an old woman, to a descendant of Nimble Dick’s, who came to visit the spot, in whose possession it still remains. Yet to this day the Irish-speaking country folk dwelling thereabout can tell in their own tongue the story of young Robin’s murder and his mother’s curse upon his slayers, corroborating with most singular accuracy both the family traditions and the legal documents that exist concerning the tragedy.

The Penal Laws.

NIMBLE DICK lived to a patriarchal age, being upwards of ninety when he died. He was succeeded by his second son, Anthony, who left no record behind him save his name and coat of arms over the altar in the ruined and roofless chapel of Killanin, where the generations of the Martins lie. After him came in due course his son, another Robert Martin, who was a mighty troubler of the peace in his day.

The Penal Laws were enforced in their fullest rigour in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, and of the many grievous disabilities which the Roman Catholics in Ireland laboured under, none was more oppressive than the enactment which forbade any Catholic either to keep a school or to teach in one. It accordingly became the custom amongst Catholics of position and wealth, all legal prohibitions notwithstanding, to send their sons to be educated upon the Continent. Young Robert was sent abroad like the rest, and received most of his schooling at Louvain, that seat of learning being no doubt chosen because another member of the family, of an older generation, Francis Martin of the Augustinian Order, had already found a refuge there. He had been banished from Ireland, like all priests of the Roman Church, by Cromwell, and having entered the University of Louvain, he had become Regius Professor of Holy Scripture there. We are told of him, however, that he was not only distinguished for his learning, but also for the contentious qualities of his race, the litigious Martins being famed amongst the tribes of Galway, and that he was always in legal hot water of some sort or other. At Louvain Robert Martin fell under Jacobite influences, and became an ardent adherent of the house of Stuart. His education being completed, he went the Grand Tour, an indispensable undertaking for every young man of fashion in those days, and returned to Galway when he was just of age. A handsome, hot-headed, gallant young beau, and a very considerable dandy, he made himself remarkable in his native county by affecting French fashions of dress and of speech. He was even then a noted duellist, and was afterwards accounted the best swordsman of his day in Ireland,—no mean praise at a time when every Irish gentleman wore his sword at his side, and was ready to use it on the smallest provocation.

There was quartered at this time in Galway the 6th Regiment of Infantry, now the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. According to the fashion of the day of calling a regiment after its commander for the time being, it was known as the Hon. General Dormer's Regiment of Foot. This gallant corps had originally been a Dutch regiment,—that is to say, it had been raised in England for service in Holland, and had come over with William III. when he made his memorable descent upon the English coast. It had done stout service at the Boyne and at Aughrim, and had formed part of the force with which Ginkell, pressing on after the last-named battle, had captured Galway some forty years before. A regiment with such a record was likely to have retained some of its old political proclivities. It may reasonably be surmised, therefore, that there was a certain ill-will between it and the young magnate, who made no secret of his sympathy with the rebel cause, and that such ill-will had a share in bringing about the tragedy that ensued.

Some of the officers of the regiment were amusing themselves one day in the billiard-room of a coffee-house in the Main Guard, the thoroughfare leading to the West Gate. They were lounging at the window when Robert Martin, dressed according to his wont in the latest French fashion, came down the street. In particular, it would seem that his hat differed in shape from the hats commonly worn in Galway at that time, and excited the officers' ridicule. They jeered at him as he came along, calling out "Macaroni ! Macaroni !" a word somewhat equivalent to fop ; and as he passed beneath the window, one of the officers, whether by misadventure or design, spat upon his head. Maddened at the outrage, which was considered absolutely unpardonable in those days, Robert Martin rushed up the stairs. He appeared in the doorway of the billiard-room, his drawn sword in his hand, demanding furiously where was the rascal who had spat upon him. The officer in question, a Captain Edward Southwell, according to his own evidence, given later, answered that it was he who had done it, but that he had not intended any affront, and he offered to apologise. But as Mr Martin was by no means appeased by this *amende*, and none of the officers were armed, Captain Southwell offered to go to the barracks for his sword, when he would be ready to give Mr Martin any satisfaction he desired. Disregarding him, however, the latter turned fiercely upon another of the party, a Lieutenant Henry Jolly, who caught up a chair, whether to defend himself or to attack Robert Martin is not quite certain. Young Martin made repeated lunges through the bars of the chair, running the unfortunate lad through and through, and killing him on the spot. He immediately gave himself up to justice, and was lodged in the town bridewell to await his trial on the capital charge.

The occurrence naturally created great excitement in Gal way, and public feeling ran so high in favour of the young squire of Connemara, in view of the insult which he had received, that the dead man's relatives petitioned that the venue might be changed to Dublin, alleging that a fair trial was not to be had in Gal way. This was accordingly done ; and in consequence of the high position of the accused, and the interest which his case occasioned, the trial took place at bar—that is to say, before the whole array of judges composing the Court of the King's Bench. Not only the prisoner, but also the jury who were to try him, were brought up from Galway. Unfortunately, only a very meagre and garbled report of the trial has come down to us : the evidence for the prosecution is only given imperfectly and in part, and of the evidence for the defence we have no account whatever. Yet it is plain that there must have been a good and valid defence, pointing, as far as may be gathered, to Lieutenant Jolly having attacked the prisoner first with some weapon other than a sword,—probably either a chair or a billiard-cue. Several witnesses were examined on the accused's behalf, and the testimony of one of them in particular, we are told, had great weight with the jury. At any rate, and apparently with the full concurrence of the court, they returned a verdict of not guilty. It is

further clear that this verdict was approved of by the Government, for a curious letter is still extant in the Public Records, from the English Government to the Lords Justices of Ireland, directing that in the event of Robert Martin's being found guilty of the charge preferred against him, he was to be reprieved till the pleasure of the Crown was known.

Lieutenant Jolly was buried in the old collegiate church of St Nicholas in Galway, where a mural tablet of gray limestone still records his name

“ NEAR THIS PLACE LYES THE BODY OF

HENRY JOLLY,

LIEUTENANT OF GRANADIERS IN THE
HONBLE. GENERAL DORMER'S
REGIMENT OF FOOT.”

It says nothing of the manner of his death, and casts no imputation upon his slayer.

“ With the dead there is peace. ”

Robert Martin's after-career was not less tempestuous than his outset had been. He quickly came to be recognised as the head of the Jacobite movement in the west. The gentle-men of Connaught were Jacobites almost to a man, but for the most part they contented themselves with giving the cause their sympathy and good wishes, without any more active participation therein.

Thus we hear of one notable gathering at the Athenry Club. The members of that institution met at the club-room one evening to dine together. After the dinner some convivial spirits determined to make a night of it, and they continued on into the small hours, consuming much good claret and rum-shrub, the favourite beverages at that time of Irish country gentlemen. Towards five in the morning, when it may not uncharitably be supposed that he had drunk rather more than was good for him, John Kelly of Fedane gave the somewhat oddly worded toast of “ The Glorious Pretender.”

Athenry returned two members to the Irish Parliament, although its electorate only consisted of twelve burgesses. It was a pocket borough, the private possession of the Blakeney family of Abbert. To their credit, however, it was recorded that these seats were never objects of sale or of any sordid bargaining, being always filled by two representatives of the family. The head of the house, John Blakeney of Abbert, was himself at this time one of the members for the borough, and was also present upon this festive occasion. He may have thought that he would be called to account for the night's proceedings, for he protested angrily, and told Kelly that he must be mad. Kelly, however, only sprang to his feet, waving his glass above his head and shouting, “ King James ! King James III. !”

The Earl of Athenry had been amongst the company at dinner, but, like a sensible man, had gone to bed in an adjoining room at an earlier stage of the proceedings. John Blakeney rushed in to him, crying, “ The gentlemen are gone mad, and are drinking the Pretender's health !” Lord Athenry leaped out of bed, and hurrying into the club-room, he commanded the company to disperse forthwith and go to their respective homes, expressing at the same time his surprise at what he had been told of their conduct. Thereupon Thomas Burke of Ballydavid started up and said passionately, “ By God, my lord, it is what is in your lordship's own heart, if you would but let it be known !”

The matter reached the ears of the authorities, and they deemed it of sufficient importance to summon John Kelly and Thomas Burke to Dublin, where both were bound in the sum of £100 to be of good behaviour for the future.

The drinking of toasts and shouting for King James might be all very well, but when Prince Charlie landed in Scotland to recover his father's crown, no man in Galway moved "tongue, pen, or sword" on his behalf. Robert Martin alone, it would seem, despairing, no doubt, of bringing about any armed rising in the west of Ireland, set out, since he might do no more, to strike a stout blow himself for the cause which he had so deeply at heart. As his opinions and tenets were well known, he feared that he might be arrested on the way, and deemed it prudent to journey in disguise. Attired in a rough and common garb, he made his way across Ireland to a small seaport town upon the north coast, from which he had made arrangements to cross to Scotland. On reaching the harbour, however, he found that the vessel in which he was to embark was not ready to put to sea ; and whilst he waited, he went into a waterside tavern to procure a meal. In an unguarded moment he ordered a dish of a choicer sort than the humble frequenters of the inn were in the habit of calling for. The host's suspicions were aroused, and keeping a vigilant watch upon his guest as he ate, he caught a glimpse of dainty lace ruffles tucked away beneath his coarse outer clothing. Convinced now that the new-comer was other than he would have it appear, mine host slipped out and lost no time in giving the authorities a hint about the suspicious stranger beneath his roof. Robert Martin was promptly apprehended, and, for the second time in his life, found himself lodged within jail walls. This second incarceration was a most fortunate incident for him. He was kept in custody for some time ; but as nothing definite could be proved against him, he was at length released, though not till the young Pretender's ill-starred venture had ended in disastrous failure, and it was too late to join his confederates across the water.

Shortly after his return from this abortive expedition Robert Martin conformed, nominally at least, to the Protestant religion. This course was practically forced upon all landowners by the Penal Laws, as otherwise they held their estates at the mercy of any Protestant informer who might be pleased to file what was termed a bill of discovery against any one of them. It is indeed hardly understood or remembered nowadays how iniquitous and grievously unjust the Penal Laws were. In our branch of the family another Jasper Martin, grandson of the one previously mentioned, and the son of his father's first marriage, likewise conformed, and ousted his father from the possession of the estate.

By the deed of settlement drawn up between them, he covenanted to allow the old man a certain yearly rent-charge upon the property, and, in addition to some other perquisites, the use of a stipulated number of linen sheets, and of three silver cups to drink out of. No Catholic at that time was allowed to possess a horse worth more than £5, and any Protestant could claim to purchase the animal from him for that price. There was a well-remembered case where a Catholic gentleman, riding a valuable young horse, was thus challenged, and rather than yield his mount up, drew his pistol and shot it dead.

There were few Catholic estates in those days which were not vested in Protestant trustees to save them from confiscation, and only in the rarest instances were such trusts abused. A great portion of the landed estates in one of the largest counties of Ireland were thus conveyed to a Protestant barber, whose own possessions did not exceed a few pounds in value, and who plied his humble calling whilst he nominally held half the county in fee. The rents were paid to him and he made them over to the uttermost farthing to those to whom they rightfully belonged. He was absolutely faithful to the trust reposed in him and died as poor as he had lived. Men were driven into perjury and sacrilege to save themselves from beggary,

and to retain possession of the inheritance that had come down to them from their fathers, for the law not only demanded that they should cease to be Catholics, but that they should become Protestants, and take the sacrament in token of their conversion. The outward act, however, was all that was required, no inquiry was made into the sincerity of the belief avowed, in proof whereof the following story that occurred some twenty years later than the period of which we have been writing may be told.

Two young Roman Catholic gentlemen, brothers, were threatened with the loss of their estates through a Protestant relative laying information against them as Papists. They were both careless, hard-riding, hard-living young fellows, not concerning themselves much with religion of any kind, but they were both married, with families of little children dependent on them. It was required of them not only that they should renounce the faith in which they had been brought up, but that they should make solemn oath at God's altar that they believed that faith to be erroneous, superstitious, and idolatrous, and partake of the communion in confirmation of their oath. Driven to this most terrible form of perjury, they vowed that they would only make the asseveration demanded of them in one lonely, half ruinous church a few miles from their home. The reason for this decision was not far to seek ; the parson of the church had likewise conformed, and for reasons more unworthy than those by which the brothers were animated. Under the Penal Laws any Romish priest who recanted was entitled to an annuity of forty pounds a year, levied off the county in which he resided, and to the re-version of the first parish that might fall vacant within it, and here, too, no questions were raised as to the sincerity of the convictions avowed. In former years Father O'Flynn had been a boon companion of the two young men who were to appear before him, and had shared many a night's carouse with them. Owing to his vices and his misdemeanours he was threatened with expulsion from the priesthood, and had therefore made good his retreat into the Established Church before it was too late, but no one doubted that in his heart he still remained a Romanist. A very early hour was fixed for the ceremony, and shortly after day-break the brothers rode up to the dilapidated church.

The windows were broken, the rain was coming through the roof in many places, and stalactites formed by the damp hung down from above. The aisle was wet and dirty, and grass sprouted round the edges of the gravestones with which it was flagged, and which bore the names of old Cromwellian families. The two converts from Popery tramped in unceremoniously in their heavy, spurred riding-boots, shouting for the parson, swearing angrily at being kept waiting, and rattling impatiently at the broken communion railings with the handles of their whips. The Reverend Patrick O'Flynn, late Father O'Flynn, came hurrying from the vestry, and was greeted by his former comrades with a shout of recognition. The business in hand was undertaken without delay, and the recusant parson resolutely recited the service, intermingled as it was with oaths and denunciations against the faith which in their inmost hearts all three men believed in ; but when, at the conclusion of that service, one of the brothers spat out the sacramental wine and swore profanely that for his part he preferred good punch, Mr O'Flynn turned pale, and, forgetful for an instant, crossed himself devoutly and muttered a hasty prayer in Latin. The ceremony ended, the newly-made converts flung themselves on horseback and galloped back to the homes which they had saved by that morning's work.

[1] The bitterest malediction which to this day an Irish peasant can call down upon his enemy.

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