

Nobility & Gentry - 1829

The
Recollections
Of
Skeffington Gibbon,

*From 1796
To The
Present Year, 1829,*

*Being an
Epitome
Of The
Lives and Characters
or The
Nobility and Gentry of Roscommon*

*Genealogy of those who are descended from
the kings of Connaught*

*And
A Memoir
of
The Late Madame O'Conor Don.*

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The reader will not accuse me of egotism for being candid, when, contrary to the acknowledgment of other writers, I tell him of the obscurity of my birth and the poverty of my parents.

I was born in a rural but humble cottage on a small farm called Fairfield, on the Glinsk Manors, in the County of Galway. My father, who was descended from a respectable family in the County of Cork, at one time possessed the chief of that barony, which still retains the name of that ancient family, well known in and about the beautiful Fermoy as the Barony of Clan-Gibbon. In tracing the origin of my ancestors I find that the Province of Gibbelonian in the Italian States is their inheritance, from which some assumed the name of Giblon, a junior branch of which family inherited, about a century ago, the noble seat of Ballygiblon, now in the possession of Wrixon Beecher, Esq., who recently married the beautiful and esteemed Miss O'Neill, of the late Theatre-Royal, Crow-street.

The first of my ancestors who landed in Great Britain accompanied William Duke of Normandy in his invasion of that Empire in the tenth century, and obtained by their valor extensive manors in the Counties of Kent, Middlesex and Northampton, of which their descendants still retain a small remnant. The head of the family is now recognised by the title of that illustrious Baronet of Staines, (Sir John Gibbon,) in the County of Middlesex.

The celebrated Edward Gibbon, so esteemed for his *Roman History* and his *Letters to Lord Chesterfield*, &c. was descended from the same ancestors. He tells us his father was a merchant in the City of London—that he was born at Putney on the banks of the noble Thames—that his mother was a Miss Porten, of the enchanting Richmond Hill in the County of Surrey, and after her lamented

demise, which was premature after his birth, he was brought into life by his maiden aunt, who spoon-fed him for nearly nine months. However, I pass by that honorable and revered gentleman for the present, to give an account of the first of my ancestors, who accompanied Fitz-Stevens into Ireland in 1172, and obtained large manors in the Counties of Wexford and Waterford, and afterwards, on the reinforcement of Strongbow, aided by MacMurrough, King of Leinster, took possession of several strong castles in the Counties of Cork, Limerick and Tipperary. Catherine Gibbon, the celebrated Countess of Desmond, who fell by the side of her hoary-headed lord, in the eightieth year of his age, in a sanguinary battle between the Cromwellian Condons of Castlegibbon, now called Castle-town-roche, on the banks of the copious and navigable River Blackwater, in the territory of the great MacCarthy, was daughter of the ancient but unfortunate family from which I am descended.

The noble ruin called the “ House of Desmond,” in the town of Mallow, now in the possession of Mr. Jephson, the representative in Parliament for that borough, deserves the tourist’s notice, being one of the most magnificent structures that antiquity can boast of. It is situate in a beauteous and verdant glen, embracing a multiplicity of spontaneous boons, mountain air, a salubrious spa adorned by the River Blackwater, and a country delightfully diversified—besides a town, to the credit of the respected inheritor, much and highly improved.

From the various sanguinary commotions and civil wars that distracted this kingdom during the reign of Elizabeth—the paramount sway of Oliver Cromwell and his rapacious freebooters, under the cloak of fanaticism, and latterly, the unrelenting atrocities committed on the natives during and subsequent to the sanguinary war between the unfortunate James II. and his nephew and son-in-law the Prince of Orange, such of the nobility as were not expatriated took refuge in the woods and forests in the province of Connaught, where thousands of them expired either by famine, an incurable flux, or a contagious epidemic, then called the long scarlet fever. Amongst these was my ancestor Richard Fitzallen Gibbon, for whose head a large reward was offered by Colonel Carew, and General Boyle, ancestor of Lord Cork ; however, by changing his name to MacGibbonne or MacGibbolone, he evaded being apprehended, and got married to the daughter of FitzMaurice, of the noble house of Clare-Maurice in Mayo, a family who only possessed a remnant of their former principality at the time, as the Binghamms and the Gores, under the false surmise or accusation of the heads of that puissant and illustrious family being suspected Papists, and outlawed for not joining the ruthless Cromwell and the Saints under his pious guidance, engrossed the chief of their patrimony and that of Burke the Lord of Mayo, and which, except what was sold through the prodigality of those unsought-for intruders, their heirs retain at the present time.

In Mrs. O’Mooney’s “ *Sketch of her own Times*,” she observes, in her view from the lofty Crough-Patrick, the wide districts in the possession of the Earls of Arran and Lucan, (the latter title once justly bestowed on the illustrious heirs of Sarsfield)—“Those demesnes,” adds she, “ Ill got, one day or other will be ill gone.” However, to return to the subject of the family from which I am paternally descended : the progeny by the marriage with Miss Fitz-Maurice, by intermarriages, got settled in the Counties of Mayo and Galway. The chief of the Gibbon estates, which was part of the dowry of Miss Fitz-Maurice, was lately in the possession of that great diamond. Big Denis Browne, (recently deceased,) on which he built a family mansion, called (to immortalize his name) Mount-Browne. My grandfather, who married the daughter of O’Shaughnessy, of Gort Castle, fell in defence of his family and property, where he lived, in a rural villa in the vicinity of Mylough, in the County of Galway. In consequence of the undeserved outrage committed on my grandfather, (at the head of which was a tyrant of the name of Ormsby, well known as Robert Ormsby, of Tubberavaddy, near Roscommon, a notorious partisan with the celebrated Lord Santry, as Chairmen of the never-to-be-forgotten *Hell-Fire Club*, in College-green,) the land is now in the possession of an heiress of the house of Netterville, who is (I believe) married to Mr. Gerrard, of Gibbstown, in the County of Meath. Much to the credit of Sir John Burke, of Glinsk Castle, (who married Miss Cicily Netterville, of Longford, in that neighbourhood,) and a few Dominican Friars, who occupied a secluded convent and a few acres of land on the Burke manors, under the west wing of that lofty peak, called Mount-Mary, which separates the wide demesnes of those two ancient feudal Chieftains, (the Baronets of Glinsk Castle and the heirs of Castle-Kelly,) which at one time comprised upwards of twenty miles of the County of Galway, and the chief of the Barony of Athlone, in the County of Roscommon, they took compassion on the forlorn situation of a destitute widow and her four infant children, and provided the harbourless with a small hut on the verge of this romantic mountain, on the site of a wood, called Cappa Wood. In this desolate wilderness did the unfortunate daughter of the once noble house of O’Shaughnessy and her orphans live on the scanty produce of a barren mountainy garden, mingling their anguish and poig-

nant destitution with their tears, and a multiplicity of privations. I recollect myself having seen this farm ; it was recently held by an opulent grazier of the name of Kyne, who died suddenly at the fair of Fuerty, in that neighbourhood, a few years back.

My father told me that his elder brother, who was a proficient in the common rudiments of education, eloped from his mother, when about eighteen years of age, and sailed from Cork for the United States. How he could get out to that lovely country at that time, without friends or money, as he was not possessed of a farthing when he left his mother's humble cottage but one guinea, which had been sent her by the Catholic Bishop of Tuam, her maternal uncle, (Doctor O'Kelly,) who lived some time in the house of Ossy, near Glinsk, where a man of the name of Glynn keeps extensive nursery gardens at the present time. The mother's grief for her husband, their property, and her son was such, that it was impossible for her exhausted constitution to bear it any longer; she fell into a fit of despondency, and in a few weeks after the departure of her son, expired in the arms of her faithful friend, and the participator of her misfortunes—a foster-sister, who never forsook her in all her complicated disasters, till she saw her interred in the Abbey of Kilbeggad, in the ancient vault of the Skeffington family, to whom she was maternally allied through the O'Kellys of Aughrim Castle, so celebrated from its memorable battle in 1689. From this my uncle worked his passage on board as a seaman, to that land of promise. The only account my father had of his arrival in that country was from Doctor Nesbitt, who practised for some time as an eminent physician there, and visited his friends in the County of Leitrim, where he remained but a few weeks, as his wife and family remained in the City of Washington, anxiously waiting his return. The account he gave was that my uncle got married to the daughter of a Scotch merchant of the name of Douglas, who resided some distance from Washington—that he was accumulating wealth, and made a most respectable connexion on his marriage with Miss Douglas—that he heard of his mother's death from a Mr. Fallon, the kinsman of an ancient family of that name in the Barony of Athlone—and that he intended to assist his friends in Ireland in a short time. My father had another brother, who died at Fairfield, of a malignant fever, in the 24th year of his age. I never knew my poor father to mention this brother without changing his countenance, which he strove to conceal from his auditors or his own family, and his whole frame undergoing that panic of grief that one recognizes in the aspect of those who are suffering deep affliction and sensation for the loss of some worthy friend, which wealth, luxury, or amusement cannot remove. My only sister, adds my father, who married a farmer of the name of Magrath, in the vicinity of Mylough or Mount-Bellew, died, after giving birth to three children. As it would only bring other melancholy recollections to my mind, and as my brother-in-law married about nine months after my sister's premature demise, I never saw any of that family afterwards. We were obliged, says he, (observing about my uncle, who died unmarried,) to leave our handsome cottage at Cappa, which was surrounded with beautiful shrubs that sprung up on the site of that large wood sold to pay off some family incumbrances, which were weighing pretty heavy on the estate of Sir Festic Burke at the time. Then my brother—that brother, adds he, who was the companion and the participator of my early, innocent and rustic amusements, took the handsome farm of Fairfield, watered by a beautiful river, which proceeds from that deep moor that separates the Glinsk manors from the small patrimony of Mr. D'Arcy, a magistrate, and a respectable gentleman, allied to the ancient family of Kiltulla, in the upper part of this great and populous county. I think Mr. D'Arcy's rural residence is called Newforest or Blackforest. Mr. James Kelly, a tanner by trade, possessed the house of Fairfield, and some fields *adorned* with tan-holes of no sweet odour ; when the wind blew westward, we felt it intolerable. James Kelly was uncle to William Kelly, of Buckfield—a farm which they hold from the Earls of Clanrickarde ; as also to William Kelly, now of Gardiner-street, who kept a spirit shop many years in that noble seat that Oliver Cromwell threw into the possession of the Mahon family, called Strokes-town. Our residence at Fairfield (considerably augmented since my early days) was delightfully situated on the banks of a murmuring rivulet. My father, a few years before his death, said that the tenantry in the surrounding villages were draining and reclaiming those deep bogs which inundate the adjacent pasturage, the fog of which swamps caused contagion and typhus fevers through the country. The people are getting prodigiously enlightened ; nor do I think that their propensities are so vicious as they were some years back. For instance, said my father, how many heinous murders have occurred in this country in my own recollection, the like of which are now seldom to be heard of. At one time a whole family was murdered near Carrick-on-Shannon ; among whom was a Mr. Lawder, the kinsman of the immortal Goldsmith, and the Croftons, of Moate, near Roscommon. Several murders were perpetrated by the notorious Anne Walker and her sanguinary husband ; they kept a public inn or half-way house at a place called Boxford—I believe part of the Coote estates, in the vicinity of Roscommon. In this den of murder, and rapacity for the goods and chattels of others, they perpetrated, unsuspected from their opulence, the most ruthless crimes ; when detected in the very act, from the

cries of a gentleman in bed in their house, at two o'clock at night, the sanguinary husband got off in a beggar woman's apparel, and evaded being brought to justice for his dark offences ; but his infamous wife was burned at a stake near that old ruin of the Dillon family, about half a mile from Roscommon, the county town from which they take their title.—That Daly, who committed a rape on a girl of ten years of age, and, from the violence he used on so young an infant in putting his wicked desires into execution, for fear, according to his own confession, that it would lead to a discovery, murdered her, and hid her under his bed, in which place she was found by her disconsolate parents, kept a country shop near Cloughan, in the Barony of Athlone, and suffered the sentence of the law at the usual place of execution at Roscommon, in the year 1780. I knew his sister, a widow, named Madden, a respectable and industrious woman, who lived many years on the lands of Baslick, near Castlereagh, in this county. Her daughter, an innocent young woman, was, not many years back, seduced by a pious Dignitary of the Church, not more than one hundred miles from the See-house of Elphin. Not only that : the Reverend Doctor took under his pious care the wife of a man well known in the Whip Club, of the name of Dalton. This is but an outline.

Children, said my father, of the many revolting massacres committed in this and the adjoining-counties within these few years back, I do not recollect any of them so heinous as the horrible murder committed on the body of young Mr. Bellew, at the great fair of Ballinasloe, and the chief of the gang his own domestics and dependents. Mr. Bellew was respectably connected in the County of Galway, being lineally descended from Earl Bellew, as also allied to the house of Mount-Bellew, one of the first Catholic families in that county. He lived with his father, (as single gentlemen generally do in this kingdom,) at a beautiful seat, now in ruin, called Drum-House, on the road leading from the village of Creggs, on the Burke manors, to the Town of Tuam, a Bishop's See, both in that county. Young Bellew unfortunately accompanied his father to this celebrated meeting, well known as the October Fair. I think it was in 1786. Mr. Bellew got a large sum of money for fat cattle the two first days of this meeting, which his own cotters and the stable men of his household saw him making up in the inn where he stopped, and which money they thought the young son retained in his possession ; consequently, a gang (about nine) of those fellows planned a scheme to induce the young gentleman to come to the stable where he kept his horses, about nine o'clock in the evening, saying that they would have a fascinating young woman to meet him. To this he agreed ; and to jog his memory, an infamous villain of the name of Greaghan, his own-boy or helper, came at the appointed hour, and sent word up by the waiter that he was below stairs, and wished to see his young master. On Mr. Bellew receiving the message, he desired the waiter to order the man his dinner, which was accordingly obeyed. When the dinner was laid before the monster, who was bursting, like Judas, with evil thoughts, the maid who served him went in search of a knife and fork, sometimes scarce articles at this great fair ; however, to her surprise, at her return, though only about a minute absent, Greaghan had the meat cut on his plate with a large knife commonly called a jack knife, and with which he murdered Mr. Bellew in a few minutes afterwards. Young Bellew had asked his father's permission to go and see the curious scenes at such large meetings, which gentlemen about his age (not more than twenty-one), are generally anxious to view. His father reluctantly complied, but not until one or two gentlemen who dined with them, and were enjoying themselves at their wine, interfered, by which the unfortunate young man was allowed to go out for a short time. He asked his father for some pocket money ; to which he complied in no pleasing terms, and threw him a purse across the table, containing some silver and sixty guineas in gold. On leaving the inn, Greaghan met him at the door, and conducted him to a lonely stable in a remote lane, within a few paces of the great River Suck, which moves in all its magnitude through part of this town, and empties its copious influx into the noble Shannon, about four miles from Dunlow, commonly called Ballinasloe, where the unfortunate Mr. Bellew entered this horrible den. He was conducted to a dark corner, in which one of those demons, named Cusack, was seated on a bundle of straw, dressed in woman's clothes. This villain (Cusack) was selected from the other gang to personate a female, in consequence of his feminine appearance, having no beard, being of fair complexion, and particularly as Mr. Bellew had no knowledge of his exterior. Mr. Bellew advanced towards the young lady, as he thought, to embrace her and put his hands round her person ; but the reception he met for his caresses was a mortal stab of a large knife in his abdomen. He screamed, and called upon Greaghan to come to his aid ; but the assistance he met with was the whole of the gang coming and stabbing him in various parts of the body. As he lay prostrate on the floor, even when dead, a young man, who happened to come into the stable at the moment, was obliged to give him three stabs, and take his oath that he would never divulge the secret. They rolled the body in some hay, tied it up in a sheet, and threw it into the River Suck.

Amongst the murderers was a farmer's son of the name of Lyons, from the village of Croswells, on the Caullield estate near Donamore. Lyons was the only son, and what I may call a spoiled child, of respectable and industrious parents far above want, and how he could bring himself to be guilty of so atrocious and sanguinary an action, and to join such a group, who had no stake or dependence in the country, save the general lot of those serfs and peasants who possess no other means but their scanty earning from one meal to another—their residence a filthy, smoky hut, their companions a pig, a cat, and a-half starved mangy dog—some may have a cow, a goat or an ass, which is driven from the wretched abode of its nominal owner, (as it generally happens that the latter is more indebted to the rackrenter or landlord than the animal is worth,) to some barren moor or noxious marsh, apparently sinking as a swamp ready to swallow in its stagnated mire the skeleton, which, from its craving maw and the pangs of hunger, is obliged (not that any thing delicious is in the soil) to feed on its unwholesome weeds. I don't impute to the oppressed peasant or rustic that these miseries are solely caused by his not reading extracts from the New Testament; far from it, they spontaneously grow with his growth : he is born in poverty— to comfort he is a stranger; and, inundated in want and wretchedness, he closes his eyes in the arms of death upon a world that afforded him no other soothing consolation but all the pangs and horror that Middlemen, rackrenters, rapacious tithe proctors, and the unceasing demands of the voluptuous absentee, can inflict upon a well disposed people. To these misfortunes the unfortunate Lyons was a stranger, as his parents were in comfortable circumstances, and possessed that state of mediocrity that they neither felt the pangs of keen distress nor the sudden surplus of overgrown wealth. The whole of this infamous gang who murdered the much and justly-lamented Mr. Bellew were executed in the town of Galway, and their bodies hung in chains in the town of Ballinasloe for many months afterwards. In talking of the horrible murder of eighteen of the Bodkin family, by a step-son and a nephew, near Tuam, which gave to the perpetrators of that massacre the never-forgotten appellation of the “ Bloody Bodkins”—the murder of Randal M'Donnell, Esq., by the notorious Captain Fitzgerald of Turla, in Mayo—the murder of Squire Reynolds of Litterfine, by the sanguinary and cowardly Kean of Newbrook, in the County of Leitrim, and many others, my father repeated a few days before his death, in 1812, with as much novelty as on the days they respectively occurred. My children, said he, my days in this world are coming to a close ; so far you have made me happy ; poverty is no crime, let not your thirst for opulence and comfort ever cause you to be guilty of a base or contemptible action ; if you raise yourselves by your industry, as I have very little more to bequeath you than my blessing, I entreat of you never to leave yourselves in the power of your friends, much more your enemies, as many false friends and false prophets are abroad ; therefore, be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves ; don't disgrace the memory of your ancestors by any ignoble or ruthless action ; rather receive an insult than give one. These words from an aged and affectionate parent made no small impression on my mind at the time, but from several circumstances that occurred since that period, they have been doubly impressed on it ; more so, when describing the barbarous and inhuman murder of my brother, at his residence near Castlerea in the County of Roscommon. I recollect one day when living at Fairfield the observations my father made about the Glinsk family. On walking to the summit of Mount-Mary, he pointed to several green fields that were reclaimed in his time, which he said he seen covered with heath and brushwood ; as also to some deep pits that the late Major Waller of Rookwood sunk to get coals, but failed, by which he lost a considerable sum of money ; and added, that his gambling in London and Paris was the principal cause of his handsome estate being sold, the chief part of which was purchased by the humane and benevolent Mrs. Walcott, the sister of Judge Caulfield of Donamon Castle, who bequeathed the rents of those manors for charitable purposes, and with which the Gaol Infirmary and Charter School of Roscommon are liberally endowed. When he came in sight of the cottage and garden wherein he was born, he seemed greatly affected and shed tears. After a pause of some time, “ my poor mother,” says he, “ breathed her last on this spot where I now sit : how often my two brothers and only sister, now mouldering in the grave, sported at our innocent amusement round these ruinous walls : but why should I grieve ; what is this world but vanity, and the longest that lives must only consider it a dream. I have no reason to complain : I have good children, and I know if your mother survive me that you will all endeavour to make her happy ; she is a worthy, humane woman, a virtuous exemplary wife, and a good mother. What would I not sacrifice, consistently with my salvation and the character of an honest man, for the welfare of my family; I have laboured incessantly for their support, and would at this moment lay down my life for their happiness. As to the Burke family,” added he, “ the most powerful feudal lords at one time in this country—who possessed that wide district of a beautiful and diversified vale, a land flowing with milk and honey—where is all their pomp and grandeur now ? The auctioneer's bell ringing every other day to sell those manors that they possessed for eight hundred years. Nothing is certain (says he) in this uncertain world.”

The first of the Burkes that gained an inheritance in this country was Rickarde de Burgh, whose father accompanied William Duke of Normandy into Great Britain at the time of the memorable Norman Conquest. For some trivial misdemeanor or levity with the wife of that puissant and illustrious Baron, Lord de Clifford, whose father signalized himself in the holy wars, better known as the sacred crusaders, and being in dread of the anger of that powerful General and exalted personage, De Burgh, a name afterwards changed to that of Burke, (though very little intercourse then existed between this country and England—at all events we did not sail by steam)—young Burke or De Burgh arrived from Wales, and, after wandering about some time, made his way into the province of Connaught.

Roderick O'Connor, the King of that principality, was in need of an experienced commander at the time, being then at war with that odious King, MacMurrough of Leinster, the father of the unfeeling seducer of the Princess of Brieffny, through whose intriguing means this fair Empire was brought under subjection to the British King.

The armies of these mighty Chieftains, aided by all their feudal knights and vassals, met by appointment near Lanesborough, in the County of Longford, where a most sanguinary battle was fought and well contested on both sides at the commencement ; the armies of Roderick suffered much and were in great consternation, which caused that monarch to make a precipitate retreat across a deep swamp, on which occasion he lost his crown : it was found by one Stafford, the ancestor of Thomas Stafford, Esq. of Portobello, in the County of Roscommon, on whom the Prince of Ardandrew, O'Ferrall, at the request of the Connaught King, bestowed some land near Longford, which his respected descendants hold to this day.

Burke displayed great valour in that battle, in which O'Connor was victorious, though thousands of his troops were slaughtered. But what endeared him most to the Connaught King was his gentlemanlike conduct in making excuses for his Prince when accused of pusillanimity by some of the chieftains and petty princes of his territory, amongst whom was the Great MacDermott of the Rock, the head of the illustrious house of Coolavin, O'Hara of Tyreaghreagh, and O'Doud of Tyrally. Burke being chiefly instrumental to this triumphant victory, which signalized the arms and puissant honors of the Royal house of O'Conor Don, his Majesty made him a public promise, that, the first vacancy that occurred by the death of any of his Knights, he (Burke) should be placed in his castle, and the estates attached thereto, giving him at the same time an invitation to reside at the Royal palace as gentleman at large, and appointing him Colonel of the Legion of Honor. These great expectations of young De Burgh caused him no small share of celebrity, which unfortunately turned to the basest conspiracy against an aged Knight of the name of O'Fenaughty, whose wife, a young woman, hearing of the great inducements held out to Colonel Burke, wrote him a letter, stating that she would have her old husband assassinated if he promised to marry her.—Whether De Burgh gave his assent is not on record ; however, the promise on her part was carried into execution, as the unfortunate O'Fenaughty was most inhumanly massacred while walking in a small wood contiguous to his residence. That castle is yet extant, and one of the oldest family residences, save Shane's Castle, in this kingdom ; it is well known (from its former hospitality, I cant say in them days, but in the days of the late and lamented St. George Caulfield,) as Donamon Castle, near Roscommon.

When King Roderick was told of the barbarous murder of his friend O'Fenaughty, he wept bitterly, and expressed aloud in the presence of his Council and the Archbishop of Tuam, “ O, God forgive me, a wicked sinner ; this base murder was committed solely through my means, in making young Burke an offer of the first knighthood vacant in this province. Go,” said he to Burke, “ enjoy the gift your valour deserves ; but if you were rapacious enough to be accessory to this base conspiracy it will turn to thee a curse tenfold more than a blessing.”

Colonel Burke married the only daughter of the murdered Knight by a former wife, and the reprobate widow was obliged to beg the country for support, held in the execration and contempt that so base and reprobate a character deserved ; abandoned even by her own relatives, the O'Malleys of Mayo. The two sons by the daughter of O'Fenaughty divided their patrimony ; the eldest got that part called Glinsk, on which he built that old ruin called Glinsk Castle, now a terrific roofless pile, haunted by a colony of rats, situate on the banks of a small stream, a low swamp ; and the spike holes and the ruts of old age are inhabited by a clutch of rapacious vultures. The descendants of the younger Burke retained that moiety called Donamon till the days of Oliver Cromwell, when it was wrenched from the heirs of that house, with the chief of the Skeftington estate, called Kilbegnad, and divided between the

Cootes of Castlecoote, and the Kings of Boyle, the ancestors of Lord Lorton. The latter family sold their part to Counsellor Caulfield, afterwards Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, whose ancestors held these manors in our own times ; but is at present set to a grazier of the name of Armstrong, from Fermanagh.

Sir Ulick Burke, Bart, sold the chief of the Glinsk estates some years back to the celebrated Counsellor Daly, commonly called, not Peter the Great, but Peter the Fool. His heiress married the late Charles Daly, Esq. of Dunsandle Castle, in the County of Galway, from whom she eloped a few months after with the humpbacked Earl of Kerry, who died at Hampton-Court, in the County of Middlesex, in 1816. All the Burkes, says my father, that you see scattered through this country, are descended from the Glinsk family ; and the first Rickarde Burke, who married that notorious and sanguinary woman, Matilda O'Kelly, a woman who personated her own father, the ruthless Chieftain of Mullaghmore Castle in the Barony of Athlone, in all his atrocities, and who was commonly called Noula Namidoge, or Matilda with the Bloody Dagger, she and her three sons, commonly called Clanrickarde, or Rick's sons, laid waste the chief of the County of Galway, which manors are retained to the present day by their progeny, the Lords who derive their titles from their ruthless and blood-thirsty ancestors—as Clanrickarde and Portumna Castle; however, says he, so far from attributing the atrocities of their sanguinary sires, or the wicked deeds of former ages, to the amiable and illustrious Earls who inherit these ill-gotten demesnes at the present time, I have the greatest respect for and the highest opinion of their humanity and many virtues.

Sir Festic Burke, adds he, married his kinswoman, a daughter of that noble house (alluding to Clanrickarde), but they had no issue. Her eldest sister named Lord Dillon of Costello—her second, Robert Dillon of Clonbrock—and the youngest, John Kelly of Castlekelly, who was no Brunmwicker, but a rigid Papist. So much for the Brunswick Secretary of that Popish house, sinking with moors and marshes, called Castlekelly, near Mount-Talbot.

“ The late Rick Burke's marriage with Miss Blake of Ardfry, or the elopement of their vicious daughter with a son of the house of Fitzgerald, is not worth my notice, so I pray you wont mention them.” This was my father's last remark about the Baronets of Glinsk Castle.

Pointing to Castlekelly, which lay some distance off, he observed, “ You have in view all that remains of the Chieftain's greatness ; though even that same is wages of apostacy, that family swayed the sceptre of this district for centuries ; but the downfall of Aughrim and Athlone put an end to their ambitious and overbearing pretensions.” Foolish Denis Kelly and his wool-jobbing at Ballinasloe, as also his imprudent marriage with a Miss Armstrong, impoverished that noble family. It was his own fault or he might have been married to the heiress of Lisduff, who was afterwards Countess of Altamont, and which aided much to the fortune of the Browne family.

Mount-Talbot, says my father, situated on the beautiful Suck, was given to the widow and children of the unfortunate Colonel Talbot for his good intentions towards the Prince of Orange while within the garrison of Limerick in 1689. When Sarsfield discovered Talbot's treachery, and the latter saw death was unavoidable, he committed suicide in his cell, though having no other instrument with which he could commit the act but the prong of his buckle. This family is descended from the same ancestors as those of the ancient house of Malahide in Fingal, who are a junior branch of the illustrious Earls of Shrewsbury in Salop, at one time Dukes of Tyrconnell in Ireland, and claim the same precedence here as the Dukes of Norfolk in the British Peerage. The demesnes of Mount-Talbot and Castlekelly join, though the former is in the County of Roscommon and the latter in the County of Galway ; both divided and beautified by the River Suck, which flows majestically and rapid in this neighbourhood.

The handsome seat of the Cheevers family is in this neighbourhood ; their progenitors were Viscounts Mount-Leinster, and resided in Naas Castle in the County of Kildare, of which they were deprived in that memorable year of unprecedented plunder and ruthless rapacity, 1688.

I am obliged, adds he, to say something of the Dillons, who, on their apostacy, were created Lords of Clonbrock. One circumstance connected with this short-lived family happened in my own time, and which I regret having heard no instance of before, that is, a father living to see his successor of age. He had a long contest some years back about the Earldom of Roscommon, but was as strenuously opposed by the late Viscount Dillon, of Costello, in the County of Mayo, who had just renounced

Popery to get a renewal of his outlawed and ancient titles. The late Pat Dillon, who married Miss Begg, of Beech-Abbey, near Carrick-on-Shannon, claimed and got the title, for which he was solely indebted to the Lord of Lough-Glynn, one of the most accomplished Peers that ever graced the high titles of that noble family, and who was maternally allied to the Earls of Lichfield in Staffordshire.

Mount Bellew, the noble seat of Michael Dillon Bellew, Esq., maternally descended from the noble house of Nugent, of Riverston, is within a few miles of Clonbrock ; it is, without flattery, one of the most magnificent country seats in this kingdom, embracing sublime and spontaneous boons, aided by the unrivalled taste of the late Mr. Bellew, who took no small pains to make this residence one of the most elysian, picturesque, and diversified in the kingdom, adorned with lakes, vista views, pleasure grounds, and as noble a family mansion as this empire can boast of.

I asked him about the Trenches of Ballinasloe, and he seemed reluctant in his answer ; after a short pause, he said he did not wish to say any thing about them. They are a haughty clan, and some what litigious since fortune favoured them, or at least since the sanguinary revolutions that distracted this unfortunate country rescued them from obscurity ; under other circumstances they might, like their ancestors, hide in the principality of the Dutch Prince. Notwithstanding being residents here these many years, deriving their support from the soil and the natives of this country, like the Hyena, nothing could tame them ; they were always ready to side the bad and unrelenting governments that oppressed the people : the more penal the disgraceful codes that passed into a law, the more apparently they enjoyed it. Previous to the franchise being granted to Catholics in 1793, the heirs of that house, in company with Eyre of Eyre-Court, returned themselves for this county, which then was a close borough ; the boon of 1793 they opposed, as they knew that they would be hurled from the representation, and so they were, of this great county, whose freemen are more worthy than to be any longer represented by illiberal and self-aggrandizing bigots. I cannot say much adds he for these revered sages who fill that honorable station at the present day ; but they appear to be somewhat more liberal in their views than the Trenches ; in many instances they thought by their influence, (I wont say by the bribery of a hut washed up with a bucket of lime, and a small garden,) to prevail on some to become Protestants ; in this they failed, save very few who would become any thing for the same wages. The connexions they formed were worthy of such an alliance, so that this race is as austere, coercive, and as obnoxious to the natives as the first possessor of that family who got as his reward the verdant plains in and about Garbally. The first of that family raised to the peerage was the late Baron Kilconnell, who joined the memorable auction of 1800, and took his title from the ruins of an old Popish abbey. So distressed were the mighty peers that they had no other foundation to ground their title upon but that wrenched from the ancient house of Clancarthy. All I have to add, says he, is, that I never knew one of the name esteemed in this country, much more these of Dunlow, or the Ashtowns, who took pleasure in keeping the natives in their present state of degradation and oppression by opposing Emancipation ; and as a reward for their unrelenting hostilities, there is not one of the pious group nor hardly one connected with them that does not enjoy a sinecure at the expense of the country ; however, says he, I think the Trenches are much on the decline as to having that influence with which these Cromwellian and Williamite aristocracy since they got into power swayed, under the cloak of loyalty ; the whole country is incensed and arrayed against these self-created monopolists, who have ruled and governed this kingdom to their own advantage for upwards of one hundred years, and sold it latterly to the highest bidder for pensions, titles and private emoluments, rich Bishopricks and large sinecures. In this he alluded to the union of 1800 as a general observation. There are several Kellys, or O'Kellys, in the district of Croffin and Athlone, but none who claim more feudal honors and respectability than O'Kelly of Tycoola, who, with the ancient family of Turrock, are acknowledged to be the lineal descendants from the great and illustrious O'Kelly of Aughrim Castle. Many others are considered spurious illegitimates, or descended from unacknowledged and remote junior branches ; some of them became apostates to enrich themselves at the expense of the lawful heirs, and others to obtain leases under rich Sees.

The O'Fallons, of Ballina, in this neighbourhood, are a respectable old family, and are connected with the noble house of Roscommon, and many others of equal claim. The unfortunate dispute which occurred some years ago between this family and one of the sons of Mount-Bellew, in which the latter was killed, caused the most poignant grief in the minds of both families—the victim of this duel having been most universally and deservedly lamented. But, adds my father, it is lamentable that such sanguinary meetings are allowed ; and indeed, says he, I think the demon of darkness is aiding and assisting the parties who promulgate and sanction such barbarous and disgraceful exhibitions in a Christian country. Duelling, by which so many valuable lives are sacrificed, destroys the peace of

many benevolent and highly respectable families during their career in this world ; and in no instance more so than on the premature demise of the justly-lamented Mr. Bellew, of Mount-Bellew.

The unfortunate Colonel Dillon, of this neighbourhood, at his residence called Johnstown, met with no better end, but under different circumstances from that of young Bellew. Mr. Dillon, I must confess, like many persons moving in high life, set a bad example to his own serfs and domestics, by keeping a kept mistress in his house, by whom he had a family, and I believe married while labouring under his wounds. This rabble, who lived on his bounty, conspired to take his life, and attacked him in bed at night, where he received such mortal and deadly blows as caused his death in a short time after. The chief of the gang was executed in the Town of Roscommon, I believe in 1805. Colonel Dillon was descended from a junior branch of the noble house of Clonbrock, a good soldier and a kind landlord. His son recently married the daughter of Sir Richard St. George, Bart., whose brother was most barbarously murdered in the same neighbourhood in 1816. In consequence of so many ruthless atrocities of this nature having occurred in this barony (Athlone), it is one of the last districts I would recommend any peaceable family to reside in.

I asked my father which were the most ancient and respectable Kellys in this barony. His answer was that the head of the Protestant aristocracy of that name were those of Castle-Kelly, Cargins, Kiltoom, Mucklin, and Churchborough ; the Catholics are those of Tycoole, Turrock, Scregg, and Ballymurray. As for the Barony of Athlone, says he, I wish to leave it as God left the Jews.....

A lady in this barony, whose name I will not mention, deserves, for her base treatment to her own daughter, to be exposed. The daughter disgraced herself in getting pregnant by some low menial in her father's establishment, and then her cruel mother locked her up in a garret room till starvation put an end to her sufferings in this world. Scenes of this kind, adds he, are revolting to the feelings of those who have the fear of God in their hearts, but those who have not are capable of feeling no remorse for any thing base or degrading. We have very few instances of this kind in Ireland : the only subject that has any connexion with the latter, that I recollect, is one horrible circumstance which occurred in the lower part of this county, (alluding to Galway,) not many years back, and that in a family highly connected. The daughter of a country squire was unfortunately enamoured of the son of a rustic farmer, convenient to her mother's residence ; her respected father paid that debt to the grave which we must all yield our frame to one day or other. It appears, said he, with tears of compassion in his eyes, that the unfortunate youth, who was only nineteen years of age, was seduced by the young lady to whom I allude to come to her bedroom window, which looked into a small pleasure garden, on the ground floor, after the family had retired to rest. However, the young lady's mother got a hint of what was going on, which she kept a profound secret from her daughter, as well as the rest of the family, till it was time for every person in the house to retire to their different apartments. She told her daughter that she must change her bed for that night, as she wished her eldest son, who was not well, to occupy her bed room. The unfortunate daughter seemed at the moment to labour under the most painful sensation, and with no small reluctance was obliged to yield. All the doors were locked, and not one of the domestics were allowed to leave the house. The mother seemed to watch her daughter, and never left her for a moment. The lights were put out, and the ruthless and sanguinary son took his station to commit as base a murder as ever disgraced the annals of this or any other country, for a crime, it seems, not committed, and of which he himself was so often guilty. Any thing but chastity, I might add, was inherent in the prodigal and debauched family from which he was descended. As for his mother, I know but little of her obscure pedigree. But I pass her by, and let the dead rest ; her spirit is fled, and she knows long before this if she were guilty or accessory to the premature death of the unfortunate boy, who fell a victim to the subtlety and wantonness of that imperious family. When the night was somewhat advanced, the foolish and imprudent rustic came to the window of the apartment where this young lady generally slept, and threw a little sand against it. Her brother rose immediately and threw up the window, to which the young man unfortunately advanced, thinking, as we must suppose, that all was right, and that no other but the young lady was going to receive him. But, alas ! he was much and fatally deceived, as the young lady's brother thirsted for blood, and spilled it profusely. He took a deadly aim at his unsuspected victim with rather an over-charged blunderbuss, and in consequence of the object being so close, blew his body into atoms. The mutilated carcase remained where it fell, till carried away next morning by his disconsolate friends. The affliction of the parents and friends of the deceased may be better conceived than described. Unquestionably, from what I understand from a person who knew the unfortunate youth from his birth, he was as well-disposed a boy as ever lived, and as free from vice. It seems the seduction was solely Miss——'s own doings, through the instrumentality of a female domestic, who was continually bringing messages

backwards and forwards. In a few days after the cruel death of the young man, who met an untimely grave through the wanton intrigue of this vicious young woman and her haughty friends, this ruthless-minded brother and his frail sister went to Galway, where he agreed with a sea captain to take her to one of those colonies in the Northern Ocean ; and the sooner some others of the same breed are sent there the better for the good of female morality. I could be more explicit, adds he, on this subject, but, to spare the feelings of some of the great ones, I pass it by for, the present.

He gave me a long history of the Abbey of St. John, near Athlone. The noble Abbey of St. John the Baptist, says he, was endowed in the days of St. Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland. The situation was worthy of such a seminary ; it was built on that lofty eminence, now in the possession of Mr. Hodson, called the Manor of St. John, which he refined, or corrupted from having too much Popery, to that of Hodson's Bay. The situation is most enchanting and diversified : a declivity on one side, and on the other the noble and copious Shannon water and its stupendous cliffs. Here nature has been more than prodigal in her boon on the verdant and Elysium plains in and about the sacred ruin, at one time, with all due solemnity and in the days of pure Christianity, dedicated to the greatest man born of woman, John the Baptist. It was for centuries the sanctuary wherein prayers were offered, from the rising of the sun till it disappeared from this hemisphere to another region. But, alas ! it has long since been converted into a den of thieves, and nothing remains of its former magnitude, admirable and costly architecture, but the archetype, and one or two lofty spires, occupied by a few daws and some vultures. The annual pattern, held here on the 25th of June, is generally attended by a great concourse of people. The concavity of the roofless edifice is converted into a burial ground—a privilege at one time granted only to the shrine of some very eminent persons of the priesthood, or some noble families, who, by their worth and long claim to feudal honours, or some liberal endowment, obtained that boon to which, under other circumstances, they dare not presume, nor would be admitted. But since the days of the celebrated Walter Devereux, the favourite gallant of the Virgin Queen, who was the first who made inroads on the monastic manors and pillaged the church in this kingdom, every plebeian and obscure upstart assumed the privilege of establishing his family vault within the sacred walls of this sanctuary ;—even several Protestant families, who were bound by their solemn oath, and who were prodigiously well paid for taking the said oath—or, I may add, a long catalogue of oaths—as nothing else would qualify their pious souls ; nor should any person be so absurd as to accuse their revered memories of any sordid view—the monopoly of the goods and chattels, or to move the landmark of their neighbours,—though they did believe, and were bound to do so, in the idolatry of their predecessors ; and the remnant that the sanguinary sword of the ruthless assassin, or the hidden dirk of the rapacious freebooter and the intruder, spared of the Catholic faith; yet, strange to say, the chief of those pious Protestants, or Knoxonians—as many of them followed and retained the sacred creed and sanctified edicts of the evangelical and orthodox Jack Knox, who perverted not the land of promise, but the land of fanaticism, Scotland—allowed their mortal and tawny shrines to be stretched in the same grave with pagan Papists. In several of the monasteries these pious triumphs are idolized; but I call them sanguinary revolutions, which threw into their unexpected possessions the extensive inheritance of the right owners.

However, I will pass by these observations for the present, to give an abridged sketch (which undoubtedly would be a ludicrous subject for Cruikshank) of the multiplicity of novel scenes to be witnessed in and about the noble ruin of the Convent of St. John, at the annual meeting, on the 25th of June ; it is within a few miles of the strong garrison town of Athlone, in the County of Roscommon. At first view, or on ascending the verdant and conspicuous hill, on which thousands are congregated together to offer their devotion to St. John, a stranger, not acquainted with the peculiar hilarity of the Irish peasantry, would undoubtedly think the whole group were labouring under a complication of mental affection and insanity, to which the human frame is so subject. But far from it : I could assure him, said my poor father, I never, in the whole course of my life, bought a dearer bargain than I did at this very pattern. The country simpletons who meet here for their holy-clay amusement are generally mixed with all sorts and sizes and particularly the knowing ones from Athlone, which, from the cheapness of its markets, is always filled with an eccentric group of sharpers Who, say they, (the countrymen,) can outdo an old soldier ? Athlone is well known as the pensioners' garrison. Here you see one man selling his pig, which is roaring all the time ; having been brought up as one of the family, and seeing itself under the transfer bond of conveyance, it sheds salt tears at parting with the friends and associates of its early days ; it feels as much as a Foundling Hospital boy would at parting with his County Wicklow nurse. Among the other commodities for sale are goats, jack asses, horned cattle, young fillies, flax, yarn, apples, gingerbread, a prodigious quantity of young scallions, and salt herrings, which are profusely given (by way of collation) by the young swains to their sweethearts.

After the repast is over, dancing commences on a platform, arranged for the purpose, in several booths, in which those of mature years join, as well as the beardless youths and lasses of the adjacent country. Here you behold a group lamenting and panegyrising their deceased friends—enumerating their many virtues, and the loss their posterity sustained in their premature demise—and cursing their fate for having been so unfortunate as to survive them. As this is a general mart for doing penance, you behold several on their bare knees, with long beads suspended from their fingers, and their lips moving, counting their Rosaries, dedicated to the Baptist, and beseeching his intercession that their manifold sins might be forgiven. When you pass these scenes, you meet a batch of riotous tinkers, jumping over sticks, adjusted at a certain height from the surface ; the man jumps first, and the bride, with apparent diffidence, next. This qualification legalizes the marriage, and the happy pair are led in triumph. with music playing and horns blowing, to proclaim the union through the whole assembly. These, with many other ludicrous exhibitions, save a few skirmishes between different clans, such as the O’Kellys and the O’Mooneys, put an end to the great and riotous pattern of St. John the Baptist.

The noble family of Dillon, well known as the Lords of Costello Gallen, in Mayo, and the Dowell family, have large estates in this neighbourhood, with several beautiful and romantic islands on the River Shannon, which forms into one of the most enchanting and picturesque inland oceans, not to be equalled in any part of Europe ; it is well known as Loughree, and separates the Counties of Longford, Westmeath, and Roscommon. The Hodson family, who reside here, are maternally allied to the celebrated and immortal Goldsmith ; and the “ Deserted Village,” on which he was so prodigal in praise, is just in view from the noble but ruinous Abbey of St. John. The Shannon at this point is considered about fourteen miles broad.

The family of Mr. Kelly, in the neighbourhood of St. John, at a rural seat called Killtoom, is highly respectable ; as also the Dowell family, at an ancient seat called Gort.

Screggs, the admired residence of Edmond Kelly, Esq., a short distance from the great road leading from Athlone to Roscommon, deserves to be particularly mentioned. Mr. Kelly is descended from a junior branch of the house of Turroch ; and though his patrimony is not extensive, he has managed his limited rent-roll with judicious but gentlemanlike economy ; so much so, that he keeps a respectable equipage, a hospitable table, and is able to relieve many meritorious but indigent objects in and about his rural habitation. Mr. Kelly married Miss Lambert, of Milford, in the County of Galway, the daughter of John Lambert, Esq., by the amiable and accomplished Miss Burke, the youngest daughter of Sir John Burke, Bart., of Glinsk Castle, by Miss Netterville, of Longford, near Mount-Bellew. This honourable union brought Mr. Kelly connected with the Baronets of Glinsk Castle—the Burkes of Cleranbridge, and the Burkes of Meelick—the Lamberts of Haggard, Cregclare and Castle-Lambert—all in the County of Galway.

Ballymurry, the handsome seat of Captain Kelly, which commands a delightful view of the Shannon, adds much to the diversified sceneries in this neighbourhood.

Moate-Park, the ancient seat of the Murray family, after which it was called Ballymurray, but of which they were most unjustly deprived by the sanguinary revolutions into which the unlamented house of Stuart plunged this unfortunate country, is for upwards of a century in the possession of the Crofts, or Crofton family, to which, having become extinct from male issue some years back, the family of Sir Hugh Crofton, of Mohill, in the County of Leitrim, claimed a hereditary right : but Edward Lawder, Esq. of Kilmore, near Elphin, who was maternal nephew to Sir Edward Crofton, as also the kinsman of the esteemed late Oliver Goldsmith, of the Elysian Auburn, on the banks of the Shannon, in Westmeath, and whose father was barbarously murdered in that county, changed his name from Lawder to that of Crofton. He got possession of the house and estates of Ballymurray, and after a long litigation between him and the other branches of the Croftons, he married the daughter of an attorney of the name of Croaks or Croker, by whom he got a large fortune, which enabled him to pay a bench of lawyers, (who generally flock about a man of fortune or expectations on these occasions,) and some family incumbrances ; being eased of these pestiferous tormentors, he offered himself as a Candidate for the County of Roscommon, which in these days was nothing better than a close borough between the Cootes of Castlecoote, the Kings of Boyle, and the Sandfords of Castlereagh. Sir Robert King, afterwards Lord Kingsborough, the new Baronet, (Sir Edward Lawder Crofton,) and Mr. French of Frenchpark, appeared on the hustings as Candidates. Sir Robert King being the popular candidate, the contest lay between French and Lawder Crofton : the dispute ran high between the parties, and some old spleen was revived, in which French was upbraided of a gross fraud said to have

been committed by one of his family while treasurer of the county. The ripping up of these old sores in a public Court-house, threw such a stigma on the character and so wounded the feelings of the Frenches, that the dispute could not be settled without a hostile meeting ; consequently the unfortunate George French of Endfield, not long married at the time, sent a message to the new Baronet of the house of Lawder. They met at the back of that old ruin called the Castle of Roscommon, where, on the first shot, the unfortunate George French was mortally wounded. What added to his torture was the amputation of his leg from the thick part of the thigh, which was afterwards carried to a small Church, not quite finished at the time, a short distance from the house of Frenchpark, where it remained but a few days till the body of the unfortunate George French was closed with it for ever in the same grave. This, said my father, did not end their misfortunes, for two other brothers of the house of French met with a premature death, being drowned, during a dreadful storm, on their passage from Parkgate to Dublin, and one of them only a few days married to the rich heiress of the house of Cloughan, in the barony of Athlone. This threw the property into the possession of Arthur French, of Dominick-street, wine merchant, the only surviving brother, and not long married to a Miss Magenis of the North. To return to the Croftons, adds he, they were any thing but happy. King and Lawder Crofton were returned at this election, after a great deal of human blood inundating the county. Even the old pump and jambs of the gaol did not escape the uncontrollable mob that joined the heir of MoatePark. “ Any money,” said the ringleader of the lawless mob of the town of Roscommon, aided by a number of the barony boys, “ for the head of any of the Toobeheen men,” alluding to the Frenchpark freeholders. The late Sir Edward Crofton, Bart, the eldest son of Lawder Crofton, married the daughter of the late Earl of Galloway, of Gallowayshire, in Scotland, sister to the Marchioness of Blandford, an amiable wife and a good mother. The unfortunate Sir Edward got rather irritated in consequence of being obliged to sell a portion of his estates in the County of Limerick to Baron O’Grady to pay off some family incumbrances, and for a useless and distempered stud of horses purchased at one of the embarrassed auctions of the late Duke of York. Sir Edward was fond of Royal blood, but never was man so completely taken in in his English mares. These annoyances preyed on his mind to such a degree, as also some exorbitant expenses he was at in building that noble mansion called Moat-house, (which I believe he never occupied,) that his mind could no longer bear those mischances and disappointments. Being haunted by some evil thoughts, after kissing the whole of his lovely family, and coming in from the pleasure grounds where he had been walking, to know if the children had dined, and being answered in the affirmative, he walked into the school-room, and, melancholy to relate, after bidding them adieu for ever, shot himself in a small grove a short distance from his own house. So rash an act in so honorable and respected a gentleman astonished many, and plunged a large circle of friends and relatives into a state of grief and affliction easier to be conceived than described. His amiable widow, Lady Charlotte Crofton, and her young family, at present reside in London, where they occupy a splendid mansion in Montague-square. Moate Park is delightfully situated ; it is about two miles from the town of Roscommon, and is adorned with a magnificent mansion, recently built, surrounded with groves, enchanting vista views, some beautiful ponds, and a diversified country which combines all that is sublime and beautiful.

The recollections of Skeffington Gibbon, from 1796 to the present year, 1829; : being an epitome of the lives and characters of the nobility and gentry of Roscommon; the genealogy of those who are descended from the kings of Connaught; and a memoir of the late Madame O’Conor Don. (1829)

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