

Roderic O'Conor

Monarch Of Ireland

1156-1186.

The O'Conors of Connaught
an Historical Memoir, compiled from a MS of The Late John O'Donovan, LL.D.
with additions From the State Papers and Public Records
By the Rt. Hon. Charles Owen O'Conor Don

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ON the death of Turlough the Great, his son Roderic succeeded him as King of Connaught ; but the sovereignty of all Ireland passed without contention into the hands of Murtough M'Loughlin, the heir of the previous monarch, King of Ailech, and head of the northern Hy-Niall. Although M'Loughlin soon became as powerful as any of his predecessors since the time of Niall of the Nine Hostages, yet Roderic, who did not feel himself at once strong enough to enter into a contest for the sovereignty, entertained hopes of being able, later on, to assume the position occupied by his father.

To accomplish this object, he had recourse to the same tactics as had formerly proved so successful, and at once set about subduing some of the hereditary enemies of his race, and obtaining the recognition of some of the subordinate kings, who were disaffected towards the reigning family of Ulster. With this view, he invaded Munster in 1157, and received hostages from both O'Brien and M'Carthy. He then demanded hostages from the King of Leinster, and shortly after he collected some ships on the river Shannon, and prepared for an attack on the northern kingdom. After several encounters with his sovereign, Roderic found him too powerful, and submitted to his authority, giving hostages in the usual way. At the same time, Dermot M'Murrough, King of Leinster, adopted a similar course, and then, in the words of the annalists, Murtough M'Loughlin " became King of Erin without opposition, and he gave the half of Meath to Dermot O'Melaghlin and the other half to Roderic O'Conor." [1] From this date until his death, M'Loughlin was recognised without dispute as the monarch of Ireland. In the year 1166 he was slain in an insurrection raised by his own subjects in Ulster, and on his death the sovereignty reverted to the King of Connaught ; and Roderic, as the most powerful provincial king, was soon recognised as monarch by the whole island.

His first assertion of authority was in a conflict with the Danes of Dublin, against whom he marched with a large force, and having taken their city, and secured their allegiance, he was inaugurated " as honourably as any king of the Gaels had ever been." On this occasion he presented the Danes with the stipends due to him from them as his vassals ; after which they accompanied him to Drogheda, where he was met by Donough O'Carroll and the chieftains of Oriel, who submitted to him and delivered hostages. He then returned to South Leinster, received the hostages of Dermot M'Murrough, and proceeded with the forces of Connaught, Breifny, and Meath, into Munster, where all the chieftains of the South having submitted to him, he divided Munster into two parts between McCarthy and O'Brien.

Roderic O'Conor, being now fully recognised as supreme sovereign of all Ireland, turned his attention towards the pacification and better government of the whole island, and with this view convened an assembly of the chieftains and clergy of the northern half of Ireland at

Athboy, near the famous hill of Flactga in Meath. To this assembly came Gelasius, Archbishop of Armagh ; Catholicus O'Duffy, Archbishop of Tuam ; and Laurence O'Toole, Archbishop of Dublin. The following chieftains and their supporters also attended :—

O'Melaghlin, King of Meath ; Randal MacRandall, King of the Danes of Dublin ; O'Rourke, Chief of Breifny ; M'Felen, Chief of Offaly or Offalon ; O'Carroll, and several others. At this meeting various laws and regulations relating to the ecclesiastical and temporal affairs of the country were enacted ; and the annalists remark, that so great was the order, peace, and tranquillity which prevailed immediately after, that women were wont to traverse Ireland alone without any protector. All this is attributed by the annalists to “ the blessings which God showered down on Erin in consequence of the righteousness of its sovereign, Roderic O'Conor, the descendant of the elder brother of Niall of the Nine Hostages.”

Shortly after this, Roderic, hearing that Tyrone was disturbed, in consequence of a dispute between M'Loughlin and O'Neill, respecting the portion of Tyrone which each ought to possess, “ summoned a hosting” of the men of Erin, and was joined by Cormac McCarthy, King of Desmond, Murtough O'Brien of Thomond, Dermot O'Melaghlin of Meath, Donough O'Carroll, Lord of Uriel, and all the chieftains of Leinster. This large force having been collected, he marched into Tyrone, and divided the territory between Neal M'Loughlin and Hugh O'Neill, giving to the former the southern part, and to the latter the northern portion of the district, and, as monarch, received hostages from both as pledges for their obedience and fealty. This enterprise being ended, the several kings and chieftains returned to their respective homes, Roderic O'Conor escorting the King of Desmond as far as Knockany, near Bruff, in the County of Limerick, where he dismissed him with many presents.

Whilst everything seemed thus to indicate a long and successful reign for Roderic, and all sorts of prosperity for his country, a storm was about to burst on the island over which he held sway, which was as little expected as it was far-reaching in its consequences. Hitherto, with the exception of the Danish irruption, Ireland had been free from any serious foreign invasion, and all her struggles and conflicts were confined to her own sons ; but the moment now approached when completely new actors were to appear on the scene, and when the independence of Ireland as a separate and distinct nation was to vanish.

The two most warlike and turbulent chieftains in Ireland during the reign of Turlough O'Conor, and who disturbed the kingdom for many years under his son, were Tiernan O'Rourke, chief of Breifny, and Dermot M'Murrough, King of Leinster. M'Murrough, who was about ten years younger than O'Rourke, had long been distinguished for his fierce activity in those scenes of violence with which Ireland was then agitated. He had been active in the field so early as the year 1137, and in 1141 had rendered himself an object of dread and horror throughout the kingdom by treacherously seizing upon seventeen of the principal nobles of Leinster, some of whom he put to death, and others he caused to be blinded. Between him and O'Rourke, who was also a fierce warrior, a hostile feeling had arisen at an early period, which continued to increase by slow degrees, until at last it rose to its highest pitch of rancour and fury in the year 1152, when both were far advanced in years. In that year, as before mentioned, Dervorgill, the wife of O'Rourke, was carried off by Dermot, whilst O'Rourke was on a pilgrimage at Croaghpatrick. O'Rourke, on his return, found that his wife had left his house, taking with her all her trinkets, having been encouraged to do this by her brother, Melaghlin, son of Murrough O'Melaghlin, who had a quarrel with her husband some time previously. O'Rourke at once appealed for redress to the monarch, Turlough, who, sympathizing with him, marched in the year 1153, with a numerous army, into Leinster, rescued Dervorgill from M'Murrough, and conveyed her back with her trinkets and

ornaments, to Meath, where he placed her under the care of her father's family, the O'Melaghlin's. [2]

So long as Turlough O'Conor lived, O'Rourke found in him a sturdy protector ; but on the accession of Murtough MacLoughlin to the sovereignty, M'Murrough renewed his attacks upon O'Rourke, and subjected him to every variety of wrong and insult. A check was put to these proceedings when Roderic O'Conor became king. Dermot by his haughtiness and cruelty had rendered not only the men of Breifny and Meath his bitterest enemies, but also many of his own subjects in Leinster, especially the Danes of Dublin. All these were now anxiously bent on his destruction, and flocked to the standard of his adversary. Attacked by such a formidable alliance, and deserted by his own subjects, Dermot retired at first to the castle of Ferns ; but seeing no chance of being able to withstand his assailants, he determined to seek foreign aid, and having set fire to his castle, in the seventy-eighth year of his age, he fled privately, to England, whereupon his kingdom of Leinster was declared by the monarch to be forfeited, and his cousin, Murrough, was nominated in his place.

On arriving at Bristol, Dermot learned that the King of England was at that time in Aquitaine, and thither he hastened to seek him. Henry listened to the fugitive old man with great complacency ; and Dermot offered, if restored by Henry's aid to his kingdom of Leinster, to receive it as a fief, and render him homage as his vassal.

No evidence has been discovered to show that Dermot had any previous communication with the King of England on the subject of the invasion of Ireland, and it is highly probable that he had not. Henry at that time had his hands full with other troubles ; but it is well known that this able and ambitious monarch had many years previously contemplated the acquisition of Ireland ; and the celebrated Bull of Pope Adrian IV., dated A.D. 1153, and which purported to give the Pope's sanction to the invasion, clearly shows that Henry had long had designs on that country. The much debated question of the authenticity or otherwise of this Papal Bull, is a subject quite outside the limits of this memoir ; but whether really granted by the Pope or not, there can be no doubt that King Henry produced it, that it was accepted as genuine by many of the clergy and people of Ireland, and that upon it Henry founded his claim to interfere as a superior lord in the affairs of that country. He had long desired an opportunity for such interference ; and although the flight of Dermot from Ireland and his appeal for assistance came at an unfortunate moment, the opportunity was not to be rejected. [3] Henry received without hesitation the proffered fealty of his new liegeman, and gave him letters patent, to be employed throughout his dominions, authorizing any of his subjects to assist him.

Furnished with these credentials, Dermot hastened back to England, and repairing once more to Bristol, made every effort, by promulgating the King's letters, and holding forth liberal offers of lands and other rewards, to induce adventurers to take up arms in his cause. He was not long without receiving an answer to his appeal. This answer came from Richard, Earl of Pembroke, surnamed Strongbow, a brave nobleman of ruined fortune. To him Dermot offered his daughter in marriage, and the succession to the kingdom of Leinster, on condition that he would raise for him an efficient body of forces, and bring them over with him into Ireland in the course of the ensuing spring.

To these propositions Strongbow assented, and Dermot, removing from Bristol to the town of St David's, met there two young men of high rank and ruined fortunes, Maurice Fitzgerald and Robert Fitzstephen, both Normans, and half-brothers, being sons of Nesta, mistress of King Henry I. To these he also made overtures, but difficulties were thrown in their way by Rice Ap. Griffith, King of Wales, who had thrown Fitzstephen into prison for debt. In con-

sequence of this, the negotiation lingered for some time, but concluded satisfactorily to the three parties ; Dermot pledging himself to give in fee to the two brothers the town of Wexford and two cantreds of land adjoining it ; while they on their side undertook to transport into Leinster, as soon as the season permitted, a body of English and Welsh forces, to aid him in recovering his kingdom.

Thus assured of English aid, Dermot ventured to return into Leinster ; and proceeding privately to Ferns, remained concealed there during the greater part of the winter. After some time he emerged from his concealment, and in the year 1167 [4] took the field, and regained possession of the territory of Hy-Kinsellagh, a district co-extensive with the diocese of Ferns. Surprised at the suddenness of Dermot's reappearance, and still more on hearing that he was attended by foreigners. King Roderic collected some forces, and being joined by O'Rourke, marched into the territory of Hy-Kinsellagh. Dermot, being able to make but a feeble resistance, only some stragglers from Wales having as yet arrived, was obliged to retreat to the woods, where he was pursued, surrounded, and taken prisoner. [5] He made ample submission ; denied all his negotiations with the Welshmen, and was pardoned by the Irish monarch. Renouncing all claim to the kingdom of Leinster, he requested to be allowed to retain only ten cantreds of that province, agreeing to hold them from Roderic, and giving seven hostages for his future fealty. He offered to pay one hundred ounces of gold to O'Rourke as "eric" for the injury he had done to him, and in every way submitted to O'Conor. Although these were but false promises and hollow pretences made to gain time, and to ward off the danger to which his premature operations had exposed him, yet they were, to a great extent, successful. Neither the Irish monarch nor his chieftains had any idea of King Henry's designs, or of the understanding which existed between Dermot and his English allies, and satisfied with the ample submission made by the King of Leinster, Roderic returned to Meath, and there, in the year 1168, [6] for the last time celebrated the great fair of Tailton, the host assembled on this occasion spreading out over six miles.

Roderic O'Conor and his followers having withdrawn in fancied security in the following May, A.D. 1169, the first landing of the Anglo-Normans in Ireland took place. The commander of this expedition was Robert Fitz-stephen, who brought with him thirty knights, all his own relatives or house-hold, sixty men in coats of mail, and three hundred of the most skilful archers of South Wales. With this small army, which landed at a creek called Bannow, in the south of the present county of Wexford, came also Harvey de Montemarisco, the paternal uncle of Strongbow, who is also described as a person in needy circumstances, who without either arms or means, had joined the expedition rather as the emissary of his nephew than as a soldier.

On the day following, there arrived at the same place Maurice de Prendergast, a valiant gentleman of Wales, at the head of a few knights and a small body of archers. Messengers were immediately despatched to announce their arrival to Dermot, who instantly collected his forces, and having got together about 500 men, hastened to join them. The united army, numbering in all about 1,000 men, then marched to the town of Wexford. On reaching the suburbs of this maritime city, which was inhabited chiefly by Danes, they were met by about 2,000 of the inhabitants. These were mainly a tumultuous crowd, and as soon as they had observed the orderly array of the Anglo-Norman troops, the cavalry drawn up on the flank of the archers, according to the Norman discipline ; when they beheld the shining armour and the shields of the knights, the novelty of the spectacle made them waver, and after a little hesitation, they set fire to the outskirts of the town, and retired within its fortifications.

Fitzstephen, taking advantage of what he believed to be a panic on the part of the townsmen, and anxious to strike a decisive blow before the real strength of the invaders became

known, led on his men at once to scale the walls of the town, but he was met with a brave resistance from its defenders, who hurled down huge stones and beams on the heads of their assailants, so that the latter were obliged to withdraw for the moment, after having burned all the shipping lying at anchor in the harbour.

On the following day, Fitzstephen resolved to renew the attack ; but the citizens believing that their ex-king had countless forces at his back, and being quite ignorant of the real weakness of their assailants, came to the conclusion that it would be better to make terms with Dermot ; accordingly they offered to capitulate ; and a negotiation was carried on through the mediation of two bishops, under which it was agreed that the town should be given up, and hostages delivered for the future good conduct of its inhabitants, whom Dermot pardoned and received again as his subjects.

These negotiations being completed, Dermot took possession of Wexford with great pomp, marching into it with his allies. Hastening to fulfil his engagements to the two Norman brothers, he invested Fitzstephen and Maurice Fitzgerald with the lordship of the town and its domain, while he gave to Harvey de Montemarisco, in order to attach him to his service, two cantreds of land lying on the sea side between Wexford and Waterford. [7] “ This tract of land is now comprised in the baronies of Forth and Bargy, in which the descendants of these, the first English settlers in Ireland, are still distinguishable from the native Irish by their customs, characteristics, and personal appearance ; and, even to a recent date, a dialect remained in use peculiar to these baronies, which was generally known throughout Leinster as the barony of Forth dialect.” [8]

After this triumphant entry into Wexford, Dermot conducted his allies to his own castle at Ferns, and remained with them there for three weeks, whilst they laid plans for future operations. The united forces now amounted to about 2,000 men. Dermot’s first project was to be revenged on M’Gilla-patrick of Ossory, who had, some time before, seized and blinded his eldest son, and who had been one of the first to shake off his authority when he perceived that his tide of good fortune began to ebb. To carry out this project, an expedition into Ossory was organized, and a battle ensued, in which the men of Ossory were overpowered by the Anglo-Norman cavalry, and the native infantry. After this battle three hundred heads were placed as a trophy at the feet of Dermot, who, as we are informed by Giraldus, on turning them over, leaped with delight as he recognised the faces of his former enemies, and at length, holding up his hands, shouted out thanksgiving to God. After this battle, Dermot and his followers overran Ossory, meeting with no further resistance.

Tidings of these proceedings soon reached the ears of the monarch Roderic, who ordered out his troops, and proceeded to Tara, where he was joined by the chieftains of east and central Ulster. The combined army then marched to Dublin, whence they intended to proceed to Wexford, but the “ curse of all Irish counsels,” disunion and dissension, began to work its accustomed paralyzing effects. The Ulster chieftains became jealous of the power of Roderic O’Conor. They refused to co-operate with him, and returning to their own country, left him with his own provincial troops from Connaught, assisted by O’Rourke, and the Dano-Irish of Dublin, to take the field against the invaders.

Dermot was meanwhile, with his allies, concealed in a fortress near Ferns, surrounded by almost impassable woods and morasses. Daily expecting additional aid from England, his object was to gain time ; and to attain this end he was ready to make any temporary submission which the indignant monarch might demand. Many of his Irish subjects had deserted him ; and he was left few supporters, except the band of Anglo-Norman adventurers and their followers. Roderic knew little of the true position of affairs ; he regarded the present insur-

rection much in the same light as those that had preceded it, and imagined that by negotiations and parading an over-whelming force, he could compel Dermot to return to his allegiance, and to give pledges for his future good behaviour. Accordingly, instead of crushing at once the rebellious chieftain, and driving the foreign invaders out of the kingdom, he opened negotiations with both. The result of these negotiations was that a compact was entered into between the two parties, in which it was agreed that the full rights of sovereignty over the province of Leinster should be enjoyed by Dermot and his heirs on the usual condition of his acknowledging the supremacy of Roderic, and rendering him homage as his liege subject. In pledge for the performance of this service, Dermot delivered hostages, and among them his eldest son Conor, his grandson Dermot (the son of his son Donnell Kavanagh), and the son of his foster-brother, O'Caally. Roderic, on his part, undertook that should the compact be faithfully observed, he would give his daughter in marriage to Dermot's son. [9]

By this compact Dermot was forgiven his treason, and restored to his kingdom of Leinster, under the sanction of Roderic, who knew nothing as yet of the agreement between him and the Earl of Pembroke, and nothing whatever of King Henry's designs upon Ireland. It would appear, however, from the work attributed to Maurice Regan, who was Dermot's interpreter, that another article was added to the treaty by which the King of Leinster pledged himself not to call over any more strangers from England, and to dismiss the hiring soldiers then in his service, as soon as the affairs of Leinster had assumed a more settled state. These articles being ratified, and the hostages given, Roderic drew off his forces, leaving Dermot and his allies to settle between themselves.

Reviewed by the light of subsequent experience, the conduct of the Irish monarch seems infatuated and pusillanimous to the last degree. Dermot had on more than one occasion before entered into compacts which he had unhesitatingly broken, and how the monarch could have been persuaded into again trusting him seems difficult to understand. Yet a judgment such as this on the conduct of Roderic may not be altogether fair. It must be remembered that all that was claimed by the monarchs of Ireland from the subordinate kings was their acknowledgment of the monarch as their superior lord. The delivery of hostages, and the payment of tribute, fulfilled this acknowledgment. Dermot was the hereditary King of Leinster. In acknowledging Roderic as monarch, and taking his kingdom under him, he did all that any of the subordinate kings could be expected to do, and his having called in the aid of foreign hirelings to assist him when in difficulties, was not a completely novel proceeding, as it had previously been frequently done by other chieftains, when mercenaries from Scotland, the Hebrides, and the Isle of Man were called in. Moreover, Roderic's own right to the monarchy was not itself universally admitted, without jealousy ; and even on this very expedition against Dermot, he was deserted by nearly all the other provincial kings. In entering into this arrangement the Irish monarch may, therefore, have imagined that he secured an ally, and accomplished all that he could justly expect to gain by further warlike proceedings.

The sincerity of Dermot's submission was, however, soon put to the test. Shortly after Roderic's departure, Maurice Fitzgerald, the half-brother of Fitz-stephen, arrived in the port of Waterford, attended by ten knights, one hundred archers, and thirty horsemen ; and, in violation of his treaty, Dermot proceeded immediately to meet him. Leaving Fitzstephen to superintend the erection of a fort on the summit of a hill near Wexford, he associated the new-comer with himself in the command of an expedition against the Ostmen, or Danes of Dublin. For about four generations the Dano-Irish of Dublin had acknowledged Dermot's ancestors as their sovereigns, but they had frequently rebelled ; and if we can believe Giraldus, they had murdered Dermot's father, and buried his body with that of a dog. No good feeling had ever existed between them and the King of Leinster, who tyrannized over

them with the utmost severity when his power was in the ascendant ; whilst they, on their part, whenever an opportunity offered, endeavoured to shake off his authority. During the reign of the late monarch, Turlough Mor, they had received his son Conor as their king ; when Roderic proceeded to Leinster, they were his allies ; and now when that monarch departed, having agreed to reinstate Dermot, they found themselves left to the mercy of their old enemy and superior lord. His hostility was soon declared. Accompanied by Maurice Fitzgerald, and his knights and archers, Dermot marched with a numerous army of the Leinster men to the neighbourhood of Dublin, and commenced a siege of the city, destroying all the property belonging to the citizens on which he could lay hands, but before he had succeeded in forcing the citizens to surrender, a change came over his plans, and more important projects in the south diverted his attention from Dublin for a short time.

At this moment troubles arose in the south between Roderic O'Conor and Donnell O'Brien, King of Munster, who had cast off his allegiance. Roderic, to maintain his authority, was obliged to lead his forces against O'Brien. The news of these proceedings reached Dermot whilst engaged in operations before Dublin. To weaken, or, if possible, destroy the power of the Irish monarch, became his first object, and he at once determined to join O'Brien. Abandoning for the moment the siege of Dublin, he marched with as great rapidity as possible to Munster, and having united with O'Brien, a battle ensued, in which Roderic was defeated, and obliged to retire to Connaught

New dreams of aggrandisement now filled the brain of Dermot, and he flattered himself with the idea of obtaining the sovereignty of Ireland for himself. His grandfather had been Monarch of Ireland ; and if the King of Connaught could be set aside, no other provincial king could be regarded as more powerful than the King of Leinster, especially when aided by his foreign allies. To these allies Dermot communicated his designs. Fitzstephen and Fitzgerald applauded his ambition. These able warriors perceived at once how efficiently such a scheme would serve their own and the English interests generally, and they advised him to renew his application for assistance to the Earl of Pembroke, and to urge him to come over with reinforcements without delay.

Richard, Earl of Pembroke, commonly called " Strongbow," had been watching the proceedings of his countrymen in Ireland with much anxiety ; but it appeared to him that before he himself took any part in them, he should obtain direct authority from Henry. He therefore set out for Normandy, where Henry was, waited on him, and having urged his suit with earnestness, received in return an ambiguous answer, which he knew was designed to bear a double interpretation. Armed with this answer, which he was determined to accept as an assent to his petition, he returned to England, and prepared to proceed on his expedition.

As soon as the season permitted the embarkation of troops, he sent over to Ireland, as his advance-guard, ten knights and seventy archers, under the command of Raymond le Gros, who, landing at a place not far from Waterford, was soon joined by Harvey de Montemarisco and his followers. Here they raised a small fort, in which they hoped to be able to maintain themselves till the arrival of Strongbow ; and if Giraldus can be believed, they successfully resisted an attack from 3,000 of the citizens of Waterford, whom they repelled with the loss of 500 killed.

Whilst these events were passing in Ireland, Strongbow himself having left Chepstow, proceeded along the coast of South Wales to St. David's, gathering new followers to his standard ; and after having collected a sufficient force, consisting partly of volunteer adventurers, and partly of his own vassals, he was on the point of embarking with his army from Milford, when an order reached him from King Henry, positively forbidding that he should leave the kingdom. He hesitated for a moment ; but his dark prospects at home, and the hope of better-

ing his fortune in the western island, induced him to disobey. He boldly issued the order to sail ; and on the eve of the feast of St. Bartholomew, in the year 1170, he landed near Waterford, with an army of 1,200 men of whom 200 were knights. Immediately on his arrival he was joined by Raymond le Gros, with a small body of horsemen ; and as Strongbow was anxious to commence his operations by an attack upon Waterford, it was determined that with the forces then under his command, and without waiting for the promised aid of the King of Leinster, the assault should be undertaken on the following day.

The citizens of Waterford, consisting mainly of Dano-Irishmen, defended their city with resolution and spirit, and twice repulsed the attempts of the assailants. “ At length,” says Giraldus, “ Raymond, perceiving in the east angle of the walls a small house projecting on timber props, ordered some of his knights to hew down the props, which being done, the house fell, and with it part of the wall. A breach being thus opened, the troops poured into the city, and took dreadful revenge for the resistance which they had encountered, by a general slaughter of all whom they met in the streets without distinction or mercy.” In a tower (now called the king’s tower), of which Reginald, a Dano-Irish lord, was governor, that chieftain and O’Phelan, chief of the Desies, had taken refuge, but being dragged forth, were on the point of being put to death when most unexpectedly they found themselves rescued by the interposition of Dermot, who had just arrived on the scene of carnage, with his daughter Eva, and his trusty liegemen Fitzstephen and Fitzgerald.

The Earl of Pembroke received him with all honours ; but little time was allowed for welcome or ceremony, as intelligence had arrived from Dublin that Hasculph, the Danish governor of that city, had revolted, and it was deemed necessary to march thither without delay. Giraldus relates that the marriage of Dermot’s daughter Eva, with Strongbow, was first celebrated, and that after it the whole army set out for Dublin, with the exception of a small body of troops left to garrison Waterford.

The bold step taken by Hasculph, in declaring his defection from Dermot, was encouraged by the monarch, Roderic O’Conor, who becoming alarmed on hearing of the arrival of so many hostile foreigners, had assembled a large army, and had taken up his position at Clondalkin, near Dublin. In the meantime, the confederate troops of Earl Strongbow and Dermot were rapidly pressing on their march ; and learning that the woods and defiles between them and Dublin were occupied by the Irish troops, they turned out of the ordinary route, and made their way along the tops of the mountains of Glendalough, and so reached unmolested the very walls of the city.

The inhabitants, who had relied for protection on the large army under Roderic O’Conor, were seized with consternation at the sudden appearance of their ferocious enemy, King Dermot, at their very gates, supported with a large foreign force

In this emergency they had recourse to the mediation of the clergy, and the celebrated Laurence O’Toole, Archbishop of Dublin, who was then in the city, undertook, at the earnest solicitation of the citizens, to mediate on their behalf. Whilst the negotiators on each side were conferring together outside the walls, Milo de Cogan, a puissant Anglo-Norman knight, and his comrades, were inspecting the ramparts in search of an assailable point, and as soon as the time allowed to the bishop for the purpose of parley had expired, or, according to some accounts, even before its expiration, Milo de Cogan and Raymond le Gros gave the signal for the assault, and leading their troops to a part of the walls which they had observed to be ill-defended, were in a few moments in the streets of Dublin, where the unfortunate inhabitants, taken off their guard, were slaughtered and plundered without mercy. Hasculph and some of the leading citizens succeeded in escaping to the vessels which lay at anchor in the harbour,

and with the aid of a favourable wind made their way to the Orkney Islands, but the city remained in the possession of the invaders.

Meanwhile Roderic O'Conor, who lay encamped outside of Dublin, instead of rushing to the aid of the unfortunate inhabitants, was induced to draw off his forces to assist his liegeman, O'Rourke of Breifny, whom he had lately made King of Meath, and whose rights over that kingdom were at this moment disputed. Hearing of this, and having made themselves masters of Dublin, and having thus secured the most important city in Ireland, Dermot and his allies determined to follow up the war at once against Roderic, and to attack him in Meath, where he had gone to assist O'Rourke. In addition to the desire of further humbling Roderic O'Conor, Dermot's old grudge against O'Rourke urged him to this enterprise. Having, at Strongbow's recommendation, entrusted the government of Dublin to Milo de Cogan, he sent the Earl with a large force to invade and lay waste the lands of Meath, and followed himself soon after with the remainder of his army.

Roderic, now finding himself insulted and humbled, despatched deputies to the camp of Dermot, to upbraid him with these gross and repeated violations of all his solemn engagements, and to threaten that if he did not instantly withdraw his troops, and restrain the incursion of his foreign auxiliaries, the head of his son, Conor, who was still a hostage in Roderic's hands, should be cut off and sent to him. To this message Dermot haughtily replied that he intended to persevere as he had begun, nor would he desist till he had brought Connaught under his sway, and also recovered for himself the monarchy of all Ireland, to which, he said, that he had better title than the King of Connaught. On receiving this insolent answer, the monarch Roderic became implacable, and at once ordered Conor, son of Dermot, heir of Leinster, to be beheaded ; and executed, at the same time, Dermot's grandson and his foster-brother, O'Caelly. [10]

Whilst these proceedings were taking place in the east of Ireland, a synod of the Irish Church was called together at Armagh, for the purpose of taking into consideration the perilous state of the country ; and, if we can believe Giraldus, the conclusion at which the synod arrived was, that the sins and offences of the people were the cause of the awful calamities which now threatened them ; and it was therefore resolved to seek in some national and general act of repentance the means both of propitiation and relief. In accordance with this view, the synod unanimously decreed that all the English throughout Ireland who were in a state of slavery should be restored to liberty.

Just at this moment a check was put to the proceedings of the invaders, by intelligence which they received from England. It will be remembered, that Strongbow had set sail for Ireland in defiance of the command of King Henry, who now issued an edict forbidding all traffic and intercourse with Ireland from any part of his dominions, and commanding all his subjects then in Ireland, of every order and degree, to return home before the ensuing feast of Easter, under pain of perpetual banishment and the forfeiture of all their estates in England.

The effect of this mandate was soon felt by Strongbow. His supplies from England ceased, and a number of his soldiers and knights deserted. Alarmed by this change in his fortune, he summoned a council of his followers, to consider what steps should next be taken, and it was decided that Raymond le Gros should be despatched to King Henry, who was then in Normandy, with a letter from Strongbow, stating that he thought he had had His Majesty's permission to go to Ireland to aid the King of Leinster, and offering to place whatever he had acquired in that country at His Majesty's disposal. Although this acknowledgment was all that Henry could well desire, yet he did not deign even to notice the Earl's letter ; and

Raymond, after waiting some time at Henry's court, had the mortification to return to Ireland without any reply.

To add to the embarrassment of the English adventurers, their great patron, Dermot M'Murrough, King of Leinster, died, at the close of this year, at Ferns, of some frightful disease, which rendered him in his last moments an object of horror and disgust to everyone who approached him. [11]

The personal appearance and physical characteristics of Dermot are graphically described by his contemporary, Giraldus Cambrensis, who states that he was "a man of great stature and ample dimensions ; his voice hoarse and harsh from his continual shouting in the battle ; kind to the clergy and the poor, but severe and tyrannical towards the gentry and the nobility ; his hand against every man of power, and every man's hand against him."

On the death of the King of Leinster, his son-in-law, Richard, Earl of Pembroke, claimed succession to the throne ; Conor, the son and heir of Dermot, having been executed by Roderic O'Conor, and the illegitimacy of his other son, Donnell Kavanagh, having been proved by the Lady Eva, Strongbow's wife. The great body of the Irish of Leinster, however, refused to acknowledge his claims, and attached themselves to the next Irish heir to the throne.

This defection in no way disheartened Strongbow, who, with the view of asserting his authority in other parts of Leinster, now left Dublin, entrusting its defence to De Cogan and others of his most powerful knights. These were soon afforded an opportunity of displaying their valour. The late Danish governor of Dublin, Hasculph, who had succeeded in escaping to the Orkney Islands, had collected there a large army of Danes and Norwegians, and with these he now sailed up the river Liffey. His armament consisted of sixty ships, which were under the special command of a chieftain, called by his countrymen Hans Thewoode, or "John the Furious." Hasculph, having landed his forces, attacked the eastern gate of the city, where being encountered by Milo de Cogan, he was repulsed with the loss of 500 men. The Anglo-Norman knight, flushed with this advantage, was tempted to pursue the fugitives too eagerly, and soon found himself surrounded by superior numbers, whilst some of his followers were seized with a sudden panic on seeing the thigh of a knight, which was cased all over in iron, chopped off by the Danish chieftain with a single blow. Finding himself in this difficulty, De Cogan endeavoured, with his small band, to regain the city ; but the besiegers still crowding upon him, he was on the point of falling beneath their numbers, when his brother Richard suddenly issued forth with a body of horse from the southern gate of Dublin, and coming on them unobserved, charged the assailants in the rear. After a long struggle, John the Furious was at length killed by the Anglo-Norman Baron, Walter de Riddlesford, and Hasculph, believing defeat to be inevitable, attempted to fly to his ships, but was taken prisoner upon the strand, and brought back alive to be reserved for ransom. [12] On appearing before the governor and a large assembly in the council house, and being questioned as to his intentions and resources, he had the courage to exclaim, "We came hither with only a small force, and this is but the beginning of our labours, and if I live, far other and greater things shall follow." This bold speech had an immediate effect, and the unfortunate Hasculph was ordered to be beheaded.

Notwithstanding this temporary success of the English in Dublin, it soon became evident that without further assistance from England they could scarcely hold out for any length of time, in what was now clearly a hostile country, and all aid from England was stopped by the edict of King Henry.

Under these circumstances, another opportunity was afforded to the Irish monarch to get rid of the invaders. What had been done by him immediately after the execution of the Leinster hostages is not recorded, and probably he was engaged in other parts of Ireland dealing with internal dissensions which seemed to be ever cropping up between the subordinate princes. About this time he was waited on by Laurence O'Toole, the Archbishop of Dublin, who, shocked at the excesses committed by the Anglo-Normans, urged the Irish monarch to take advantage of the present weakness of his enemies, and to lose no time in coming to the assistance of the Irish of Dublin. Roderic yielded to these representations, and determined on a general attack on the city both by land and sea, and for this purpose sought the aid of the fleet of the Isle of Man, and of the other islands off the coast of Ireland. In a short time Dublin was invested on every side. The fleet of the isles blocked up the harbour, whilst the Irish forces were encamped around the city, and amounted, if one can believe Giraldus, to 30,000 men. But no attempt was made to enter the city, the Irish monarch having determined to starve out the garrison. Believing that a patient blockade, and the stoppage of supplies, would be the most effective and least destructive mode of reducing the foreigners to submission, the Irish army remained inactive for nearly two months, occupied solely in preventing all communications between the besieged and those outside. These tactics had at length the desired result Strongbow, finding his provisions falling short, and knowing that he could not much longer hold out, notified a desire to negotiate, and the Archbishop of Armagh was deputed by Roderic to receive his overtures.

The proposition made by Strongbow under these circumstances was, that if Roderic would raise the siege, and consent to receive him as his vassal, he would, on his part, agree to take the province of Leinster from him, and acknowledge him as his sovereign. This proposition having been laid before Roderic by the Archbishop, an answer was returned, that unless the English forthwith surrendered the towns of Dublin, Waterford, and Wexford, together with all the forts and castles then possessed by them, and agreed to depart on a given day with all their forces from Ireland, the besieging army would, without delay, attack and storm the city.

By one of those inspirations of courage, founded on despair, which, for the time, invest men with an almost supernatural strength, and enable them to control and conquer fortune herself, the whole situation was, in a few eventful hours, changed. Just at this moment, intelligence reached the leaders of the English in Dublin, which made their position even more intolerable than before. Donnell Kavanagh, the natural son of the late King Dermot, having by some means eluded the vigilance of the Irish army, entered Dublin, and acquainted Earl Strongbow that Robert Fitzstephen was closely besieged in the fort of Carrick by a large multitude of the inhabitants of the town of Wexford, and the territory of Hy-Kinsellagh ; and that having with him but five knights, and a small body of archers, if not relieved within a few days, he and his followers, and Strongbow's wife and children, who were shut up with him in the fort, must fall into the hands of the besiegers.

On hearing this painful intelligence, Strongbow summoned a council of war to consider what measures should be taken. When the council met, Maurice Fitzgerald, the half-brother of Fitzstephen, boldly proposed to his comrades that they should at once sally forth with the whole of the garrison, and escape from Dublin, cutting their way as best they could through the besieging cordon of the Irish army. This suggestion was seconded by Raymond le Gros, and met with general approval. Not a moment was lost in putting it into execution. Three bodies of horsemen were selected from the garrison, the first of which, consisting of twenty knights, was placed under the command of Raymond ; the second, thirty in number, under Milo de Cogan, and the third, consisting of forty knights, was commanded by the Earl himself, whilst Maurice Fitzgerald was appointed to bring up the rear.

Meanwhile Roderic O'Conor, who had been lulled into security by the negotiations which had been entered on, and who was daily expecting the surrender of the city, had, according to the Irish annalists, drawn off a part of his army, and proceeded into another part of Leinster with the cavalry of Breifny and Oriel, in order to lay waste the corn of the English, having left what he considered a sufficient force to uphold the investment of Dublin, until such time as the expected surrender would take place.

The moment was thus most opportune for a sally on the part of the besieged ; and, animated by despair, the small band of valiant knights and their followers marched out in the order above indicated. Taken quite by surprise by this unexpected sally, and their leader absent, the Irish troops were completely disconcerted. A panic seized them, and, instead of cutting off the retreat of the English knights and their retainers, they fled on all sides, leaving to the victors stores of provisions, with which the beleaguered city was speedily revictualled, and all the advantages gained by the preceding long siege of two months were lost in a few hours. [13]

From the effects of this disaster the Irish cause never afterwards recovered. Tirnan O'Rourke, and the Irish cavalry of Breifny and Oriel returned again to Dublin, and a fresh assault was made by the Irish upon the English, but the circumstances of the two armies were now altogether different. The foreigners had ample supplies of all sorts, and headed by De Cogan, they repelled the attack ; O'Rourke was defeated, and his eldest son, Hugh, killed. The prestige of the Irish army was now gone for ever, and Strongbow was able speedily to open communication with Wexford and the other besieged portions of the kingdom of Leinster.

Previously to this he had sent over Harvey de Montemarisco to King Henry, to try and propitiate that monarch ; but on arriving at Waterford, he found that Harvey had returned with letters and messages from various persons in England, advising him not to lose a moment in presenting himself before the king. Acting on this advice, he at once sailed for England, and waited on King Henry, who was then at Newnham, in Gloucestershire, with a large army, in a state of preparation to cross over to Ireland.

At first the king refused to admit Strongbow into his presence ; but the readiness evinced by the latter to submit unconditionally to his royal will and pleasure had soon its effect, and smoothed the way to reconciliation. Henry demanded immediate possession of the city of Dublin and the adjacent country, together with all the other seaport towns possessed by the English in Ireland, and consented that all the other Irish possessions of Strongbow should remain in perpetuity to him and his heirs, to be held under homage and fealty to the Crown of England.

[1] The account given here, and in subsequent pages, of the proceedings of Roderic O'Conor is taken mainly from the Annals of the Four Masters.

[2] Dervorgill was never reconciled to her husband, and entered into a convent, and died in the Abbey of Mellifont at an advanced age, in 1193, having lived to see her country invaded and partially conquered by foreigners, invited and brought over for the purpose by the man for whom she had basely deserted her husband.

[3] This account of Dermot's proceedings with King Henry is mainly taken by O'Donovan from Giraldus' *Hibernia Expugnata*.

[4] *Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 165.

[5] On this occasion, it is stated that amongst Dermot's followers was the son of Griffith, King of Wales, and that he was slain in the conflict

[6] *Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 1169.

[7] O'Donovan MS.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] It is stated in the *Annals of the Four Masters* that Roderic thought nothing of the "Flemings," that is to say, of the English in the service of Dermot, regarding them as mere hired soldiers, who would leave when their pay ceased.

[10] A fresco painting in the Abbey of Knockmoy is stated by Dr. Ledwich and Dr. Petrie to represent this execution of the hostages of Leinster ; but whether this is so or not seems doubtful.

[11] According to other accounts, Dermot died penitently, "triumphant over the devil and his other enemies." This is the account given in the *Annals of Leinster*.

[12] Gilbert, in his *History of the Viceroys of Ireland*, p. 23, referring to this engagement between the Dines and Anglo-Normans, remarks : "In the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, are preserved what are supposed to be the remains of some of the swords or javelins used in this engagement, which were tuned up about forty year ago, in excavating the southern side of College Green."

[13] According to Giraldus Cambrensis, the Irish monarch was with his army at the time when the English sallied forth, and fled with the others, having with difficulty made his escape, after having lost his right hand, which was cut off by De Burgo, one of the Anglo-Norman knights. This is extremity unlikely, as such an event would certainly be recorded in the annals.

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