

The Welshmen of Tirawley

Lays of the western Gael : and other poems

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SEVERAL Welsh Families, associates in the invasion of Strongbow, settled in the west of Ireland. Of these, the principal whose names have been preserved by the Irish antiquarians were the Walshes, Joyces, Heils (*a quibus* Mac Hale), Lawlesses, Tomlyns, Lynotts, and Barretts, which last draw their pedigree from Walynes, son of Guyndally, the *Ard Maor*, or High Steward of the Lordship of Camelot, and had their chief seats in the territory of the two Bacs, in the barony of Tirawley, and county of Mayo. *Clochan-na-n'all*, i. e., “the Blind Men’s Stepping-stones,” are still pointed out on the Duvowen river, about four miles north of Crossmolina, in the townland of Garranard ; and *Tubber-na-Scorney*, or “Scrag’s Well,” in the opposite townland of Carns, in the same barony. For a curious *terrier* or applotment of the Mac William’s revenue, as acquired under the circumstances stated in the legend preserved by Mac Firbis, see Dr. O’Donovan’s highly-learned and interesting “Genealogies, &c. of Hy Fiachrach,” in the publications of the *Irish Archæological Society*—a great monument of antiquarian and topographical erudition.

The Welshmen of Tirawley.

SCORNA BOY, the Barretts’ bailiff,
 lewd and lame,
To lift the Lynotts’ taxes when he came,
Rudely drew a young maid to him ;
Then the Lynotts rose and slew him,
And in Tubber-na-Scorney threw him—
 Small your blame,
 Sons of Lynott !
Sing the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley.

Then the Barretts to the Lynotts proposed a choice,
Saying, “Hear, ye murderous brood, men and boys,
For this deed to-day ye lose
Sight or manhood : say and choose
Which ye keep and which refuse ;
 And rejoice
 That our mercy
Leaves you living for a warning to Tirawley.”

Then the little boys of the Lynotts, weeping, said,
“Only leave us our eyesight in our head.”
But the bearded Lynotts then
Made answer back again,
“Take our eyes, but leave us men,

Alive or dead,
Sons of Wattin !”
Sing the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley.

So the Barretts, with sewing-needles sharp and smooth,
Let the light out of the eyes of every youth,
And of every bearded man
Of the broken Lynott clan ;
Then their darken’d faces wan
Turning south
To the river—
Sing the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley.

O’er the slippery stepping-stones of Clochan-na-n’all
They drove them, laughing loud at every fall,
As their wandering footsteps dark
Fail’d to reach the slippery mark,
And the swift stream swallow’d stark,
One and all,
As they stumbled—
From the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley.

Of all the blinded Lynotts one alone
Walk’d erect from stepping-stone to stone :
So back again they brought you,
And a second time they wrought you
With their needles ; but never got you
Once to groan,
Emon Lynott,
For the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley.

But with prompt-projected footsteps sure as ever,
Emon Lynott again cross’d the river,
Though Duvowen was rising fast,
And the shaking stones o’ercast
By cold floods boiling past ;
Yet you never,
Emon Lynott,
Faltered once before your foemen of Tirawley !

But, turning on Ballintubber bank, you stood,
And the Barretts thus bespoke o’er the flood—
“ Oh, ye foolish sons of Wattin,
Small amends are these you’ve gotten,
For, while Scorna Boy lies rotten,
I am good
For vengeance !”
Sing the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley.

For ’tis neither in eye nor eyesight that a man
Bears the fortunes of himself and his clan,
But in the manly mind,

These darken'd orbs behind,
That your needles could never find
 Though they ran
 Through my heart-strings !”
Sing the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley.

“ But, little your women's needles do I reck :
For the night from heaven never fell so black,
But Tirawley, and abroad
From the Moy to Cuan-an-fod, [1]
I could walk it, every sod,
 Path and track,
 Ford and togher,
Seeking vengeance on you, Barretts of Tirawley !

“ The night when Dathy O'Dowda broke your camp,
What Barrett among you was it held the lamp—
Show'd the way to those two feet,
When through wintry wind and sleet,
I guided your blind retreat
 In the swamp
 Of Beäl-an-asa ?
O ye vengeance-destined ingrates of Tirawley ! ”

So leaving loud-shriek-echoing Garranard,
The Lynott like a red dog hunted hard,
With his wife and children seven,
'Mong the beasts and fowls of heaven
In the hollows of Glen Nephin,
 Light-debarr'd,
 Made his dwelling,
Planning vengeance on the Barretts of Tirawley.

And ere the bright-orb'd year its course had run,
On his brown round-knotted knee he nurs'd a son,
A child of light, with eyes
As clear as are the skies
In summer, when sunrise
 Has begun ;
 So the Lynott
Nursed his vengeance on the Barretts of Tirawley.

And, as ever the bright boy grew in strength and
 size,
Made him perfect in each manly exercise,
The salmon in the flood,
The dun deer in the wood,
The eagle in the cloud
 To surprise,
 On Ben Nephin,
Far above the foggy fields of Tirawley.

With the yellow-knotted spear-shaft, with the bow,
With the steel, prompt to deal shot and blow,
He taught him from year to year
And train'd him, without a peer,
For a perfect cavalier,
 Hoping so—
 Far his forethought—
For vengeance on the Barretts of Tirawley.

And, when mounted on his proud-bounding steed,
Emon Oge sat a cavalier indeed ;
Like the ear upon the wheat
When winds in Autumn beat
On the bending stems, his seat ;
 And the speed
 Of his courser
Was the wind from Barna-na-gee [2] o'er Tirawley !

Now when fifteen sunny summers thus were spent,
(He perfected in all accomplishment)—
The Lynott said, “ My child,
We are over long exiled
From mankind in this wild—
 —Time we went
 Through the mountain
To the countries lying over-against Tirawley.”

So, out over mountain-moors, and mosses brown,
And green stream-gathering vales, they journey'd
 down ;
Till, shining like a star,
Through the dusky gleams afar,
The bailey of Castlebar,
 And the town
 Of Mac William
Rose bright before the wanderers of Tirawley.

“ Look southward, my boy, and tell me as we go,
What seest thou by the loch-head below.”
“ Oh, a stone-house strong and great,
And a horse-host at the gate,
And their captain in armour of plate—
 Grand the show !
 Great the glancing !
High the heroes of this land below Tirawley !

“ And a beautiful Woman-chief by his side,
Yellow gold on all her gown-sleeves wide ;
And in her hand a pearl
Of a young, little, fair-hair'd girl.”—
Said the Lynott, “ It is the Earl !
 Let us ride

To his presence !”
And before him came the exiles of Tirawley.

“ God save thee, Mac William,” the Lynott thus
began ;

“ God save all here besides of this clan ;
For gossips dear to me
Are all in company—
For in these four bones ye see
A kindly man
Of the Britons
Emon Lynott of Garranard of Tirawley.

“ And hither, as kindly gossip-law allows,
I come to claim a scion of thy house
To foster ; for thy race,
Since William Conquer’s [3] days,
Have ever been wont to place,
With some spouse
Of a Briton,
A Mac William Oge, to foster in Tirawley.

“ And to show thee in what sort our youth are
taught,
I have hither to thy home of valour brought
This one son of my age,
For a sample and a pledge
For the equal tutelage,
In right thought,
Word, and action,
Of whatever son ye give into Tirawley.”

When Mac William beheld the brave boy ride and
run,
Saw the spear-shaft from his white shoulder spun—
With a sigh, and with a smile,
He said,—“ I would give the spoil
Of a county, that Tibbot [4] Moyle,
My own son,
Were accomplish’d
Like this branch of the kindly Britons of Tirawley.”

When the Lady Mac William she heard him speak,
And saw the ruddy roses on his cheek,
She said, “ I would give a purse
Of red gold to the nurse
That would rear my Tibbot no worse ;
But I seek
Hitherto vainly—
Heaven grant that I now have found her in Tirawley !”

So they said to the Lynott, “ Here, take our bird !

And as pledge for the keeping of thy word,
Let this scion here remain
Till thou comest back again :
Meanwhile the fitting train
 Of a lord
 Shall attend thee
With the lordly heir of Connaught into Tirawley.”

So back to strong-throng-gathering Garranard,
Like a lord of the country with his guard,
Came the Lynott, before them all.
Once again over Clochan-na-n'all,
Steady-striding, erect, and tall,
 And his ward
 On his shoulders ;
To the wonder of the Welshmen of Tirawley.

Then a diligent foster-father you would deem
The Lynott, teaching Tibbot, by mead and stream,
To cast the spear, to ride,
To stem the rushing tide,
With what feats of body beside,
 Might beseem
 A Mac William,
Foster'd free among the Welshmen of Tirawley.

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But the lesson of hell he taught him in heart and
 mind ;
For to what desire soever he inclined,
Of anger, lust, or pride,
He had it gratified,
Till he ranged the circle wide
 Of a blind
 Self-indulgence,
Ere he came to youthful manhood in Tirawley.

Then, even as when a hunter slips a hound,
Lynott loosed him—God's leashes all unbound—
In the pride of power and station,
And the strength of youthful passion,
On the daughters of thy nation,
 All around,
 Wattin Barrett !
Oh ! the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley !

Bitter grief and burning anger, rage and shame,
Fill'd the houses of the Barretts where'er he came ;
Till the young men of the Bac
Drew by night upon his track,
And slew him at Cornassack—[5]
 Small your blame,
 Sons of Wattin !

Sing the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley.

Said the Lynott, “ The day of my vengeance is
drawing near,
The day for which, through many a long dark year,
I have toil’d through grief and sin
Call ye now the Brehons in,
And let the plea begin
Over the bier
Of Mac William,
For an eric upon the Barretts of Tirawley. [6]

Then the Brehons to Mac William Burk decreed
An eric upon Clan Barrett for the deed ;
And the Lynott’s share of the fine,
As foster-father, was nine
Ploughlands and nine score kine ;
But no need
Had the Lynott,
Neither care, for land or cattle in Tirawley.

But rising, while all sat silent on the spot,
He said, “ The law says—doth it not ?—
If the foster-sire elect
His portion to reject,
He may then the right exact
To applot
The short eric.”
“ ’Tis the law,” replied the Brehons of Tirawley.

Said the Lynott, “ I once before had a choice
Proposed me, wherein law had little voice ;
But now I choose, and say,
As lawfully I may,
I applot the mulct to-day ;
So rejoice
In your ploughlands
And your cattle which I renounce throughout Tirawley.

“ And thus I applot the mulct : I divide
The land throughout Clan Barrett on every side
Equally, that no place
May be without the face
Of a foe of Watin’s race—
That the pride
Of the Barretts
May be humbled hence for ever throughout Tirawley.

“ I adjudge a seat in every Barrett’s hall
To Mac William : in every stable I give a stall
To Mac William : and, beside,
Whenever a Burke shall ride

Through Tirawley, I provide
At his call
Needful grooming,
Without charge from any hosteler of Tirawley.

“ Thus lawfully I avenge me for the throes
Ye lawlessly caused me and caused those
Unhappy shamefaced ones,
Who, their mothers expected once,
Would have been the sires of sons—
O'er whose woes
Often weeping,
I have groan'd in my exile from Tirawley.

“ I demand not of you your manhood ; but I
take—
For the Burkes will take it—your Freedom ! for the
sake
Of which all manhood's given,
And all good under heaven,
And, without which, better even
Ye should make
Yourselves barren,
Than see your children slaves throughout Tirawley !

“ Neither take I your eyesight from you; as you
took
Mine and ours : I would have you daily look
On one another's eyes,
When the strangers tyrannize
By your hearths, and blushes arise,
That ye brook,
Without vengeance,
The insults of troops of Tibbots throughout Tirawley !

“ The vengeance I design'd, now is done,
And the days of me and mine nearly run—
For, for this, I have broken faith,
Teaching him who lies beneath
This pall, to merit death ;
And my son
To his father
Stands pledged for other teaching in Tirawley.”

Said Mac William—“ Father and son, hang them
high !”
And the Lynott they hang'd speedily ;
But across the salt sea water,
To Scotland, with the daughter
Of Mac William—well you got her !—
Did you fly,
Edmund Lindsay,

The gentlest of all the Welshmen of Tirawley !

'Tis thus the ancient Ollaves of Erin tell [7]
How, through lewdness and revenge, it befell
That the sons of William Conquer
Came over the sons of Wattin,
Throughout all the bounds and borders
Of the land of Auley Mac Fiachra ; [8]
Till the Saxon Oliver Cromwell,
And his valiant, Bible-guided,
Free heretics of Clan London
Coming in, in their succession,
Rooted out both Burke and Barrett,
And in their empty places
New stems of freedom planted,
With many a goodly sapling
Of manliness and virtue ;
Which while their children cherish,
Kindly Irish of the Irish,
Neither Saxons nor Italians,
May the mighty God of Freedom
Speed them well,
Never taking
Further vengeance on his people of Tirawley.

[1] “ *Tirawley, and abroad*

From the Moy to Cuan-an-fod.

That is from the river Moy to Blacksod Haven, in Irish, *Cuan-an-foid-duibh*. The names of the baronies in this part of Mayo and Sligo are taken from the son and grandson of Dathi, the progenitor of the families of O'Dowda. Tir Eera, in Sligo, is so called by a softened pronunciation from Fiächra, son of Dathi ; and Tir-Awley in like manner from Amhalgaid son of Fiächra.

[2] “ *Was the wind from Barna-na-gee
o'er Tirawley*”

Barna-na-gee, i.e., the gap of the winds, is a pass on the southern side of Nephin mountain, on the road to Castlebar.

[3] “ *Since William Conquer's days*”

“ William Conquer,” i.e, William Fitz Adelm de Burgho, conqueror of Connaught.

[4] Tibbot, that is, Theobald.

[5] “ *And slew him at Cornassack*”

“ This is still vividly remembered in the country, and the spot is pointed out where Teaboid Maol Burke was killed by the Barretts. The recollection of it has been kept alive in certain verses which were composed on the occasion, of which the following quatrain is often repeated in the barony of Tirawley :—

Tangadar Baireadaigh, &c.

The Barretts of the country came ;
They perpetrated a deed which was not just ;
They shed blood which was nobler than wine,
At the narrow brook of Cornasack.”

O'DONOVAN, *Tr. and Cust. Hy. Fiach.* 338 n.

The territory of the Bac lies over against Nephin mountain, along the eastern shore of Loch Con between it and the river Moy.

[6] “ *For an eric upon the Barretts of Tirawley.*”

The eric was the fine for maimings and homicides. When the first sheriff was sent into Tyrone, O'Neill demanded to know his *eric* beforehand, in the event, reasonably anticipated, of personal injury befalling him. Singular, that while modern tenderness of human life would abolish the punishment of death in cases of homicide, it ignores the barbarian wisdom which gave compensation to the family of the victim.

[7] “ *'Tis thus the ancient Ollaves of Erin tell,*” &c.

The writer has hardly caught the full pathos of that remarkable passage translated below, with which Duaid Mac Firis, the chronicler of Lecan, winds up his account of the retribution thus singularly brought on the descendants of Wattin Barrett. “ It was in eric for him (Teaboid Maol Burke) that the Barretts gave up to the Burkes eighteen quaters of land ; and the share which Lynott, the adopted father of Teaboid, asked of this eric, was the distribution of the mulct, and the distribution he made of it was, that it should be divided throughout all Tir-Amhalgaidh, in order that the Burkes might be stationed in every part of it as plagues to the Barretts, and to draw the country from them. And thus the Burkes came over the Barretts in Tir-Amhalgaidh, and took nearly the whole of their lands from them ; but at length the Saxon heretics of Oliver Cromwell took it from them all in the year of our Lord 1652 ; so that now there is neither Barrett nor Burke, not to mention the Clan Fiachrach, in possession of any lands there.” O'DONOVAN, *Tr. and Cust. Hy. Fiach.* p. 339.

[8] *Pronounced* Mac Eeära.

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