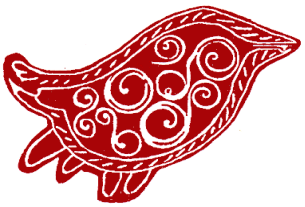
Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society

www.corkhist.ie



Title: Review: "From Reformation to Restoration: Ireland 1534-1660", by Nicholas Canny; "New foundations: Ireland, 1660-1800", by David Dickson; "The dawning of democracy: Ireland 1800-1870", by Donal McCartney (Helicon History of Ireland, 1987)

Author: Irwin, Liam

Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society, 1988, Vol. 93, No 252, page(s) 154-155

Published by the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society

Digital file created: February 20, 2017

Your use of the JCHAS digital archive indicates that you accept the Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://corkhist.ie/terms-and-conditions/

The Cork Historical and Archaeological Society (IE-148166, incorporated 1989) was founded in 1891, for the collection, preservation and diffusion of all available information regarding the past of the City and County of Cork, and South of Ireland generally. This archive of content of JCHAS (from 1892 up to ten years preceding current publication) continues the original aims of the founders in 1891. For more information visit www.corkhist.ie.

This content downloaded from www.corkhist.ie

All use subject to CHAS Terms and Conditions

Digital content (c) CHAS 2017

as the opening line of the Cantwell elegy, *Lubhghart gan fhāl in eagna* (Wisdom is like a garden without a wall), or of the Purcell one, *Mairg dar chumthach in chumha* (Woe to him with grief as a companion). Further on, James Purcell is described picturesquely (in ll. 397-400) as:

> *A' siubhal le soillsi mhaidne*
> *mac Tomāis, nachar thuar geis,*
> *do-chuaidh a fīrainn Ó Faithi,*
> *dīraim dā mbuaibh laithi leis.*

(Marching by the light of morning the son of Thomas, who did not expect obstruction, went from Offa by day taking with him a large spoil of their cattle).

In the face of expert editing one hesitates to offer an alternative translation, but since *laith* sometimes connotes 'milk', would not 'a large spoil of milch cows' make better sense in the last line?

The index of place-names is a joy to consult, with each name (apart from the half-dozen or so unidentified ones) accurately placed in its geographical and historical setting. (The only suggestion I would make here is in regard to Baile Póil (l. 414). If it is to be found in b. Gowran, might it not be Paulstown rather than Ballyfoyle?).

The copious notes are not confined to discussions on grammatical or morphological usage, but also provide valuable historical data on fifteenth-century Tipperary. Accordingly, this volume will be welcomed not only by Gaelic scholars but by anyone interested in the history of the area, since the poems supply such a rare insight into the native psyche, a counterbalance to the unsympathetic assessments more readily available in the state papers and various English-language documents of the period.

Atā d'urchra ar ēigsibh Banbha, adeir fear caointe an Phuirséalaigh; nach ionann cás inniu dóibh in ēagmais Neans Uí Shúilleabháin? Gura fada buan dā comheagarthóir lēannta, agus go gcúitítear a saothar leo beirt.

D. Ó Murchadha

From Reformation to Restoration: Ireland 1534-1660. By Nicholas Canny. *New Foundations: Ireland 1660-1800.* By David Dickson. *The Dawning of Democracy: Ireland 1800-1870.* By Donal McCartney. *The Helicon History of Ireland*: general eds. Art Cosgrove, Elma Collins. 1987. IR£6.50 per vol.

The Helicon history of Ireland aims to make available to a wider readership a synthesis of modern research in Irish history, much of it available heretofore only to those with access to obscure, specialist and expensive journals. Ten volumes in the series are planned though they are not numbered, which helps to conceal the rather erratic publication: three volumes were published in 1981, two in 1983 and these three in 1987. The first volume on early medieval Ireland has yet to appear while the two dealing with the post-1920 Ireland have been available for four years. Anyone committed to a line of development approach to Irish history needs to develop patience in the first instance.

The present three volumes fulfil very impressively the aims of the series. A vast amount of recent research both by the authors themselves and their colleagues working in the periods under review is skilfully blended into easy flowing and intelligible narratives. Where the findings of the contributors are at variance with those of other scholars the conflict is acknowledged and evenly balanced comments and judgments are made. The surrender by the Gaelic Lords of their rights of sovereign jurisdiction in the early 1540s and the formal issue of Letters Patent regranting title to them under the sovereignty of the crown provides a useful illustration. This process has been universally referred to as 'Surrender and Regrant' following the terminology of W.F.T. Butler who coined the phrase in 1913 (presumably the anonymous 'nineteenth-century historian' mentioned by Canny). Butler's view of this policy as a device to create division among the Gaelic dynasties has been shown by Brendan Bradshaw to be quite false: a sincere attempt at reform and the creation of political stability was in fact the aim. Nicholas Canny, however, suggests that Bradshaw still places too much emphasis on land tenure, 'the impositon of a nineteenth-century obsession on a sixteenth-century situation'. What was at issue was not security of tenure, a concept alien to Gaelic Lords, but that of lordship, ruling over specific septs, collecting revenue from them and in return providing protection to them. The 'surrender' therefore involved acceptance by the Gaelic lords that they, and their people, were subjects of the crown, while in return they obtained continuation of their political jurisdiction with royal approval and, if necessary, support. Canny further cites the work of Ciaran Brady in refuting Bradshaw's suggestion that it was Anglo-Irish reformers who formulated this policy and persuaded the lord deputy St. Leger to implement it and as a consequence

This content downloaded from www.corkhist.ie
All use subject to CHAS Terms and Conditions
Digital content (c) CHAS 2017

aroused the opposition of English-born members of the government, who eventually destroyed it. Brady has shown that St. Leger's advisors were predominantly English and that there was general agreement on this policy in the 1540s. Brady has also been critical of some aspects of Canny's work and the section on Elizabethan Ireland contains a refutation and defence of his views though the uninitiated would only be aware of this from the end notes. The greatest concentration is on the sixteenth century with one hundred and fifty of the two hundred and twenty five pages devoted to it while in the seventeenth-century section most space is devoted to the period up to 1641, an understandable imbalance given the author's research interests. There is a welcome emphasis on the social and economic aspect of the seventeenth-century though the 1640s are fairly drastically summarized and the Cromwellian era is dealt with in a mere nine pages though space is found for a rather shaky comparison with contemporary Bohemia.

David Dickson also adopts a basically chronological framework for his survey of the period from the restoration to the act of union. Much of the modern research on this period has not been published and a very valuable feature of this volume is the integration it provides for a very disparate range of material. The writer's own research interests provide the basis for a very stimulating section on the economy. He identifies four stages in the trade-centred economic revolution of the country. In the thirty years up to 1690 there was a period of economic expansion due primarily to three specific factors: a new market for beef, butter and ship biscuit in the Caribbean, the major export of butter and hides to the French market and the influx of settlers from Scotland and the north of England which strengthened the rural economy of Ulster. From 1690 to 1730 there was commercial growth interspersed with periods of depression which led overall to a concentration of economic power in the larger ports and in the hands of big graziers and master dairymen. For the period from 1730 to 1775 Dickson considers that Arthur Young's comment that Ireland had progressed economically more than any country in Europe was reasonably accurate. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century there was further expansion throughout the economy. This coincided with the major industrial advance in Britain and the resultant demand for Irish food, and led to a closer interlocking of the two economies despite the potential for wider markets which American independence and free trade had created. This rapid economic growth and population increase, in addition to price inflation, was a vital factor in the 1798 rebellion which forms the conclusion of the book. Recent research on this topic is well integrated with the author's own approach to provide an excellent analysis based on economic, social and political elements.

Donal McCartney categorizes the period 1800 to 1870 as an age of the emerging people; education was for the people, the churches incorporated the religion of the people, the land was demanded for the people, politics increasingly involved the people. This dawning of democracy did not, of course, mean quite what it said, most notably in regard to land which was destined to be for some of the people only. The Union, Emancipation, Repeal, Famine and Fenians form the core of the book but the most original sections are those on the Secret Societies and the epilogue, titled Society and Democracy. The numerous agrarian secret societies with their evocative names, Threshers, Caravats, Shanavests, Rockites, Terry Alts, have attracted scholarly attention in recent times and the resultant insights are incorporated into this interesting analysis. The impact of mass education, the popular press and particularly the use of the past by Davis and his Young Ireland colleagues to create the myth of an Ireland struggling for eight hundred years to achieve freedom provide an appropriately stimulating conclusion to this volume.

Any general history, even in ten volumes, runs the risk of over-simplification, certainly of smoothing too many rough edges. These three volumes avoid this to a very large extent and are excellent reports in progress, reflecting very accurately the current state of research in their respective periods. They must not, however, be read as definitive statements which they do not purport to be. As with all good history writing they invite criticism, amendment and revision.

Liam Irwin

Washington's Irish Policy 1916-1986. By Sean Cronin. Anvil Books, Dublin, 1987, IR£9.95.

Sean Cronin combines a busy life as Washington correspondent of the *Irish Times* with his work as an academic and researcher. He has produced many other books on Irish history, among them *The McGarrity Papers, Irish Nationalism: A History of its Roots and Ideology* and *Frank Ryan: The Search for the Republic.* Dr Cronin writes what is sometimes called pejoratively 'committed history'. I

This content downloaded from www.corkhist.ie
All use subject to CHAS Terms and Conditions
Digital content (c) CHAS 2017