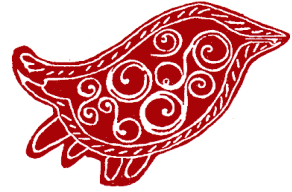


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James Roche, the Roscoe of Cork.

[The following biographical sketch of the once well-known Cork citizen and litterateur, James Roche, is abridged from his obituary notice published in the "Gentleman's Magazine" for June, 1853, to which periodical Mr. Roche was for twenty years a constant contributor, chiefly over the signature "J. R. (Cork)." His contributions to the "Gentleman's Magazine," which for a great many years was the chief if not the only literary journal of its kind published in London, were (as Windele records) such as to win him at the close of the G. M. Volume for 1837 the special acknowledgments of the Editor. He was styled the Roscoe of Cork by the famous Father Prout, through his having been formerly a banker, as was the original Roscoe, a Liverpool Banker alike distinguished for his literary attainments and as author of several books.]



MR. JAMES ROCHE was descended both on the paternal and maternal side from ancestors occupying for many centuries a distinguished rank amongst the territorial aristocracy of Ireland. He was born at Limerick on the 30th of December, 1770, and was the third son of Mr. Stephen Roche, by his second wife, Sarah O'Bryen. His father was lineal descendant and representative of Maurice Roche, who when Mayor of Cork in 1571 received a collar of SS. from Queen Elizabeth, and was the grandson of David Roche, Lord Fermoy, who died in 1492. His mother, Sarah O'Bryen, was the daughter and co-heiress of John O'Bryen, of Moyvanine and Clounties, Co. Limerick, chief of the O'Bryens of Arra, the lineal descendants of the great Brien Boromhe, monarch of Ireland, of which ancient house the deceased Mr. James Roche's nephew, Stephen Roche, of Ryehill, Co. Galway, is now (1853) the representative.

At the early age of fifteen Mr. Roche was sent to France; and for two years pursued his studies at the College of Saintes, one of those which existed there previous to the Revolution. Even in that short period his proficiency in all the preparatory branches of learning was rapid and remarkable. The purity of his pronunciation and his idiomatic precision in conversing in French were so perfect that he was frequently mistaken for a native of France.

Having returned to Ireland at the end of two years, he made but a short stay there; and then revisited France, where he remained for several years, partly devoted to the accumulation of knowledge and the culture and refinement of his tastes, and partly occupied in business, having entered into partnership with his brother George, who conducted an extensive wine trade at Bordeaux. Though he resided principally in that city, his avocation or his studies brought him frequently to Paris, where he had the opportunity of gazing at the new social and political drama which France then began to exhibit to the delight, astonishment, dismay, terror and despair of the civilized world.

In 1789, on the memorable 5th of May, he partook of the general

delight and shared the fervid hopes and aspirations raised by the assembling of the States General. From that eventful day, when the hopes of the good, the true, the enlightened and the humane had reached their culminating point down through the successive steps leading to the Reign of Terror, whose sanguinary orgies reached the height of their delirium in the spring and early summer of 1794, Mr. Roche either in Paris or Bordeaux was a spectator of that appalling world-tragedy, and liable to become at any moment a convenient and ready victim to exasperated patriotism insatiate of blood, and clamouring for some new sacrifice. He most fortunately escaped the common doom after an incarceration of six or seven months during the winter of 1793 and spring of 1794; but his own and his family's property were confiscated by the dominant faction at Bordeaux. After his liberation he continued to reside there however for three years with the object of saving some remnant of his property, after which he returned to British soil with a knowledge of men and life precociously ripened into mature experience by the events he witnessed and the eminent men of all parties with whom he had come into contact. His return took place in 1797, and he dwelt alternately in London and Dublin for the next three years, just as the exigencies of business or the gratification of his cultivated taste might suggest.

In 1800, conjointly with his elder brother, Stephen Roche, he established a Bank in Cork, where the two brothers married two sisters, the Misses Moylan, daughters of a respectable Cork merchant and nearly related to Dr. Moylan, the then Catholic Bishop of Cork. Their banking establishment flourished for many years with untarnished honour and credit and increasing prosperity, until the peace of 1815 suddenly reduced the value of all property that had been factitiously raised during the previous Napoleonic war; and after a few years' ineffectual struggles to meet the pressure, the Roches' Bank with fifteen others was compelled to suspend payment.¹

Frankness, integrity, and disinterestedness characterised the conduct of the brothers Roche on this occasion; and to satisfy the demands of his creditors James Roche promptly sacrificed his whole property, including his valuable library of literary treasures that he had been amassing for many years. Against this and other reverses he bore up with the calmness of a philosopher and the magnanimity of a Christian; and he resolved to make literature the means of retrieving his shattered fortunes.

From the ordeal of bankruptcy he came forth with unblemished character, and with the sympathy and respect of his creditors, who gave him permission to select such books as he might prefer for his own use out of the rare and magnificent collection that constituted his library. This choice supply of books he continued to augment till his death by fresh accessions made according as means and opportunity allowed.

Having proceeded to London, he resided there for seven years employed as commercial and parliamentary agent to Cork, Youghal, and Limerick; and during the same time he was engaged in literary labours of various kinds, especially in giving the benefit of his extensive, profound and accurate erudition to certain writers of celebrity whilst they were preparing

¹There is an account given of the Roches' Bank in the History of Cork Banks by Mr. C. M. Tenison, published in the first volume of this Journal.

important historical, biographical and genealogical works for the press; and many an author in these departments was indebted to the silent yet valuable services of Mr. James Roche for the elegant finish and, above all, the chronological exactness of their productions when brought before the public.

By a laudable and unremitting assiduity to intellectual work of this description and other similar labours his circumstances gradually improved; so that they grew to be not only easy, but affluent.

During his residence in London he cultivated the acquaintance and enjoyed the friendship of several distinguished scholars and others eminent by their social or political rank, amongst the rest the late Mr. Charles Butler. The latter gentleman and Mr. Roche were then in fact the two most learned Catholic laymen in the Empire. He was also honoured with the distinguished regard of the learned Lord Dudley, then Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, who offered Mr. Roche the important and lucrative post of Private Secretary to him, for which his mastery of foreign languages admirably fitted him. But greatly to the regret of both parties an insuperable impediment prevented his acceptance of this honourable position, for to Lord Dudley's shortsightedness and impaired vision Mr. Roche's tantalisingly small handwriting was utterly illegible.

In 1829 Mr. Roche retired from business and went once more to take up his residence in Paris, where he remained till 1832, when he retired finally to Cork. On the establishment of the National Bank of Ireland about three years later he was named one of the Directory; and he acted as local Director of the Cork branch of that bank until his death. In the discharge of the functions attached to that office or in connection with the several boards over which his fellow-citizens or the Government selected him to preside, such as President of the Cork Library Society and of the Cork School of Design, Vice-President of the Royal Cork Institution, Chairman of the Munster Provincial College, and of several other local Boards and Committees,² he evinced an impartiality, an exactness, a firmness tempered by courtesy, and a sagacity matured by experience, that were absolutely without parallel.

The weight of more than four-score years pressed but lightly on his thin, middle-sized but elastic frame, originally well-knit and harmoniously proportioned, and preserved by his habits of abstemiousness, temperance and moderate exercise in unimpaired vigour even to the verge of the grave.

Until within a few months of his death he pursued his daily walk from his residence in Woburn Place with an attitude as erect and step as unflinching as ever he had done in middle life. During his long period of existence he did not recollect having had even one day's serious illness.

His bodily health and activity presented a lively image of the versatile, highly gifted, and richly cultivated mind that dwelt within and threw into his countenance and conversation some of its own genial and vivacious warmth. To the very last day preceding his death he indulged with undiminished gusto his noble and elevating passion for books, which he devoured with avidity, digested with surprising rapidity, and criticised

² Mr. Roche was also the first President of the Cork Cuvierian Society, which was founded in October, 1835, a post he resigned in 1839, when he was succeeded by Sir James Pitoairne.

with an acuteness and discernment fatal to pompous pretension, dullness, or ignorance; and formidable to more venial errors.

But for the youthful aspirant or the thoughtful student of maturer years it was a gladdening and edifying spectacle to behold this venerable gentleman as the close of an eventful career still adhering devotedly to the love of study. His habits of business, which combined singular punctuality, precision and sagacity, were relieved and adorned by the more elegant and humanising relaxations of the scholar; while the Catholic religion, to whose principles and practical duties he had ever unswervingly adhered, shed its sweetest consolations and its hallowed hopes over the last moments of this Christian philosopher when he passed away after a few brief hours' struggle soothed by the loving attention of his daughter, Mrs. Galloway, from the trials of this life to the repose of the next.

One remarkable feature in Mr. Roche's early life was his escape from the powerful influences of French society at that time. He returned to this country with his religious convictions instead of being weakened, only the more deeply rooted, and his personal decorum and delicacy preserved intact amidst the prevailing licentiousness of that period.

Strangely enough, it was his fate to witness on the spot the commencement and fearful progress of the first French Revolution in 1789, and forty-one years afterwards the expulsion of the restored dynasty and the erection of the barricades in 1830. His youth coincided with the period of the early struggles of the Catholic body in Ireland and with the rebellion of 1798; while the great event of Catholic Emancipation gladdened his maturer years. Living thus amongst events of unparalleled magnitude, and coming into contact with some of the greatest men of the day, it is no wonder that a mind like his of singular shrewdness and sagacity, gifted with a memory of extraordinary power and retentiveness, should have had all its faculties ripened, invigorated and enriched.

His mere book-learning, various, profound, exact, and world-wide, embracing the ancient literature of Greece and Rome and the whole range of Spanish, French, German, and Italian literature, was mellowed, improved and vivified by the living experience of the man. The influence of the books which he read and the eventful world through which he had passed, were blended in modifying his intellectual character—a result obvious in his conversation and in his writings.

From his tongue and from his pen there sparkled out a continuous and inexhaustible stream of curious personal anecdotes, apt quotations in all languages from every known and some unknown volumes; startling verifications of dates, indignant and pitiless castigation of misstatements, illustrative reminiscences of the orators that he had heard or conversed with, and of the statesmen, warriors, politicians, diplomatists, or adventurers that had crossed his path, exercised his powers of observation or stimulated his curiosity.

The faculties of mind peculiarly characteristic of Mr. Roche and most pronouncedly developed—memory, judgment, and critical penetration—were displayed in his writings; whilst they imparted a fine flavour and piquancy to his conversation. No person, furthermore, acquainted with the gross blunders, the voluntary or involuntary perversions of truth, the strange distortions of fact, the suppression or mutilation of evidence transmitted from one writer to another, thus not only poisoning the well-springs

but tainting the whole course of history, but must acknowledge the services rendered by Mr. Roche to historical literature and the correction of errors, the elucidation of obscurities and the scrupulous verification of dates and of authorities, of which so many valuable proofs are to be seen in the "Gentleman's Magazine" for the past twenty years.

From these contributions, as well as from those which he contributed to the "Dublin Review," the "Cork Journal" (the latter a short-lived publication), and other periodicals, Mr. Roche selected about forty articles a couple of years before his death which he carefully revised and in some instances enlarged. These he brought out in two volumes entitled the "Reminiscences of an Octogenarian," which were printed at Cork for private circulation amongst his friends, and were not published. In these "Essays" Mr. Roche's chivalrous advocacy of truth brought him into formidable collision with the highest and brightest names in foreign and home literature; and it is surprising with what ease, readiness, and dexterity he exposed the mistakes, oversights, omissions, and paralogisms of such illustrious scholars as Brougham, Hallam, Alison, Gibbon, Hume, Rousseau, Voltaire and others.

Mr. Roche's conscientious adherence to his own and his forefathers' religious persuasion was untinged by the slightest infusion of intolerance. His genial and upright heart knew nothing of the dark, narrow, and mischievous spirit of unchristian bigotry. He was revered and beloved by all classes and parties of his fellow-citizens; and his remains were followed to their last resting place by the élite of the worth, intelligence, learning and rank of the City of Cork.

He who has penned this imperfect memoir was solicited a year ago by his fellow-citizens to write an inscription for the elegant piece of plate then presented by them to Mr. Roche. It may here be subjoined as expressing in a condensed form the substance of this whole article and the characteristic merits of its subject.

"*Jacobo Roche, Armigero, civi egregio, magistratio probo, singularis plane eruditionis viro; in omnium fere gentium monumentis historicis, nec non in illustrium hominum rebus gestis publicis ac privatis accuratissime versato; cujus ingenium acre et perspicax, mirum in modum cunctis disciplinis liberalibus exultum ornatumque, civium sibi observantum et admirationem jam dudum conciliavit; universis ordinibus seposito omni partium studio ob eximius animi dotes caro; et ob integerrimos, mores, longe curiosi, primunus cultores præter alia pignora antea data meritis heu quam imparo, Don deo civis Corcagienses. A.D. 1852.*"³

³ It would be of interest to know who was the writer, probably a Cork Catholic clerical friend, of the original obituary notice of Mr. James Roche in the "Gentleman's Magazine." That other people of that time did not regard Mr. Roche as quite so faultless an individual, is shown by the following extract from that far better known Irish writer, Dr. R. R. Madden, published in his famous "Lives of the United Irishmen," 4to series, page 247 (London, 1860):—"The octogenarian author of 'Critical and Miscellaneous Essays' in many passages in his work panegyricizes Lord Chancellor Clare. The Octogenarian had a hankering after lords, and especially any with whom he had ever been fortunate to scrape an acquaintance. He had a great respect moreover for prosperous people; and hardly ever a good word or a generous thought for men who had suffered for their political opinions; and yet in private life he was a good man. He had seen the horrors of the French Revolution and had a great horror of democratic principles. The secret of his eulogies of Clare oozes out of a note in reference to old Fitzgibbon, the father of the Chancellor. The latter, he says, was a particular friend of his (James Roche's) father; and Roche's grandfather had been the first client who paid Fitzgibbon a fee, which was the origin of a long family intercourse. Lord Clare, moreover, had rendered service to Roche's family and friends, and through his influence was instrumental to the saving of some of the latter 'from the lash and the halter.'"

Mr. Roche died at Cork on the 1st of April, 1853, in his 83rd year. He left two daughters, Marianne, the wife of Mr. Thomas Gallwey, and Sarah Anne, the wife of Mr. Edward John Collins. The place of his burial is not named in the "Gentleman's Magazine."

The only souvenir now left of Mr. James Roche in Cork is, we believe, the oil-painting of him which is hung up in the Commercial Buildings on the South Mall, of whose existence there few persons in Cork seem to be aware. Its position unfortunately precludes its being satisfactorily photographed.

Mr. Roche's erudite "Essays," it is to be feared, would find but very few appreciative readers nowadays. Local history and antiquities seem to have had no attractions for him; and, exclusive of his own "Essays," he appears to have been connected with only one other local work in book form, viz., the edition of the "Travels of Boullaye Le Gouz," brought out by Crofton Croker, to which he contributed a few notes.

In this Journal for 1895, page 307, appears a copy of a letter written by Mr. Roche to Dr. J. O'Brien Milner-Barry; and in the same year's volume, page 460, there is another letter of his, together with an extract from a second one, both addressed to Father B. T. Russell, then head of the Dominican Community in Cork, which from the nature of their contents may be not inappropriately reproduced here as follows:—

"National Bank of Ireland,
Cork, 27th August, 1851.

Rev. Dear Sir,

You will please to accept from me for your community a copy of the Essays, of which, as the impression was very limited, not more than ten more remain unappropriated. Should you find leisure to look over them, pray indulgently recollect the writer's very many years and very discordant general demands on his time. Some of them you probably have already seen; but here they are all considerably enlarged and corrected. The press compositor's constant sickness has caused many errors still apparent, though marked for amendment on the proofs on every occasion by me, through the stupidity of the underworkman, and sometimes, too, from their assuming a right to alter what they deemed wrong. Thus Campbell's line in the Pleasures of Hope, 'Like angels' visits, few and far between,' was by these mercenary gentlemen ascribed to Moore's Lalla Rookh, which like blunders did not reach me until too late to correct.

Believe me,

Rev. Dear Sir,

Yours most respectfully,

JAMES ROCHE."

The extract above referred to, which is part of a letter written by Mr. Roche to Father Russell in acknowledgment of the latter having sent him a copy of his abridged "Annals of St. Mary's of the Isle," contains, as the Very Rev. Father Dwyer (who first published these Roche items in this Journal) rightly remarks, "interesting information," but it may be pointed out that "Leamlara" is therein wrongly given as Teenlora. "I have received with pleasure the Account of the New Dominican Convent, &c., which you were so good as to present me. I perfectly recollect Dr. Nugent, who in 1784 or 5 accompanied the late Standish Barry of Teenlora (?) to France; and remained with him for about a year at Nancy in Lorraine. I do well remember seeing Father John Sheehan at Louvain in 1793, when the late John Oliffe, the bishop's father (meaning Dr. Oliffe, O.P., Bishop of Madras) was a student there. It was there that my brother Richard, of your Order, said his first mass, 17th March, St. Patrick's Day, 1778. He had declined the offer of an uncle, then one of

the first merchants in Rotterdam, to make him his partner and heir, a sacrifice of forty thousand pounds thus perfected rather than abandon his vocation. This large sum afterwards devolved to the family in general, my uncle having died intestate."

It is to be regretted that Mr. Roche apparently made no effort to get the "Roche Papers" published, which were in his possession when Windele wrote his "Cork and its Vicinity." According to this latter writer: "The collection of Roche Papers is one of considerable local value. It consists of a series of parchment and paper documents, commencing about the time of Edward I., and ending in the reign of George III. By the care of Mr. Thomas Crofton Croker these have been bound up in two volumes, and are now (1846) in the possession of Mr. James Roche of the Grand Parade, the representative of the once opulent and influential family to whose fortunes they principally relate. They contain many particulars respecting the ancient city (i.e., Cork); but no document belonging of right to the Corporation, although the contrary has been stated."

Windele, Tuckey, and Caulfield, however, evidently had access to these Roche papers, seeing what numerous extracts from them occur in their writings.

These Roche Papers were, subsequently to Mr. James Roche's death, sold to the British Museum, London, where they are now deposited. According to "Notes and Queries" (London, September 24, 1864, page 252), "The Original Papers and Deeds relating to the Roche Family of Cork are in the British Museum. Addit. MS. 19,868, and the Roche and Crosbie Papers, Addit. MS. 20,715."⁴

⁴ Mr. Roche's alleged descent from Maurice Roche, Mayor of Cork, was disputed in a subsequent number of the "Gentleman's Magazine."

J. C.

Mrs. Elizabeth Freke, her Diary, 1671 to 1714.*

(Continued from page 47.)

1712
April
27

I wrott to my Ld Richerson A boutt the purchas of High House & Westicar Abby, Mr Jallops estatt by Mee, Who promised me his service & favoure When Itt come to be sold who was now outt of England & knew noe time of his Returne.

Satterday In Easter Week, An execution Came on Mrs Barns estatt, the Impropriations of the Church & Tithes of Winch for eight hundred pound Debt due to Doctter thomas shortt of Berry for phisick¹⁵⁸ For her, In Arrears.

22 From Parriss the Gassett Mentions thatt the Chevillier De St. George siter dyed att St Germons the 18 of Aprill of the small Pox, Aged 19 years

¹⁵⁸ The charges for drugs at this time were enormous. Thomas Brown, in "The Dispensary," makes a fashionable physician describe his practice: "He pays well, and takes physick freely; besides I particularly know his Constitution; after Bleeding, he must take a Purge or two, then some Cordial Powders, Dulcifiers of the Blood, and two or three odd things more . . . I could tell you of a Sir Harry that paid £100 for Physick in six weeks, and I accepted it, being a Friend, without requiring one Penny for my own Fees."

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