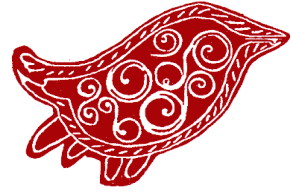


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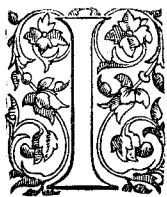
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CONNA CASTLE.

Conna Castle.



F the early history of this old County Cork Castle was not very remarkable, its later story is certainly so; for not only was it partly restored several years ago by its English owner, the Rev. Alfred G. K. L'Estrange, an Anglican clergyman residing in London, but it has now, by his Will, been left by him, as a national legacy, to the Local Government Board of Ireland, this being the first bequest of its kind ever made to that important Public Board.

A reference to the founder of Conna Castle has appeared in these pages in the interesting paper by Mr. James Grene Barry on "The First Wife of the 14th Earl of Desmond," in the *Journal* for October-December, 1910, but no account of the castle itself has so far been published in it.

The name Conna, or Connough, is said to be derived from the Irish word Cnuc, or Knock, a hill, and is that also of the little village outside which stands Conna Castle, a tall square structure perched upon a high rock overhanging the Bride, a tributary of the Blackwater River, beside whose banks many other old Geraldine castles still remain. The castle and village of Conna are about five miles to the south of Ballyduff Railway Station on the line from Fermoy to Waterford, and about the same distance west from the town of Tallow in the latter county.

The founding of Conna Castle is ascribed in Lewis's *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* to an Earl of Desmond; but other writers state, probably with more accuracy, that it was founded by Sir Thomas Ruadh (Roe) Fitz Gerald, styled Ruadh from his having had red hair, the eldest son of the 14th Earl of Desmond, who by right should have succeeded his father as 15th Earl. Its erection, therefore, doubtless took place about the middle of the 16th century. But, as Mr. Barry's paper showed, Sir James, the 14th Earl of Desmond, following the example of King Henry the Eighth, having repudiated his first wife, Joan Roche, on the ground of consanguinity, the rights of his son by this first wife, viz., Sir Thomas Roe FitzGerald, to succeed him were passed over in favour of his younger half brother, Gerald or Garrett FitzGerald, who thus became the 15th, and it might well be said the last, of the great Earls of Desmond, the princely rulers of South Munster. This latter Earl, as is well known, broke out or was goaded into rebellion, and eventually lost his life by the treachery of his own countrymen in 1582. All his immense possessions became in this way forfeited to the Crown, by whom they were parcelled out amongst the adventurers from England, or Undertakers as they were named, whose descendants in many instances still hold portions of the ancient Geraldine lands.

Sir Thomas Roe FitzGerald made an unsuccessful attempt to assert his rights, but took no part in his half-brother's rebellion, and retiring to his castle at Conna he peacefully ended his days there on the 18th of January, 1595. His remains were removed thence for interment in the Franciscan Friary, usually named the South Abbey, of Youghal, where so many of his noble kinsmen lay buried; whose tombs, the ruins of the Friary, and the surrounding graveyard were rooted up and destroyed in the 18th century, so that not a vestige of them now remains.

By his wife, Alice, daughter of Richard Power, Lord of Curraghmore, Sir Thomas Roe FitzGerald had three sons, James, John and Gerald, and a daughter, Margaret, who married Donal MacCarthy Reagh. James, his eldest son, was the ill-fated Sugaun Earl of Desmond, who on the death of his father's brother, Earl Gerald (whose own son, a minor, was long confined in the Tower of London), assumed the title of Earl of Desmond. This the Government not having recognised, he was nicknamed by Queen Elizabeth's adherents the Sugaun or Straw Earl. He had joined Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, when the latter raided Lord Barry's territory in 1599, and he took an active part in his relatives' rebellion, till at length he was betrayed by his kinsman the White Knight, taken prisoner, and tried in the King's Castle at Cork, and was transferred thence to the Tower of London, where after some time he died insane. Sir Richard Cox states that he was considered the handsomest man of his time.

It was in the same year (1599) as Tyrone's raid that Queen Elizabeth's favourite, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, made his unsuccessful campaign in Ireland. When it was drawing to a close he resolved to visit Munster, and on his homeward journey thence turned aside to visit Conna, where Desmond had his chief residence. As narrated in Bagwell's *Ireland under the Tudors*, vol. iii., page 328, Essex's army on reaching Kilmallock had then no money, magazine or remnant of any kind of victual, cows enough only for two days, and ammunition for three. On the Lord President Norris promising to procure some beeves out of the Lord Barry's country and send them to Conna, the advance of Essex's troops was resumed over the Ballyhoura hills to Glanworth and Fermoy. Essex himself went to Mallow, detached a party to Cork for the promised supplies, and rejoined the army with Cormac MacDermot Carthy, who brought 100 cows and 200 kerne. There was some fighting between Fermoy and Conna, and the latter castle was dismantled. Lord Barry brought the convoy safely to Castlelyons; the Blackwater was passed at Affane Ford, and Essex marched unimpeded into Waterford.

In 1603, as recorded in Smith's *History of Cork*, Conna Castle was demised by Sir James Fullerton to the first Earl of Cork, by whom it appears to have been again put into a defensive state, for the next thing we hear of it is that Conna Castle was taken by storm by the loyalist forces under that English bearer of an Irish title, Lord Castlehaven—forces, who though openly fighting for "God, King and Country," were always dubbed "rebels" by those who were really such, viz., Lord Cork's partisans and the adherents of Oliver Cromwell.

Lord Castlehaven's own account of this capture is a remarkably brief one, as recorded in his Memoirs:—"I advanced towards Lismore, but Coney (sic) Castle lying in a pass on my way, and, sending on summons a defiance, I encamped before it, thinking to plant my guns that night; but the Boys (i.e., young lads belonging to his army) eased me of that trouble, and before it was dark took it, as they did Milltown, by storm."

In the spring of 1650, Oliver Cromwell, as we learn from the late Rev. D. Murphy's *Cromwell in Ireland*, passed by Conna. To the west of the castle is Gallows Hill, where he is said to have halted with his army and held council about executing the garrison. From this point he battered the castle with his guns, but apparently with but little effect. But he sent out parties from here who captured the neighbouring castles of Mocollop, Cappoquin, and Dromana.

In 1653 Conna Castle was burnt by fire, and in the conflagration three young ladies, Avis, Joanna and Jane, the daughters of Edward Germain, lost their lives, to whom a monument was erected in the church at Knockmourne, about half a mile to the west of Conna. This was the old and now disused church, not the present Knockmourne Church, which lies to the east of the village at the south side of the river. On the abandonment of the old church the monument was doubtless neglected, and fell down in course of time from the niche, still left, in which it stood. So that no trace of it is now to be seen.

The castle and lands of Conna passed in later years to the descendants by marriage of the Earl of Cork, viz., the Dukes of Devonshire.

When many years ago the late Rev. Mr. L'Estrange became landlord of the Conna district, he partly restored the keep of the castle (whose out-buildings had by then disappeared), which seems to have suffered little from Essex's dismantling, Castlehaven's storming, or Cromwell's battering, or from the later fire which occurred there. Mr. L'Estrange's restoration was such as to make it likely to last for many years to come, besides which he enclosed the grounds surrounding the castle, had them tastefully laid out, and then placed the building in charge of a competent caretaker, and allowed the public access to the castle on payment of a nominal sum for admission. Its remote situation, however, cannot have induced many persons to visit Conna Castle, of which the Rev. Mr. L'Estrange furthermore wrote a History, which he had printed for private circulation only.

He disposed of his property here some time back to his tenants under the recent Land Purchase Act, and now he has, with unprecedented generosity, bestowed the castle on the nation by bequeathing it, by his Will, not to a heedless and inept local body, incapable of adequately appreciating a gift of this sort, but to the important and responsible Local Government Board for Ireland, and thereby has provided as far as possible for its preservation and maintenance, it is to be hoped, for generations yet to come.

J. C.

Dr. Caulfield's Records of the Sarsfield Family of the County Cork.

(Continued from page 91.)

“The ennobled branch of this Sarsfield family descended from Edmund Sarsfield, nephew of William, who acquired the estates from his ward. This Edmund was probably the same who was styled Alderman in 1577, as before stated. He was son of a Thomas Sarsfield, according to the genealogical sketch, which Thomas was therefore son of Edmund and grandson of Thomas, who deplored the encroachments. The sketch says that Edmund had issue male ‘Thomas and William,’ for which reason, and as it was usual to call an eldest son after his grandfather, we must suppose Thomas to have been older than his brother William who obtained the estates, and the Kilmallock branch senior to that of Sarsfield Court, though