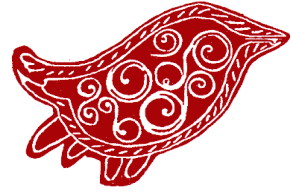


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dreamy murmur of streams. The air from ocean and mountain makes the atmosphere delicious. For the jaded statesman, sick of politics, or the denizen of London, tired of its distractions, there could be no more restful retreat. It is a sequestered spot, far removed from the haunts of men, away from their ambitions, their rivalries, their intrigues. With the world's insincerities and hypocrisies shut out, what purer haven of peace could one desire? Residence in such a place, amid scenes of natural beauty and grandeur, is the ideal of refreshment and repose.

Kilbrittain Castle.

By REV. C. COAKLEY.



THE burning of Kilbrittain Castle on the morning of Wednesday, May 26th last, will serve to revive at least a passing interest in the older and more historic pile which it replaced. Of the old fortress only few traces remained. The massive wall on the southern side of the courtyard, the arched rooms used in recent times as sculleries, and—perhaps most interesting of all—the dungeon, a place partly under the ground level, and lighted by a window at the foot of the castle wall, access thereto being by means of a trap in the ceiling. But—*ex pede Hercules*—from these scant remnants may be inferred what a formidable stronghold it must have been in the olden days.

When and by whom the castle was originally built are questions which seem to have never been satisfactorily decided. Usually the work is said to have been done by some member of the De Courcey family during the early portion of the 13th century; but there is good reason for attributing it to an earlier period and to an Irish hand. Readers of Smith's "History of Cork,"¹ will readily recall the well authenticated fact of the discovery by Jonas Stawell, in one of the old towers of the castle, of two inscribed stones bearing the date 1035—a fact placed beyond all question by the correspondence between Dr. Clayton and the Earl of Egmont, who proved to be a "doubting Thomas" on the point. Now the only reasonable conclusion with regard to these figures is that they give the date of the original building. If they do not mean that, what do they mean? That they should have been placed there by a builder a couple of centuries later is simply incredible. Assuming that they do indicate the date of the building of the castle, the identity of the builder can be easily established. Kilbrittain, at the date mentioned, belonged to the territory of the Ui Eachach. It was in fact the nearest point on the sea coast to the royal residence of the chief of that tribe, the King of Rathleann, situated near Templemartin, and was in consequence a place of considerable importance. And the King of Rathleann from 1014 to 1038 was—according to the Four Masters—Mahon;² the ancestor from whom the O'Mahony

¹ See Smith pp. 239-40 New Ed.

² According to the Leabhar Oiris, Mahon died in 1028, and was succeeded by his son Brodchon, who in that case would be chief in 1035.



THE ANCIENT CASTLE OF KILBRITTAIN,
(From an Old Painting copied by P. G. Lee.)



KILBRITTAIN CASTLE.
(From a Photo by Guy & Co. Ltd.)

Septs derive their name. Some confirmation may be given to this view of the matter by the tradition referred to by Smith, "History of Cork," p. 320, new edition:—"To the west of Fermoy lies Carriganedy, i.e., the rock of the shield, *where stood a castle said to have been built by the Mahonys*"; because, as the late Canon O'Mahony points out in his "History of the O'Mahony Septs," p. 55, this very territory was probably acquired by the Ui Eachach during the chieftainship of Mahon.³

Though the earliest historical reference to Kilbrittain Castle occurs in the year 1295, there are some facts of an earlier date which may serve to throw some light upon its history. In the year 1223 Milo de Courcey was created Baron of Kinsale by King Henry III. Through his marriage some years previously with the daughter of De Cogan he had acquired the territory known in later times as "Courcey's Country," and as this seems to have included the "cantred of Kilbrittain," we may conclude that the castle passed into De Courcey hands in the first or second decade of the thirteenth century. A few years later the McCarthys appear upon the scene. Under the year 1232 the "Annals of Innisfallen," Bodleian copy, record that: "Donall Gott (i.e., the Stammerer) McCarthy . . . went at the instance of Maghnus O'Cobhthaig and Fineen O'Moriarty to commit an unneighbourly act against Muirchertach O'Mahony, a thing which he did, for he slew the three sons of O'Mahony and plundered himself; and in consequence of this Donal Cairbreagh and his race remained in the south from that forth." Some thirty years later when, in the quaint language of Hanmer, "the Carties plaid the divells in Desmond," the sons of this Donall "Gott" over-ran Courcey's country and laid siege to Ringrone Castle⁴ on the river Bandon opposite Kinsale; and although there is no reference to Kilbrittain in the "Annals" on this occasion, it is hardly possible that they could have overlooked so important a stronghold. If, however, the McCarthy did get possession of the place it was soon recovered by De Courcey; because when these relentless foes met once more in battle, on the Island of Inchidony, in 1295, and the brothers John and Patrick de Courcey went down before the veteran Donal "Maol" (i.e., "the Bald") McCarthy, Kilbrittain Castle passed into the hands of the King, whose escheator, Walter de la Haye, handed it over to the custody of one James Keating in trust for De Courcey's heir. But as there was no De Courcey to defend the place, it is more than probable that Donal Maol seized it for himself—at any rate, when it next appears on the stage of local history it is the principal stronghold of his descendants.

During the fourteenth century Kilbrittain seems to have shared the happiness of "the country that has no history," but it more than atones for that omission in the course of the fifteenth. In the library of T.C.D. there is a fragment of an Irish MS. marked H. 5, 27. It is part of a medical treatise translated from the Latin original by John O'Callanan, physician to McCarthy Reagh, with the help of his tutor Pierce O'Harallahan. The work was begun in Kilbrittain Castle during the last illness of Donal

³ When the present writer, at the request of a former secretary of the society, contributed a note on Kilbrittain to the Journal some years ago, he believed that the castle itself supplied further evidence of its early origin. A more critical examination after the lapse of a score of years has convinced him that this is not so.

⁴ "Annals of Innisfallen", Dublin copy.

“Reagh” (i.e., “the swarthy”) McCarthy, Chief of Carbery, and completed at the School of Ross immediately after his death, on the day before the feast of St. Brendan (May 15) 1414.

The death of Donal Reagh was followed by a war of succession, and Kilbrittain became a scene of turmoil. According to Laine, the French historian of the McCarthy's, the choice of the clan fell upon Dermot “an Dhunaidh,” the fifth son of the late chief; but with this statement our native Annalists are by no means in agreement, as will appear later. At any rate Dermot got possession of Kilbrittain Castle and held it until 1430, when, according to the “Four Masters,” he was defeated and driven out by the Earl of Desmond, who put Dermot's elder brother, Donough “of Iniscéin,” in possession. Two years later, the same authorities inform us, “Owen, son of McCarthy Reagh”—another brother—“led a predatory incursion towards Kinsale and was killed”; Lord Kinsale in turn invaded Carbery, drove out Donough McCarthy from Kilbrittain, and secured the castle for himself. But in 1449 Dermot “an Dhunaidh” returned to the charge and expelled De Courcey. Scarcely had he gained possession however when danger threatened from another quarter. Under this year Duaid M'Firbis records: “Great war in Desmond between McCarthy Reagh and Teige Mac Cormac McCarthy.” Probably the Chief of Muskerry, or it may be the son of McCarthy Reagh's own brother, Cormac Teige, aided by the sons of McCarthy Mor, led an army into Carbery and directed his course towards Kilbrittain; but McCarthy Reagh met and defeated them at a place called Glean-na-mhuilinn—the glen of the mill—and following up his advantage he pursued them as far as Ballymodan on the River Bandon, where many others were killed or made prisoners.

Under the year 1452 the “Four Masters” record that “McCarthy Reagh, sc, Donough, Lord of Carbery, died; and Dermot “an Dhunaidh” was inaugurated in his place.” Dermot's four brothers were now dead, so he might be expected to “enjoy peace in his possessions.” But it was not to be so. His nephew, Cormac, the son of Donough, set up a rival claim, which he continued to press for a quarter of a century, until he was finally defeated and made prisoner in the year 1477. Nor was this Dermot's only trouble. In 1461 he was still in possession of Kilbrittain Castle, as appears from an act dated there on June 12 of that year, by which he recovered certain lands once the property of his father; but in the following year, Lord Kinsale, taking advantage of the family feuds among the McCarthys, once more seized the place, after which it remained in the hands of the De Courcey family for half a century. This period, it will be remembered covers the career of Blessed Thaddeus McCarthy (1455-92), and readers of the life of our sainted Bishop will note, perhaps with surprise, the friendly relations which, despite their frequent wars, existed between the McCarthy and De Courcey families.

When about the year 1510 Kilbrittain once more changed masters it was by a transaction that betrayed the arts of peace rather than war. McCarthy Reagh—at this time Donal, grandson of Dermot “an Dhunaidh”—was the owner of a strange animal, usually described as a white weasel, to which his neighbour, Lord Kinsale, appears to have taken an extraordinary liking, so much so that he borrowed it, and actually pledged

Kilbrittain Castle for its safe return. But the weasel died on his hands, and McCarthy Reagh kept possession of the castle. The local version represents the animal as a ferret, and De Courcey's pledge as merely a joke, but a very serious joke, as the event proved! Whatever be the correct version, the result of the incident was to make McCarthy Reagh and his descendants undisputed masters of Kibrittain Castle for the next hundred and thirty years.

The astute individual who negotiated this little affair is described by the "Four Masters," when recording his death under the year 1531, as "Donal son of Fineen, son of Dermod, lord of Hy Carbery, a man of good jurisdiction and rule, of great hospitality and prowess, a man who had given a general invitation of hospitality to all those in Ireland who sought gifts." Had they consulted Lord Kinsale they would probably have added that he was not the sort of man from whom it would be safe to borrow a weasel. He had been twice married—first to a daughter of Cormac "Laudhir" MacCarthy, chief of Muskerry, the builder of Blarney Castle and Kilcrea Castle and Abbey; and secondly to Ellinor, daughter of Gerald, eighth Earl of Kildare. The two sons of his first marriage having died before him, Donal was succeeded by the eldest son of his second marriage, Cormac "na h'aoine," then a youth of fifteen. But that he was a youth of very high spirit Cormac very soon proved, as appears from the following written by an Irish correspondent to Cromwell, and dated October 6th, 1535.⁵ "Macarte Ryagh came in upon a saff cundewte and hys anneswar was that he would not be sworn unto the Kyng, nor put in no plegys for to doo eny man eny ryght that he had don wrong to; for that, that he hathe won with hys sworde he will holde it with hys sworde. And then my Lorde being sore movyed at hyme, saying untoo hyme yt schold be unto hys payn; he makyng answar, he would abydd yt; with a prouwd countenance, lyke the Garadyns as ever I saw." Possibly this interview was connected with another event which had taken place earlier this same year. After "The Pardon of Maynooth" had brought the rebellion of "Silken Thomas" to a disastrous end, Dr. Leverous, tutor to Gerald, the younger brother, fled with his pupil to Kilbrittain, where for a time at least the lad was safe with his aunt, Lady Ellinor, and her gallant son Cormac "na-h'aoine" though the English ministers were sparing no effort to lay hands upon him. His subsequent adventures and ultimate restoration to estates and titles form a romantic chapter of Irish history.

Cormac "na h'aoine" died about the year 1560. By his marriage with Sheila, daughter of Cormac "Laudhir Oge," Chief of Muskerry, he left an only son, Donal, then little more than an infant; and in accordance with Tanistic law he was succeeded by his next brother Fineen. It was probably about the beginning of the latter's Chieftancy that, as we learn from the Four Masters under the year 1560, "Thomas and James, the sons of Sir Maurice Fitzgerald of Desmond, led an army in Carbery." As they advanced towards Kilbrittain they were met and defeated at "Glan-an-mhuilinn"—the scene of Dermod "an Dhunaidh's" victory over a century earlier—by the Carbery forces under Donough McCarthy, the chief's brother, and Turlough McSwiney with his company of northern gallowglasses, who pursued the invaders as far as the River Bandon, and on bank opposite

⁵ See "The McCarthys of Glenacroin"—D. McCarthy Glas: pp. 206-7.

Inishannon, slew over two hundred of them. After a short rule of four or five years Fineen died, and was succeeded as "McCarthy Reagh" by his next brother, Donough, the hero of the foregoing exploit. During Donough's lordship over Kilbrittain Castle and Carbery he consistently supported the Royalist interest, being particularly active in his service against the Earl of Desmond during the early years of the great Geraldine's rebellion. Sir Henry Sydney, writing from Cork to his royal mistress about the feast of Christmas, 1575, declared that: "The Lord of Carbery, Sir Donough McCarthy, and the Lord of Muskerry, Sir Cormac Mac Teige, neither of these but in respect of his territories, was able to be a viscount, and truly I wish them both to be made barons, for they be both good subjects." (Cal. State Papers.)

Sir Donough was the father of the famous Florence McCarthy, who played so large a part in Munster politics during the closing years of Queen Elizabeth's reign, and who is sometimes, but erroneously, referred to as "McCarthy Reagh." He never became Chief of Carbery or master of Kilbrittain, but claimed the title of "McCarthy Mor" in right of his wife, who was the daughter of the last "McCarthy (Mor)." When Donough was laid to rest with his ancestors in Timoleague Abbey in 1576 his brother Owen was chosen to succeed him—a striking example of the working of Tanistic law, whereby four sons of a former chief succeeded him in turn.

Sir Owen McCarthy appears to have been a man of peace, taking little or any part in the public movements of his time. That he was not an earnest supporter of the Queen's interest seems to have excited the wrath of her ministers in Ireland. "Though specious in show, he is a very hypocrite, being badly bent and a notorious Papist, and who would be in rebellion if he dared"—thus Sir Warham St. Leger, one of the Queen's Commissioners for Munster, refers to him when writing to London about him. From a letter of his own which is too good to be omitted, we get a view of his character from a different angle. Being in London during Christmas of the year 1587, and finding himself short of cash, he writes to Lord Burleigh—"I humbly beseech your hon. Lp. to respect my present extremity, and to supply my want with the Loane of one fortie pounds to refresh me these holydayes.—Owen Carty." Evidently if Sir Owen could not spend "a merry Christmas" with his friends in the halls of Kilbrittain he was determined not to spend a sad one in the hostleries of London; and even for a Chief of Carbery, considering the value of money in those days, "one fortie pounds" was a very generous "refresher" indeed. According to the "Four Masters," Sir Owen attended Perrott's parliament in Dublin in 1585; and in recording his death eight years later they describe him as "a sensible, pious, truly hospitable and noble-deeded man." He was succeeded by his nephew Donal, the son of Cormac "na h'aoine," whom he had previously bound in securities of £10,000 not to divert the chieftainship from the Tanistic heir, Florence, the son of Donough.

Donal's rule covered one of the most momentous periods of Irish history, and his actions throughout were utterly at variance with what might have been expected from the son of the brave and high-spirited Cormac "na h'aoine." He had married Margaret, daughter of Sir Thomas Roe Fitzgerald, and sister of the gallant but unfortunate "Sugaun" Earl of Desmond, and in the year 1596 they built one of the towers of Kilbrittain

Castle, as appears from an inscribed stone taken therefrom and preserved until recently, but probably now destroyed. The inscription ran:—

DONALOUS - CAR
 CI - ET - MARGAR
 ETTA - SERATO -
 FECERUNT. A.D. 1596.

i.e., "Donal McCarthy and Margaret Fitzgerald made (this tower) A.D. 1596." At the siege of Kinsale Donal appears to have given some assistance to the royalist side, but never to have uttered even a word of expostulation when his country of Carbery was being ravaged with fire and sword both before and after that event. Indeed, his chief study in life would seem to have been to secure for his own posterity the clan lands, in defiance both of his bond and of the laws of Tanistry, an object which he achieved in the year 1606 by what is known as the process of "surrender and regrant." In 1610 his eldest son, Cormac, died, and on his own death, two years later, he was succeeded by his grandson, Donal "Mac Cormaic."

In the year 1616 James I., ignoring his grant to McCarthy Reagh ten years earlier, bestowed Kilbrittain Castle and a number of ploughlands in Carbery upon a Scotch favourite, Sir James Sempel, but the grant was apparently allowed to lapse. At least, there seems to be no evidence of any attempt having been made to enforce it.

The name of "Donal Mac Cormac" will be familiar to readers of Bennett's "History of Bandon," as the McCarthy Reagh to whom he attributes so many of the alleged atrocities of 1642. But with regard to Bennett's "history" it is sufficient to remark that Donal died in 1636! His place at Kilbrittain was taken by his son Cormac, who seems to have been of anything but a warlike disposition; but into war he was drawn, no matter how reluctantly. The troubles which began in Ulster in October, 1641, do not seem to have spread to the South till the beginning of the following year; and it was only in the month of February, 1642, that hostilities commenced in Carbery, and then in a half-hearted fashion. Three months later, as McCarthy Reagh's forces lay in camp at Killavarrig wood, between Timoleague and Clonakilty, the Bandon Volunteers—now a strong body, well organised and armed—made a sudden and successful raid upon Kilbrittain, apparently left without a sufficient guard, and from that day its castle halls knew McCarthy Reagh no more.

The rest of its story is soon told. The Parliamentarians held it until the Restoration, when it was granted to James, Duke of York, who later on bestowed it upon his friend, the Earl of Clancarty, head of the Muskerry McCarthys. In 1690 that nobleman shared the fortunes—or misfortunes—of his royal master; and Kilbrittain, like so many of his estates, passed into the hands of the Hollow Sword Blade Company of London. Later on this land-jobbing corporation sent over agents to dispose of its acquisitions piecemeal, and thus in the early years of the eighteenth century Kilbrittain Castle became the property of the Stawell family, who in the course of time, as has been already indicated, almost completely demolished it.

Of the mansion recently destroyed the west front was built about the middle of the eighteenth century, and the south was a restoration of the old castle carried out in the year 1871 by the late Col. Alcock Stawell.

C. COARLEY.