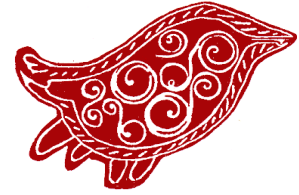


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## The Cistercian Abbeys of Munster.

By REV. PROFESSOR POWER, D.Litt.

(Continued)

### COUNTY OF CORK.

#### I.—CHORE (Midleton).



CHORE is the modern Midleton which took its ancient name from a well-known salmon-weir (*coradh*, gen. *corann*) in the Owenacurra. The full Irish form, still in use, is Mainistir-na-Corann, *i.e.*, "Abbey of the Weir," from play upon which came the poetic Cistercian designation—"Chorus Sti. Benedicti" and the abbreviated form, Chore, etc.

Our abbey, of which scarcely a trace survives, stood on the eastern bank of the river near where the stream empties itself into an inlet of Cork Harbour. Growth of the very modern town has obliterated not only all remains of the abbey but even all popular memory of the abbey's existence. The monastic site is occupied, at least in part, by the present Protestant Church and cemetery.

Records of the abbey are almost as scant as the material remains. We do not even know the founder, for certain; he was either a Barry or a Geraldine—but, more probably the former. At any rate the Barrys were always looked upon as the patrons and protectors of the community. The recognised date of foundation is 1180, and the house was certainly the fourth, and youngest, daughter of Maigue. One Robert (surname unknown) was abbot here *cir.* 1309. The King refers (MS. Nat. Lib. Ireland) to him or his predecessor, Donald, as responsible for diversion of a watercourse between Donarthlyn<sup>1</sup> and Cathermoyn.<sup>2</sup> Abbot Robert was, in 1309, involved in another controversy regarding half a quarter of land in Donimockmore.<sup>3</sup> We next hear of the abbey in 1363 when a monk of the house, Nicholas FitzAbraham, was granted a dispensation to become abbot notwithstanding illegitimacy of birth. A similar dispensation previously had enabled Nicholas to enter religion and the second dispensation is petitioned for on the ground that "there is in Ireland a very great lack of fit persons for such dignities" (*Calendar of Papal Petitions*, p. 468). Such dispensations from the irregularity of illegitimate birth have become ominously frequent in the 14th cent.—an indication (if we had no other) that postulants to the religious state had very much declined in number. It is hardly too daring to associate the decline in question with the social and economic consequences of the Black Death which ravaged Ireland, 1348-49. In 1447 another monk of Midleton, Rory O'Loughnan<sup>4</sup> was similarly dispensed to succeed abbot Philip O'Loughnan. Rory's promotion involved the removal of one John de Barry, who, for two years had held the abbacy by aid of lay powers. Pseudo-abbot John seems also to have been inhibited by the now familiar irregularity from

<sup>1</sup> Possibly the present Dunsfort.

<sup>2</sup> Cahermone a townland of 171 a. On it stands a ruined castle and on the adjoining townland of Carrigshane is a cathair.

<sup>3</sup> Now Doniekmore, in the parish of Clonmult, a townland of 696 a.

<sup>4</sup> The name has been anglicised Lawton, under which form it still occurs locally.

which he had not been released by dispensation. The Papal mandate for Rory's installation was addressed not to the Bishop of Cloyne but to an outsider, the Dean of Ross, because Rory had made complaint to Rome that he had no hope of justice "in the city or diocese of Cloyne," where, no doubt, clan, or family, feeling ran strong. Rory is authorised to receive the abbatial blessing from any Catholic Bishop "without prejudice to the bishop of Cloyne to whom the said monastery is, by ordinary right, subject" (*Cal. Papal Letters*, vol. x. p. 300). There is only one further reference to Midleton till the Reformation era. This is under date, c. 1479, when Gerald Fitz Richard, bishop of Cloyne and Cork, bestows on the abbey the vicarages of Clonmult, Daingean-Donovan and Ballyspillane.

The last abbot of Midleton was Philip Fitz David Barry who, on the suppression, was granted (1543) a lease for twenty-one years of the abbey site, etc., at an annual rent of £3. 13. 4. (Fiants, Henry VIII.). Next, the abbey property passed into the hands of Sir John Fitzgerald of Cloyne, and in possession of his descendants it appears to have remained, notwithstanding the Desmond confiscation, till the forfeiture under Cromwell. When, in 1580, the Seneschal of Imokilly, was driven by Raleigh out of his Castle of Cahirmore, he retired to the abbey whence he was also expelled, probably with much damage to the building.

About the middle of the 17th cent. Father Malachy Barry, a monk of Tracton, was appointed titular abbot of Chore—presumably under aegis of the Confederation. Before, however, he could take possession Abbot Barry was accidentally killed by a French soldier.

## II.—FERMOY.

The name Fermoy, once designative of a wide and fertile region mostly to north of the Blackwater, is now popularly restricted to the very modern town, though there is also, of course, the present Barony of Fermoy representing, but not coterminous with, the ancient Feara Muighe Feine. As our abbey, after the 12th cent., was the chief religious house within the territory it came to be designated—Mainistir Fearmaighe, and this remains the present Irish name of Fermoy town. *Castrum Dei* ("God's Camp") was the Cistercian name which possibly owes its origin to an ancient Irish *longphurt*, or entrenched camp, on the bank of the river at this place.

Abbey site and precincts are to-day occupied by the new and thriving town and not a fragment of building survives to give us a clue to the ancient plan or to mark the ancient site. The abbey stood on south bank of the river—between the river and the parallel range of hill not many perches to the south. The exact site lies between the river and the main east-and-west street of Fermoy—close to the present residence of Dr. O'Brien. Therefore the abbey church must have lain, *more solito*, parallel with the river bank while the cloisters and domestic buildings extended as far to the south as the main street already alluded to.

Material from the monastic buildings was used in erection of the first houses of modern Fermoy and local account has it that the Royal Hotel is almost entirely built of stone from the abbey. Recently carved stones and ancient interments were found during excavation for foundations on the indicated site. Built into boundary walls of tenements to north side of the main street are quantities of old weathered shale (a local stone) from the demolished ruin. Much confusion of local tradition has resulted from the fact that the old thatched Penal Days' chapel of Fermoy stood in a cross-lane partly on the former abbey site. Two distinct traditions have in consequence

become mixed or interwoven and it is now no easy task to disentangle the respective elements. As a matter of fact, and as is usual in such cases, the latter edifice has almost entirely ousted the earlier, and most important, from popular memory.

Fermoy was a foundation from the abbey of Inislounaght (*De Surio*), but when the latter house—for transgression of Cistercian spirit—was deprived of its filiations in the 13th cent., Fermoy was transferred to the paternity of Furness, in Lancashire, and under the latter it remained for half a century. Different authorities variously attribute the foundation, and incidentally the endowment, of Fermoy. Foundation is more commonly ascribed to the Roches; this can hardly be taken literally however, for the family in question had not come into the country, much less established itself there, as early as 1170—the date commonly assigned for foundation of our abbey. Fermoy, therefore, like its parent house, was most likely of purely Irish origin and its original endowment was almost certainly augmented by subsequent donations of a Norman Chieftain. The native Irish overlord was O'Keefe whose chief dun was at Glanworth. O'Conway, O'Regan and O'Connor (Fermoy) were the local petty chieftains and they may have contributed to the work but their individual resources would hardly have been equal to the foundation. What the Norman gave had cost him little; it was the fruit of conquest and its giver could well afford to be generous.

We know singularly little of the abbey's domestic history from its foundation to the dissolution. We have, in fact, no references to the house beyond record of some semi-public disturbances of the early 13th cent. in consequence of which a monk of Fermoy, together with the abbot of Inislounaght, was murdered by the Irish. It looks as if the crime were agrarian in character; it must be remembered that in some cases monastic lands may have been property of which the natives considered themselves unjustly despoiled. Be this as it may the General Cistercian Chapter, held the following year, decreed that all the abbots of England, Scotland and Ireland should, on certain days, solemnly excommunicate the murderers as well as all the promoters and counsellors of the bloody deed.

At the general dissolution—or rather some time subsequent to the latter (in Elizabeth's reign)—De Castro Dei, with its appurtenances, was granted to Sir Richard Grenville, Knight.

### III.—MAURE.

The name probably represents the Irish Magh Odhar, *i.e.*, “Dun-Coloured Plain.” Or, it may be a copyist's corruption of Mahon which in its turn may represent the genitive of the tribe-name Uí Badhamhna. It is most unlikely that it is a form of St. Maurus as has been contended. Spellings and forms in ancient documents are notoriously freakish when the names have been copied by foreigners. As the name, Maure, is obsolete locally it is not possible to test it by the safest of all criteria—its pronunciation by a native Irish speaker. The Cistercian name, De Fonte Vivo, may have been suggested by a well near the abbey, but to-day there is no spring visible in the immediate neighbourhood of the ruin.

Identity of this abbey has been the subject of controversy. That, however, Maure is the present Abbeymahon, near Timoleague, there can now be no reasonable doubt. Smith *History of Cork*, who failed to identify the site, has led subsequent writers astray. The contention that Maure and Abbeymahon are not one and the same is quite untenable. No

such house as Abbeymahon is named in the Cistercian lists, and Janauschek, chronicler of the Order, refers to it as an abbey of doubtful existence.

The site of Abbeymahon is rather unCistercian—not, as according to tradition, on a stream or river, but on to the sea shore, in Courtmacsherry Bay, Barony of Barryroe. At present a public road which carries a tramway line runs between our abbey ruin and the sea.

The abbey ruins are neither extensive nor in a good state of preservation. Worse still, there is lack of such architectural features—like doors or windows—as indicate dates. In Smith's time a dwelling, "surrounded by a grove," stood within the precincts—a fact which accounts for the abbey's present condition of dilapidation and partly explains the historian's failure to identify the site. The surviving remains comprise portion of the great church with little more than bare foundations of the east and south ranges. The only part of the church in a fair state of preservation is the chancel which measures some twenty-seven by eighteen feet internally. A fragment of the east gable stands to a height of fifteen feet and shows the base, but not the upper parts, of one widely splaying window. In their proper respective places are the founder's tomb and the sedilia under their pointed arcades. Above the sedilia, in the south wall, are traces of a former window, or windows, and, in the opposite side wall is one later, double-light, ogee-headed window. By side of the last there is inserted in the wall a slab of freestone having incised in Roman capitals the letters I. H. It is clear that the choir was carried back, in the familiar Cistercian fashion, a bay or two to west of the transept crossing. It is scarcely possible now, at least without excavation, to say whether there was a central tower. A pointed doorway (6' x 3' 9''): pierces the stone screen in the usual way and, midway between the door and the south side wall, there is a small square tower (about 11' at the side) projecting into the nave. This tower is quite a unique feature—though there is something resembling it at Corcomroe—and it seems to have belonged to the original plan. The nave has entirely disappeared so that even the foundations cannot be traced with certainty. Both transept arches (about 15' wide) have been built up and the inserted screens are pierced by plain, square-headed doorways. Here, in the transept crossing at the south side, I found embedded in the earth a curious box-like object of stone (2' x 18'')—its outer sides decorated with Maltese crosses. By myself I found it impossible to lift the object for further examination and I can only conjecture its purpose. It looks like some sort of basin or holy-water stoup. There is nothing to indicate that the Church was ever furnished with aisles and there is total absence of ornament, further than the plain chamfer on windows and arches. Built into a wall in one place, however, is a piece of stone moulding but it looks as if it had belonged to an older building, such as an original Hiberno-Romanesque church on the spot. Only a single chapel of the south transept remains; this, which had a vaulted roof (now broken down), measures approximately 10' x 9' and it communicates directly with the chancel by a small doorway as at Hore and other places. It is impossible—without liberal use of the spade—to determine original extent of the transept or, indeed, of the adjoining apartments of the eastern range. Of the north transept there are absolutely no remains. The north side wall of the church batters on the external face, and the east gable is strengthened without by massive buttresses where the ground falls away to north and east. The southern range of buildings is even more dilapidated and more difficult to trace than the eastern. It is, in fact, quite featureless except at the south-west angle where there stands a crumbling piece of ivy-clad ruin

perhaps thirty-feet in height with very badly cemented walls of great thickness. This structure projects outwards from the quadrangle after the manner of a flanking tower. Can this be part of the residential building which Smith found within the abbey precincts nearly two centuries since? Choir, south transept and north-east corner of cloister garth are at present enclosed by a common fence as a graveyard. Burials still occasionally take place here though the cemetery is very badly kept—even for Ireland.

Foundation of our abbey is commonly assigned to the year 1172 and to Dermot MacCormac MacCarthy, Prince of Desmond. Maure therefore belongs to the first and great period of Irish Cistercianism and it received its first community from Baltinglass—itsself the second offshoot of Mellifont. Beyond this few facts of Maure's history are known. We have mention of an abbot, Patrick, of this house in 1252, and Brady (*Episcopal Succession*, vol. II., p. 242) shows that Thady (Blessed Thaddeus), Bishop of Ross, was commendatory abbot in 1492. Theiner (*Vetera Monumenta Hibernorum*) prints two papal documents which refer to our abbey. The first, which is dated 1517, records the resignation of a Bishop of Ross, Edmund Courcey ("senciens me viribus meis corporalibus et sensibus debilitatum") in favour of the abbot of Fons Vivus. The abbot in question was not, by the way, our Blessed Thaddeus—who had died at Ivrea, nearly twenty-five years earlier.

There is a letter from King Henry VIII. to the Pope asking approbation of Courcey's resignation and of the Abbot's promotion. Moreover the King requests that the new bishop be allowed, in consideration of his See's poverty, to retain his abbey of Fons Vivus. A note to the Annates (*De Annatis Hiberniae*, vol. I. p. 55,) shows that Courcey aforesaid was a Franciscan that, previous to his appointment to Ross, he had been bishop, or coadjutor-bishop, of Clogher and that he too had, almost certainly, held the abbacy in commendum, following the death of an Abbot Robert. All this suggests that the community of Maure had declined to, or towards, zero by beginning of the 16th century.

Smith—"aliquando dormitat bonus Homerus"—is evidently in error in his assumption that Maure and Abbeymahon are distinct houses. Moreover, the county historian asserts that Abbeymahon had been founded not long previous to the general dissolution and that its founder was a Barry, who had temporarily endowed the abbey with eighteen ploughlands—till such time as the building should be completed. Smith even names the townlands. One strongly suspects that there was a second foundation, or a restoration, in the early 16th cent. consequent on which the nomination of merely commendatory abbots ceased. The whole subject is, however, very complicated and it requires further investigation.

Literally accepted, Smith's statement is incredible for (a) we have no mention in any other authority of a Cistercian abbey other than Maure in the diocese of Ross, (b) there is neither trace nor tradition within the diocese of such an abbey and it is quite impossible that a great Cistercian house should have completely passed from earth and human memory, and (c) it is most unlikely that the Cistercian spirit was sufficiently alert and active in Ireland of the 16th cent. to promote a completely new foundation. In connection with the last point it is to be remembered that no Cistercian house had been founded in Ireland for two hundred and fifty years and that the tide of enthusiasm on which such a foundation might be carried to fruition had long since ebbed. Can Smith, by any chance, have confounded Maure with Chore! Such confusion, though it would account for the suggested foundation by a Barry, would leave the assigned date unexplained!

Maure, like Knockmoy, Jerpoint and Inislounaght, had an attached or affiliated cell, which we find variously named in ancient documents—Inchoie, Ree, Ri, etc. It is now known as Abbeystrewry, Co. Cork.

Consequent to the suppression Abbeymahon with its cell, Abbeystrewry, and the lands in each case attached, passed into possession of the Walsh family. Nicholas Walsh, Knight, held the abbey with its eighteen townlands in 1634 and he appears, at the same time, to have held Abbeystrewry with its twenty townlands.

#### IV.—TRACTON.

The name, like the names of many other Irish Cistercian Abbeys, (Tintern, Mellifont, Jerpoint, Bective, etc.), is apparently unIrish. Tubrid appears to have been the original Irish name of the place. *Albus Tractus*, whatever its origin, was the Cistercian, or official designation; probably it had association with the title of the parent house—Alba Landa, in Caermarthenshire. It appears in the documents under a variety of forms—many of them, like *Streechem, de Stricto and Crectotrem*, due to errors of copyists and departing very far, indeed, from the original.

The Abbey site, in the barony of Kinalea, lies on north bank of a stream which, some perches to the east, joins a small tidal estuary of Ringabella Bay. On north and east rise hills of medium height and on the other sides are rich alluvial flats with an elevation—Knocknamanach to the south east.

Very scant remains of the abbey survive in what is now a garden belonging to Mr. Coveney. Adjoining the garden in question is a small Protestant Church standing within its ancient graveyard and occupying site of the ancient parish church built, as at Knockmoy, Maigue, Grey Abbey, Inch and elsewhere, close to the monastery, on its west side. In trenching the garden referred to Mr. Coveney has, from time to time, unearthed quantities of carved stones, chamfered and moulded arch heads, sections of columns and broken window mullions. Many of these are preserved in the garden together with a coffin-shaped grave slab bearing a floriated cross of thirteenth century style. At east boundary of the garden—forming, in fact, the fence of the enclosure, there still stands a piece of very ancient wall (about 20' in length by 8' high) which probably was portion of the church (eastern gable). At this point, for a stretch of fifteen feet or so, across, an excavation has been made to the original floor level and from the collected archivolt and voissior fragments a small pointed arch (as if of sedilia) and a round-headed arch (as if of the founder's tomb) have been reconstructed, in addition to one larger pointed arch, seven feet wide. Mr. Coveney, in his exploration, came, on one occasion, upon a human skeleton, which he reverently reinterred. The body in this case had been buried *within* the church at, or near, the approximate position of the founder's tomb. In all probability therefore the body was of some bishop, abbot or noble of high degree for no others were allowed interment within a Cistercian Church. On another occasion, in tree-planting, Mr. Coveney uncovered the base of a clustered column which we are fairly safe in setting down as one of the nave pillars and its discovery is evidence that the church had aisles. The column plinth, which has been reburied, is on north side of the central garden-path. Another object unearthed was a large stone basin, presumably a holy-water-font, which has been removed to the parish church. Among the recovered carvings is a sheela-na-gig-like figure, in relief from a flat surface. Judging from the fragment of surviving wall the masonry of our church—and presumably of the abbey throughout—was of the local black shale, with sandstone dressings.

Large quantities of oyster shells have likewise been found in the garden and vicinity. So completely had the buildings been destroyed—a tradition states, by design—that even the exact site of the abbey had been forgotten till Mr. Coveney's discovery of the cut-stone fragments, etc.

Ware, who quotes 1224 as the date of Tracton's foundation, does not give us the founder's name—doubtless, because he did not himself know it. Hartry is equally uncommunicative. Allemand assigns the honour to a MacCarthy; Harris follows him and their view is adopted by Janauschek. As Webster (*The Diocese of Cork*), however, pertinently observes, foundation by a MacCarthy is very unlikely in-as-much as the region had, in the 13th cent., passed into Norman ownership. The writer last quoted likewise cites the significant fact that affiliation of Tracton was not to an Irish but to a Welsh abbey and he suggests that a MacCarthy would have sought a community nearer home. It is probable, or at any rate—possible, that both Barrys and MacCarthys were benefactors and it is not unlikely that the community honoured both as founders.

The earliest documentary evidence relating to our abbey is dated 1251; this year the house, through default of the abbot, lost half a carucate of land at Kilmeaton. In 1297 the abbot recovered, from Owen Barry, the right of presentation to Clontead and somewhat later he was sued for one acre of turbary and forty acres of pasturage at Kilmoney. Again, about the same time, the abbot was charged with harbouring a criminal—his own nephew, one Michael Russell—who had committed a rape on an Englishwoman. For the offence of harbouring the abbot was fined £40, a very large sum in the 14th century. In this connection it may be noted that many abbeys—Tracton amongst them—possessed the right of sanctuary—which extended to a month or thereabout. In the case under notice either the abbot kept the criminal longer than the law of sanctuary allowed or the crime was one for which sanctuary was not recognised. One of the monks of Tracton was feloniously killed in 1350 and the abbot was arraigned for the murder—but acquitted.

That Tracton was one of the more important abbeys of the Order in Ireland appears from the frequency with which, notwithstanding remoteness of the place, commissions were entrusted to its abbot, both by Pope and King. In one Papal mandate (*Cal. Papal Letters*, x., p. 369) the abbey is styled "Holy Cross" which makes it necessary to explain that, like Holy Cross of Tipperary, Tracton claimed to possess a relic of the True Cross. This last, according to Sir Richard Cox, had been donated to the abbey by Barry Og, Lord of Kinalea and to it "multitudes of papists resort on Holy Thursday." Apparently neither Cox nor Smith, who followed him, knew much of the significance of Holy Thursday as distinct from that of the day following! Richard Graynoll, abbot of Tracton, was deposed in 1363 by the visitor, Abbot Cornwalsh of Dunbody.

Tracton maintained a strong English connection up to the middle of the 15th cent., it was, indeed, one of the Irish abbeys into which no mere Irishman might be admitted. All the abbots, whose names we have for two centuries and a half, are English, or of English descent—John Flemyng, John Cultham, Miles Roch and John Barry. Barry, who figures in an unsavoury incident, was a Welshman or, at any rate, a monk of Albalanda, who, by family influence, secured appointment as abbot of Chore where he remained seven years—till he resigned. Next, he appears, by some means—probably by simony, to have secured the abbacy of Tracton. The previous abbot, Roch, had, by the way, been found guilty of grievous neglect of duty,



simony—and worse. The papal mandate reciting these enormities is addressed to the Dean of Cork (*Cal. Papal Letters* x. p. 510) and it empowers the latter (1450) to absolve Barry from simony; moreover, as Barry was illegitimate—the son of a nobleman—it dispenses him in this irregularity. Again, the mandate empowers and directs the Dean to depose Roch and to install Barry if he think him fit. Finally it gives permission to Barry to receive the abbatial blessing from any Catholic bishop. Abbot Barry appears (*vid. Brady, Episcopal Succession*, vol. II., p. 237) to have been succeeded by another Roche (Milo) who was later (1464) promoted to the see of Leighlin with permission to retain the abbacy in commendam. Roche was succeeded, at Tracton, by Robert O'Callaghan, a monk of Maure. Yet another Barry (Raymond) was nominated abbot in 1493 and, thenceforward, the abbacy became a regular (or very irregular) appanage of the Barry family, till the suppression. John Barry succeeded Raymond and James of the same name succeeded John.

Tracton, with its lands and dependent rectories, etc., was granted, in 1568, to Messrs Gilbert and Craig who, thirty-one years later, assigned their interest to Sir Richard Boyle (of appropriating capacity). Boyle was confirmed in possession by the Letters Patent of King James, 1610. Finally Boyle sold the abbey to Thomas Daunt who took up residence in the monastic buildings. Two generations of the Daunt family occupied the old structure and then, probably owing to its inconvenience and ruinous conditions, the abbey was pulled down and a new residence built beside it and, presumably, with its materials, on the site of the present Mr. Coveney's homestead.

(*To be continued.*)

## WILMOUNT CASTLE.

Cobh (Queenstown), Co. Cork.

The property of F. J. Healy, Esq., LL.D., Barrister at Law (*Council Member*)

This building, architecturally very interesting, is situate upon a lofty eminence in Cobh, overlooking the harbour, and has both a sunny southern aspect and a most delightful view.

Built after the designs of the famous Cork architect, Brash, by the late Captain William Deane Seymour, J.P. (the well known Consul and Shipping Agent, who represented the Inman Line for many years in Cobh, and was the author of "Journal of a Voyage Round the World," "A Tour in Syria and Palestine" etc.), the Castle presents a striking appearance to all outgoing and incoming travellers when seen from the water. It consists of two tall towers, one at each end of the main building. At the Eastern end is a large wing in which were situate the billiard room and the suite usually occupied by the late Mr. William Inman on his visits to Ireland. Running from this Eastern wing to the end of the corresponding wing at the Western tower was the picture gallery, a most imposing hall in which hung some very fine Marine paintings—some by Atkinson—a few of which are now in Mr. Healy's residence at Wilmount House.

The towers are surmounted by four well cast lions, and there was formerly an immense American eagle between them. Upon the Western tower Captain Seymour installed, in the Eighties, one of the earliest, if not the earliest, telephone in Ireland, connecting the Castle with his Shipping offices on Lynch's Quay.