

I am truly sorry to hear that Mr. Downes is ill: I hope the dog has been shot. I am very fortunate in my escape from dogs. I am often attacked by regiments of those uncivil latro's as well as by turkey-cocks and ganders.

The authorities for this county are so very few, and the name books so defective that I must take time to consider them, and consult the most intelligent persons in the county. I shall do my utmost endeavour to settle the names as well as possible, and in as short a time as possible, but there are as many islands, islets, straits, loughrans, etc. as would puzzle the devil himself. One topographical word frequently occurs in this county, viz. Tate (TAITE, tatty) the P. Priest of Enniskillen says it is synonymous with Bally, but I think it is an old measure of land, and memory deceives me, if I have not met it defined in some old Act of Parliament. I know that Vallancey explains it in his Collectanea, but in what part I do not remember.(3) Perhaps Mr. Petrie may remember. I think that Tatte is much the same as Carrow or wau? quarter of land, and may be perhaps a corruption of the Latin Stadium, but this I give as wild conjecture. I wish you would send me Vallancey's definition of it.

How soon do you think will the first No. of Derry appear? (4) It will be wickedly and treacherously attacked by many of the reviewers, and it will be necessary to have it well fortified, as they will bring all their guns to bear upon a work from which much is expected. There is one opinion set forth in it by Mr. Petrie that will scarcely be ball-proof that is, the Presbyterian Character of the ancient Church of Ireland. I have stated this before John McCloskey, and he thinks that it can not be supported. The ancient Church of Ireland was surely Episcopalian, but there were many bishops who had no fixed sees, as is the case in France at present. The passage in the Inquisitions respecting the establishment of Bishops by the church of Rome, alludes to the synod of Rath Breasail at which the boundaries of Sees were fixed; before this period (1118) the Irish appointed their own Bishops independently of Rome (i.e. without consulting the Pope) and the new regulations at that time introduced is what the Jury of the old Milesians allude to.(5) It also appears from unquestionable authority, that about the same period the Pope or court of Rome, deprived other countries of the power of appointing their own Bishops without their permission.

Yours truly,
John O'Donovan.

Comment

(1) O'Donovan had high hopes of learning a lot from Thomas Maguire but these are severely dashed. Brian Mann Mullan made a great impression on him when he went to visit him in his little cabin in the mountains above Garvagh. He even wrote a poem about him. It begins:-

“Upon a mountain's brow o'er Ullin's Glen,
Remote from men, among wild rocks and heath,
In a lone cabin dwells a worthy man,
The senior branch of the O'Mullan tribe.....”

Page 49-52, John O'Donovan's Letters from County Londonderry (1834). Edited by Graham Mawhinney and published by Ballinascreen Historical Society in 1992.

(2) O'Donovan does not suffer fools gladly where matters of interpretation of Irish placenames are concerned.

(3) At the end of the C18, between 1776 and 1796 General Vallancey made a series of maps of the south of Ireland. They were more in the nature of military sketches than surveys and although the General was well educated and a scholar he was a considerable eccentric.

(4) This, the first and only official memoir of the Ordnance Survey, was published in 1837. It was entitled, “Ordnance Survey of the county of Londonderry: Volume the first: Memoir of the City and North Western Liberties of Londonderry, Parish of Templemore.” It ran to 350 pages and was greatly acclaimed but on the grounds of cost no further volumes were published.

(5) O'Donovan uses the term Milesians to refer to people of Irish descent.

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Enniskillen, October 16th, 1834.

Dear Sir,

I have received your letter of the 14th current, with Mr. O'Reilly's elegant letters, which breathe patriotism and kindness. (1) The Maguire MS. is amazingly interesting, it enumerates all the families of Tyrone, which to me is very gratifying. I was not able to persuade myself that the townland names of Ballyguddan, and Evishygeeran in Dungiven were not derived from families of such names, now in the neighbourhood, and the Revd. Mr. Ross explains Guddan as “prayers” and Geran (why not millenium?) as a castrated horse.

These townlands are called by those who speak Irish, BAILE UI GHODAIN, and EIBHIS UI GHERAIN, but yet they do not understand their meanings. Now among the Milesian families of Tyrone, I find O'Godan and O'Geran. Old Alick Ogilby has an etymological rule from which he is determined never to deviate, viz. to make the name of every townland describe the locality. I have another rule from which I will never deviate unless I am frightened from it by incarceration, viz. whatever word has O', Ua, or Mac prefixed to it, is a family name of Irish or Highland origin. I will make it be so.

in despite of all eastern erudition, and will give no satisfaction to antiquarians, but a laugh!

Among the families of Tyrone given by Maguire, or rather by McFibbis, are the following:-

(1) O'Neill (2) Mac Sweeny (3) Mac Loughlin (4) O'Brien, numerous yet in Desertmartin. (5) O'Clerkan, very numerous, but rapidly passing into Clarks. (6) O'Mulhollan (7) O'Torar (now Toner) (8) Mac Rory (now Rogers) (9) O'Cairellan, not Cerbhallan, nunc Carlan et Curland. (10) O'Cumaskey (11) O'Kane (12) O'Goddan (I suppose made now into Goodman, Ballygudden, vide) (13) O'Quin, very numerous (14) O'Maonan (15) O'Morren (O'Mughroin) (16) O'Boyle (17) O'Merley (18) O'Mullen (19) O'Breslen (20) O'Dragon (nomen sane bellicosum) (21) O'Calgan (22) O'Dawley, so pronounced still (23) Mac Camphill (Latin, Cavellus at Rome, vide De Burgo, page 735) (24) O'Hosey (25) Mc Reavy (26) O'Connegan (27) O'Beccan (28) O'Horan (29) O'Morris (30) O'Moan (31) O'Gormley (32) O'Mulligan (33) O'Creevy (34) O'Luney, O'LUNIGE, not Lyn or O'Lyn, but Lynagh at present. (35) O'Garvy (36) O'Branagan (37) O'Crodan, now spelled Credan in Enniskillen, but pronounced Crudden. (38) O'Rafferty (39) O'Loskey! pity that it is not Mac (40) O'Loughan (41) O'Monaghan (42) O'Searcachain, now Sharkey.

I think you are perfectly right with respect to Curry, if you think that you would have long employment for him. I wish I could devote more time to Book literature. You will find, however, that Curry will not be satisfied with travelling thro' the country. It is extremely laborious, vexatious and troublesome, especially in the wintertime. (2) I should not wish to be so long in the country, because I will soon become a regular Don Quixote if I continue in it much longer. I am afraid, however, that Curry would not wish to accept of such a roving employment unless he were well paid for it which is out of the question. I could live more comfortably in Dublin for one pound a week than here for three, there are so many harpies looking for money in every house [for public entertainment] and I am no sooner known, as an honest quiet fellow in one place, than I have to shift my quarters to another, where I must dine on rusty bacon and sour beer, and sleep in a damp bed, for all which I must pay more than if they were much better. (3)

If I could stop in any one place, for any length of time, I could then procure things myself, but when I am a meer bird of passage, I can procure nothing but the worst of treatment.

No person will ever do the business except one who takes an interest in it himself. At present Curry would certainly mistake the northern pronunciation,

and would do so until he would become well acquainted with their peculiarities and barbarisms.

I am convinced that if Curry would accept of the situation, he would expect to be always stationed in Dublin, which could not, I think, be readily allowed him unless you intend to keep me always roving about like the wandering Jew. No person is fit or should be allowed to meddle with those names except one acquainted with the whole circle of Irish lore, and with the peculiarities of pronunciation that prevail in the different districts. O'Reilly would have plaid the devil with them. Curry is a person, who could, in a short time be trained to do the thing properly, but he could not possibly be expected to be prepared now, unless you would allow him to prove, like Leydon, that Orpheus was an Irish man, and Irish, the language of paradise. Etymology alone and unassisted (or rather unrestricted) is capable of doing all this with great facility, and to the satisfaction of such gentlemen as O'Brien the Budist, and the King of Ulster, who can swallow nonsense better than reason, and romance better than history. I should be glad that you could prove the assistance of Curry, but I cherish a hope that if you remove him, you will be able to make him some way comfortable. If I had any acquaintance with him, I would think it my duty to advise him to weigh the matter again and again before he would remove from Limerick & if he be a married man, he is totally mistaken in removing.

Yours truly,

John O'Donovan.

COMMENT.

(1) Mr O'Reilly is Myles John O'Reilly who lived at Heath House near Portlaoise and a friend of O'Donovan. It was at this house that O'Donovan came to recover from illness in 1830 and here in O'Reilly's library that he first came in contact with the Annals of the Four Masters with which his name will be ever linked. He made several extracts from the Annals while he recuperated and copied another ancient text, the Book of Fenagh and had his first major opportunity of reading the works of Sir James Ware (1594-1660), Archbishop Ussher (1581-1656) and the learned Franciscan Professor of Theology at Louvain, Father John Colgan who died in 1660. This period of study and recuperation is probably one of the main turning points in O'Donovan's life.

(2) O'Donovan was often consulted on proposed appointments to the staff of civil assistants to the Ordnance Survey. Eoin O'Curry was at this time on the staff of the Mental Asylum in Limerick and although he had a high opinion of him he did not wish him to make a bad career move. Eventually O'Curry was appointed and as fate would have it they became brothers-in-law as O'Donovan married Mary Anne Broughton the sister of O'Curry's wife. O'Donovan and his wife had a family of nine boys, of whom six survived to adult life.

(3) According to the Ordnance Survey Memoirs there are four hotels in Enniskillen at this time, two at the East and two at the West end of the town all of them with slate roofs. In addition there are 75 spirit retailers i.e. pubs. It goes on to give a vivid impression of the town of Enniskillen as it was in O'Donovan's day.

"The streets are for the most part narrow and irregular, bad pavements and worse flagways, and as they are only swept once a week (Saturday) they are often almost intolerable to pedestrians. The principal street, both winding and hilly, extends from bridge to bridge, having a number of minor streets and lanes branching off on both sides. The town is neither watched nor lighted, and from the broken and very irregular state of the pavements it requires more than ordinary caution to walk them at noonday without stumbling! What then must a stranger encounter, who enters the town on a winter's night with no other guide to his way than the faint gleam of a shop window, or perchance a dull lamp at the door of an inn? Surely these alone are sufficient to stamp an unfavourable impression and at once bespeak the supineness of the corporation or the sordid habits of the people."



Enniskillen, Friday 17th Oct.

Dear Sir,

I travelled yesterday through the parish of Enniskillen, and got some of the aborigines (1) to pronounce the names in Irish. The parish of Enniskillen is now in the barony of Tirkennedy, but it would appear from the names of some places and from traditions in the country, that it was anciently in the territory of Cuil. The names I allude to are Castle Coole, the splendid and gorgeous palace of Lord Curry (rectius Lowry) which is called by the Irish CAISLEAN NA CUILE, i.e. the castle of Coole territory. The Annals always prefix the article to the name of this territory as MAGUIDHIR NA CUILE i.e. Maguire of the Coole, O'CAISEIDE NA CUILE i.e. O'Cassidy of the Coole. In like manner the Irish people of Enniskillen parish always insert the article NA in the name Castle Coole. Again there is a proverbial expression current in the parish that Carrickmacmea, T.L. in Ennis-Key, in Irish, CEATHRAMH MIC MEITH, i.e. Mc Mea's quarter, is the best quarter in Coole: it rhymes thus:-

CEATHRAMH MIC MHETH, CEATHRAMH RAEGHA NA CUILE.

From this I infer that the ancient territory of Cuil comprehended a portion of the present barony of Tirkennedy.

Mr Stotherd and I spent the greater part of this day with Captain Gabbot of Enniskillen,(2) a magistrate, and a very curious man and one who is well acquainted with the modern History of Ireland. I have not yet met with any one, who knows so much about the general topography of Ireland, and family history as Captain Gabbot. I shewed him the extracts from the Annals relating to Fermanagh. He thought that we had no such records preserved in the Irish language, and was surprised to find how they agree with the English accounts. He has assisted me much in identifying the old names of the islands with their modern ones.

The following curious passage occurs under the year 1589 which throws great light upon the history of the Maguires:-

"After the death of the Maguire (Constantine), Conor Roe, the son of Conor Maguire, conceiving that the Lordship of the country was his in right of his seniority and others thinking that Hugh the son of the deceased Maguire should be Lord after his father gave rise to great dissensions."

Hugh was inaugurated chief at Sciath-gabhra thro' the influence of O'Donnell.

"In 1593 the Lord Chief Justice defeated Hugh and left bands of soldiers in the country to assist Conor Oge, the son of Conor Roe, who was at strife with the Maguire, i.e. Hugh."

The Queen after created this Conor Oge, Lord of Enniskillen, but he joined in the rebellion of 1641, and was executed. This is the Conor whose will is yet preserved. After this, Hugh or his son, joined the English cause, and got the estate of Tiompoghadh Deisill now Tempo. Hugh is the ancestor of Constantine Maguire of Tempo.

Thomas Maguire who has the will of Conor Oge, first and last Baron of Enniskillen, descends from the brother of Conor Oge, and is the next heir to a property left by his (Conor Oge's) son in the south of France. But Constantine of Tempo is the Maguire in the Irish point of view, i.e. he is descended from the last person who was inaugurated head of his tribe, according to the Irish custom of Sciath Gowra. I do not believe that Conor Oge, who was made baron of Enniskillen by the English, was ever called THE Maguire by the Irish.

The following is the succession of the Maguires in Fermanagh (3) according to the MS. lent me by Mr. O'Reilly:-

1. Donn, the son of Donnell, who was son of Giolla-iosa, the first person called Maguire, he died A.D. 1345.

2. Flahertach, the son of Donn, who was son of Donnell, 1324 ruled 21 years.