

## Uisneach and Environs

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### Royal Uisneach.

THE history of Ireland might be written from the hill-top and the ruined palaces of Royal Uisneach. Though its glories are faded and gone, and its hosanna long silenced in the solitude of time, those who visit it will see striking evidence of its former greatness. Though ruin has filled the scene with the fragments of its ancient splendour, the great men who dwelt here and ruled the people of Erin are not forgotten, though nearly two thousand years have rolled over since Tuathal, the Acceptable, as the renowned king is called who built the palace in the first century, sat upon the coronation chair on Royal Uisneach. "Man dies but his memory lives." The history of this king reads like a powerful romance, and if his deeds were acted, they would form a drama of thrilling interest. We view him a prince, a great ruler whose wise laws and good government brought peace and plenty into the land. It would take long to relate the history of Uisneach. What Tara is to Royal Meath, what Emon is to Ulster, what Cashel is to Munster, and what Cruachan is to Connaught, Uisneach is to Westmeath. This noble seat is sacred as the ancient meeting place of the renowned men of Ireland, the city of Laberos, mentioned by Ptolemy. The memorials of this once famous and ancient city are strewn around and over the plain. Beneath moss-covered cromlechs, storm-worn pillar stones lie buried the relics of a great race, but their tombs are sacrilegiously uprooted, their memorials broken or used to make scratching posts for cattle, or to build dwelling-houses. Will the day come for us as it has for them when our tombs will be torn up and our ashes spread out as top-dressing for the fields of the farmers, the grazier, and the landlord. Who can tell? The spirit of the age is material, earthly, unspirited. There is nothing held sacred in our day, if money can be made by its desecration and spoliation. The future antiquarian, searching for traces of the men who lived in Westmeath in our days, shall have a weary task, for he shall have to argue their existence from the fragments of a broken tomb or pedestal of a ruined cross found, perchance, in the dust heaps of towns now decaying. The fame of the old hill extends far back into the misty past, and for its early story one must seek in

The twilight waste,  
Where pale tradition sits by memory's grave.

The following article by Mr. James Tuite was published in the *Dublin Daily Independent* on 10th August, 1906 :—

"The great hill of Uisneach is, from the historical and picturesque standpoints, a place of great interest, and, in its own way, unrivalled grandeur. The situation of the hill, its commanding position over the surrounding country, no doubt, inspired the ancient Irish to select it as a place of assembly. From the apex a most extensive view can be had. Being almost in the centre of Ireland, the prospect extends from the Shannon on one side to the Dublin Mountains on the other. On a clear day the O'Connell Monument in Glasnevin Cemetery is distinctly visible. The hill is over 600 feet high, but the ascent is so gentle that the walk to the top is by no means distressing. The summit is divided into several plateaux, which at once suggest the hill's suitability as a meeting-place of the hosts of Erin, and for the holding of the great festivals of Bealtaine.

### A Noted Spot.

“ For ages before King Tuathal, the Milesian, erected his palace on Uisneach at the end of the first century of the Christian era, the hill was a noted place in the religious and civil life of Erin. Here the first Druidic fires were lighted, and it is in connection with those weird Druidic rites that we have the earliest mention of Uisneach in the ancient manuscripts of Ireland. In those very early times the hill was known by the name of Caen Druim, “ the beautiful hill,” and the legend of the change to Uisneach, as also the origin of the name “ Meath,” is thus related in the Dinnseanchas—“ Midhe, the son of Brath, son of Detha, was the first who lighted a fire for the sons of the Milesians in Erin on the hill of Uisneach, in Westmeath ; and it continued to burn for seven years ; and it was from this fire that every chief’s fire in Erin used to be lighted. The Druids of Erin, however, said that it was an insult to them to have this fire ignited in the country ; and all the Druids in Erin came into one house to take counsel, but Midhe had all their tongues cut out, and he buried the tongues in the earth of Uisneach, and then sat over them, upon which his mother exclaimed : ‘ It is Uaisneach (*i.e.*, proudly) you sit up there to-night.’ ” Hence the names Midhe (Meath) and Uisneach or Ushnagh. O’Curry states that this is the first reference to a Druidical fire in any of our ancient books.

### Ail-Na-Meeran.

“ From all the ancient writings it would appear that Ireland from the very earliest times was divided into provinces—Ulster, Leinster, Munster, Connaught. This arrangement was first made by the Fírbolgs—the sons of Dela,—and their meeting place was around the Great Stone Ail-na-Meeran, (“ the stone 'of the divisions,”). This great rock, which is estimated to weigh about 30 tons, stands near the summit of the hill. It is recorded that at the coming of the Milesians Eiri. wife of one of the sons of the Monarch Carmoda, from whom Erin is said to have been called, was buried underneath this stone. Indeed, part of the stone, which was split off, was thought by O’Donovan to have formed a Cromlech.

“ Passing on to the historic period, Uisneach continued to be the chief place of assembly of the tribes of Erin. As I have already stated, King Tuathal Teachtmair erected his palace here, and he also enlarged the mensal estate of the Ard High by cutting off from each of the four Provinces around Ail-na-Meeran a considerable tract of land, which he added to the old territory in Bregia and formed the Province, or Kingdom, of Meath. King Tuathal consolidated the monarchy. He was, in fact, the founder of the Irish Pentarchy.

### The Old Palace.

“ Portions of the walls of the old palace still remain. It was this king who first imposed the Borumha Tribute on Leinster for the outrage on his daughter by Achy Ainkenn, King of Leinster, and which was the cause of so many quarrels for centuries after between the two kingdoms. Under Tuathal the great assembly of Uisneach became more important. At those meetings the fiscal and other local affairs were first considered in conference by the assembled Brehons, chiefs, and leading men of the provinces, also the disputed judgments, and having disposed of the civil and military affairs, this great national gathering proceeded to celebrate the festival of Bealtaine. Music, history, poetry, genealogy, formed special features of the entertainment. The two great fires were lighted in honour of Beal, the sun god,

between which the cattle were driven in order to preserve them from sickness during the coming year. There were also great feats of arms and horsemanship performed, and prizes were distributed by the Ard Righ on each day of the feast. Then followed the great fair of Uisneach, the special features of which were three principal markets—one for live stock and horses, one for clothes and food and a third was railed off for the use of foreign merchants who sold gold and silver articles and fine raiment. At the great banquet of Uisneach it was the privilege of the King of Oriel to sit next the King of Ireland, but he sat at such a distance that his sword just reached the head of the Aid Righ, and to him also belonged the honour of presenting every third drinking horn to the king.

### Hero Rings.

“ According to the ‘ Book of Rights,’ when the provincial kings attended on the supreme monarch at the assembly at Uisneach each of those petty kings was bound to wear on one of his fingers a hero’s ring of red gold (a bruine wad d’or), which, on the breaking up of the convention, he left on the seat he occupied as a tribute to the Ard Righ. The monarchs insisted on this practice, and an instance is recorded when one of the under kings was expelled for having failed to appear with his ring. Every lord of a manor or chieftain who attended presented a horse and arms to the King of Connaught on account of the very considerable portion of land that was taken off his territory to form the mensal lands of the high king.

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When the Firbolg princes divided the country, the provinces they formed met at Uisneach, a tradition which has been constant to the present day. In the Senachus Mor we are told that the first Law of Distress the laws relating to which form the greater part of the book was laid down at a national assembly on Uisneach, convened by the three chiefs who divided the island. In the ‘ Fate of the Children of Tuireann ’ the dramatic action of the story commences when—

Nuadh of the Silver Hand, the king,  
In these days held at Uisneach on the hill,  
A great fair meeting, and the people came  
And filled the plain in thousands, and the chiefs  
Were all assembled there, and not a man  
Of the De Danann race of any mark,  
But showed himself amongst his fellow-men  
In that great throng that thronged about the king.

“ Most of us know the story, the ostensibly historical part of which is that to the meeting come first Lugh Lamhfhada the ‘ Ildanach,’ and afterwards the messengers of the Fomorians. whose insolence arouses the passion of Lugh. The latter, amidst the fear of the other De Danann, slays the tax gatherers except three, whom he sends to their king, Balol of the Evil Eye. The second battle of Moytura follows, in which Lugh, aided by the eric earned by the children of Tuireann, enables the De Dananns to defeat the Fomorians. Lugh afterwards becomes king. To him is ascribed the celebration of the Feast of Bealtaine on Uisneach, held on the 1st of May, as well as that of the games of Lughnasa at Tailltaine held on the 1st of August. He is said to have been killed and buried at Uisneach.

“ In more strictly historical times we find the Milesian king, Tuathal Teachtmhar, associated with Uisneach in the first century of the Christian era. When he had completely overcome the plebeian insurrection which had disturbed the succession, he fortified Tara and formed a mensal kingdom around it for the Ard Righ. For this purpose he cut off portions of the provinces that had met at Uisneach, and formed from them a new Cuige which was called Midhe—either from the small district originally so-called, or from ‘ meidhe,’ a neck. At Tailtean and Tlachtga. (Hill of Ward) he erected forts, and at Uisneach he built a royal palace and established marts which were held annually in May, ‘ where,’ says Keating, ‘ men of Ireland were wont to exchange their good’s and their wares and other jewels.’ At these assemblies the religious celebration of Bealtaine was also carried out, the sacred fire being first lighted at Uisneach and then throughout the country. We learn that two fires were lighted and cattle driven between them to preserve them from plague. This is the origin of the custom, modified by Christianity, of the bonfires on St. John’s Eve. It is a custom, however, not by any means confined to Ireland, for it prevails in Spain, France, Greece, the Slavonian countries of Europe, and in Western Asia. In those countries the fires are also generally lighted on St. John’s Eve. In some cases, however, they are lighted on the Eve of St. Peter, and there are, indeed, some districts in Ireland in which the same night is chosen for the celebration. Besides the religious celebrations, the great feast of Bealtaine was also taken advantage of for the promulgation of laws and the holding of courts of justice, for military displays, commerce and match-making. They were attended not only by the Gaels of Eire and Alba, but also by merchants and others from England and the Continent.

“ In ‘ Connla of the Golden Hair,’ we find Uisneach referred to as a palace of Conn Cead Cathach at the close of the second century. Conn and his son Connla are standing on the royal hill of Uisneach when the latter sees approaching a beautiful lady who says she comes from Tir-na-nOg —

A land of youth, a land of rest,  
A land from sorrow free ;  
It lies far off in the golden West,  
On the verge of the azure sea.

“ None see the fair maid but Connla. Conn, disturbed at the mysterious conversation, calls upon the druid to drive her away, but she returns and carries off Connla. Connla’s brother was Art, afterwards Ard Righ, whose appellation of Clonfhear, or ‘ The Lonely,’ is said to be caused by the loss of his brother.

“ The famous Cormac Mac Art, the great and wise philosopher, is also connected with Uisneach. When his eye was pierced by the poisoned spear of Aenghus, thus compelling him—by the law which allowed no king to suffer from a physical defect to retire from the throne, he took no personal revenge, but appealed to the States of Eire, and at their meeting on the hill of Uisneach he demanded an eric. The banishment from Meath of Aenghus’ tribe of the Deisi and this settlement in the Deisi were the results of the crime.

“ Although the introduction of Christianity and the coming of Patrick soon destroyed the Pagan association of Uisneach, and modified the customs connected with it, we still find the hill to be a place of note. The ‘ Mary of Ireland,’ Brigid of Killare, is said to have received the veil from the hands of Bishop Mucaille at Uisneach. We are told that when the hand of the saint touched the altar the dry wood became fresh and green again. Some state that it was at the Hill of Croghan (Cruachan Bri Eile), which may be seen from the summit at a distance of

15 miles to the south, that Brigid was professed. There was, however, for centuries a convent situate at Killare at the western base of the hill, and local tradition claims that Brigid established it and lived in it A.D. 467.

“ Upon the desertion of Tara in the sixth century the Kings of Tara moved further west and established their palace of Dun na Sciath — not to be confounded with that of Brian in the south, on the west shores of Loch Ennel. This gave added importance to Uisneach, but the incursions of the Danes and the loss of power of the southern Ui Neill prevented its still being a place of national influence. An assembly took place here, however, that had a profound effect upon the future history of the country. This was the Synod of Fidh Mic Aenghusa, which is believed to be the same as the Synod of Rathbrasil, referred to by many writers. At this Synod, which was held in 1111 or in 1118, the Irish dioceses were defined to the number of twenty-four, and were divided into two provinces—that of Leath Cuinn with the Archbishop of Armagh, and that of Leath Mhogha with the Archbishop of Cashel. At the Synod of Kells some years afterwards this arrangement was altered, four provinces being formed and archbishops created for Dublin and Tuam.

“ With the coming of the Norrnans and the continual struggles against them of the Irish clans who had taken their stand behind the lakes and bogs, there was but meagre opportunity for celebrations at Uisneach. An interesting incident in connection with it occurred in 1414, when the Deputy, Sir John Stanley, raided the country around. Amongst those whose cattle were stolen was Niall OhUigin of Uisneach, a famous satirist, whose rhymes had already won a battle. He rhymed the Deputy with such effect that he died in a few weeks. It is satisfactory to read that the poet’s cows were rescued and restored to him by a Norman knight named Dalton. Mount Dalton in the neighbourhood of the hill may be named after his family.

“ From what has been said as to the great antiquity of Uisneach and as to its being a place of assembly more distinctly than a place of residence it will not be expected that there remain on the hill many marks of its former importance. The summit of the hill, which is 602 feet in height, consists of a small plateau gently sloping to the south west. In the centre is a small platform of rock, which is locally called St. Patrick’s bed. On the eastern side are the traces of circumvallation. On the western rim of the plateau is the famous Aill na Meeran—the Stone of the Divisions—where met from time immemorial the cuigi of Eire. At one time the stone was marked with four lines running to the points of the compass and in the angles contained between them as they ran to the four seas of Eire lay the four cuigi the Munsters being counted as one. Aill na Meeran. which is over twenty feet in height, is locally called the Cat Rock.”

The following brief description of the archæological remains of Uisneach is by Major Berry, F.R.S.A.I. :—

A glance at the six inch Ordnance Survey reveals how interesting, the whole of this district is. It is covered with forts and castles, which indicate its importance from times prehistoric. Many of the forts are really burial mounds, after the manner but not so grand as Newgrange, Dowth, and Knowth ; others are of most unusual form, and several are known to be chambered. Around Dysart House there are a group of interesting earthworks. Those to the west of this house are peculiarly arranged, and those lying to the south are of very uncommon shape. There are several square forts and some lunette shape. There is a fine fort marked *Cave*, with an ancient road leading to it, on the south-eastern slopes of the Hill of Uisneach. This fort is probably the royal *dun* already alluded to. On it are the remains of a souterrain. The fort to the south of the hill is called Finnleaslach, which might mean the White Hut of the

Champion, or, as it has a well, the spring of which rises in the fort and flows out at the bottom of the rampart, more probably the white hut of the physician. A little further to the westward is the Stone of the Divisions, and at a quarter of a mile or so north of Ballymore to the west of Lough Sunderlin (Loch Sewdy), is the Lughcahaha, or Hollow of the Battles. Rathfargan, to the north of the hill, means the fort of the little man. On the highest point is a kistrean known as St. Patrick's Bed.

Uisneach stands in the fertile plain of Teathbha, which from the earliest times has been the granary of central Ireland. So late as the Confederate Wars it was used by Preston and Ormonde as their bases of supplies. Defended on one side by a line of lakes and by bogs stretching south to the Sliabh Bladhma and on the other by the Shannon, its inhabitants were in a position to protect themselves. It was the central district of the O'Melaghlines after the desertion of Tara, and here they retired when De Lacy overran the eastern part of Midhe (Meath). The passes on either side of Loch Ennel were for centuries the great objects of struggle between the O'Melaghlines, MacGeoghegans, Foxes and O'Molloys on the one hand, and the Norman families of Lacy, Bermingham, Tuite and Tyrrell on the other.

Beneath Uisneach, on the east side, lies Loch Ennel, on the western shore of which was Dua na Sciath. In an island in the lake, called Cro Inis, died Malachy II., Ard Righ of Ireland whose throne was usurped by Brian Boromhe until the latter's death. When entering his death, in the year 1022, the Four Masters style him "the pillar of dignity and nobility of the western world." South of the lake lies the pass between it and the bogs, the district at either entrance being covered with the ruins of Norman Castles. In the pass lies the town of Tyrrels Pass, where Richard Tyrrell and O'Connor of Ui Failghe completely defeated the English under Barnwall, son of Lord Trimleston, in 1597. Trimleston was to march from Mullingar through Westmeath, while the deputy moved from Dundalk and Clifford from Sligo in order to crush Aodh O'Neill. Tyrrell drew the English after him until they reached a wooded defile where O'Connor's men were in ambush. The two bodies turned on the English with such effect that but one man escaped to Mullingar. Barnwall being taken prisoner. In a straight line beyond Tynell's Pass is conspicuous the Hill of Croghan (Cruachan Bri Eile) where Bishop Macaille had his monastery.

Directly south, beyond the plains of Southern Teathbha and Fir Cheall, appears the great sweep of the Sliabh Bloom between Ui Failghe and Dealbhna Eathra.

Westward and north westward the eye reaches across the Sionnan and Loch Ribh to the plain of Ui Mhaine, Maghae, and Mage Lorg. Northward runs the plain of Northern Teathbha, Anghaile, and Breifne, until it reaches the range called Sliabh an Iarain. A few isolated hills dot the plain, and among them is conspicuous, at a distance of about twelve miles, a little west of north, a hill 650 feet high, now named Sliabh Golry. This was the famous Bri Leith, the residence of the fairy prince Midir, who enticed away to his Land of Youth, beneath the hill, the Queen Etaine, until she was restored by Dallan, the druid. (The story—which is named "The Wooing of Etaine"—formed the subject for the art competitions at one year's Feis, Bhaile Atha Cliath.

On the north east, some neighbouring small hills shut off the view. Two of these are probably the hills of Gairidh and Hghairidh, between which was fought the final battle of the Tain Bo Cuailgne. They prevent us seeing Loch Uair (Owel) where Malachy I. drowned the Danish tyrant, Turgesius, and the beautiful Loch Dairuhreach (Deravaragh) beyond it, upon which the children of Lir lived for 300 years.

The Dublin Branch of the Gaelic League visited Royal Uisneach on 12th August, 1906.

### Killare.

KILLARE, a parish in the barony of Rathconrath, on the road from Mullingar to Athlone. It is united to the parish of Ballymore, and in 1871 had a population of 3,870. This place is supposed by Camden to have been the Laberos of Ptolemy, and is considered to be the centre of Ireland, and in ancient times was a place of considerable importance in consequence of its close proximity to Royal Uisneach, and was the scene of some bloody conflicts between the MacGeoghegans and D'Altons, the Anglo-Norman Barons of Rathconrath. Its principal attraction is St. Bridget's Well, which is constantly visited by pious pilgrims some-times from remote parts of the country.

Killare, or *Cill-Air*, is situated about two miles west of the Hill of Uisneach. There are some places of historic interest in close proximity to Royal Uisneach hallowed by the foot-prints of St. Patrick, St. Bridget, St. Eochid, St. Aedh, and St. Secundus, which deserve a passing notice. Killare in ancient times was a town of considerable importance. A monastery was founded there by St. Aedh, or Hugh, about the middle of the sixth century. This eminent saint was born about the year 520, in the territory of Kinil Fiacha, the present barony of Moycashel and formerly the patrimony of the great MacGeoghegan family. His father's name was Brec, descended from Nial of the Nine Hostages, Monarch of Ireland, and his mother was from the present county of Tipperary. St. Aedh was reared with his mother's friends, and on the death of his father returned to Kinil Fiacha, to inherit a portion of the ancestral property. In this, however, he was disappointed, as his brothers deprived him of his share. On his return to Munster he was passing the abbey of Rathlibbten, in the present King's County, when, being noticed by St. Illand, who was bishop and abbot there, he was offered a home inside the hospitable walls. He entered, joined the community, and graduated for some years in Scripture, theology and monastic discipline. St Illand at length sent him with some of the community to Munster to found a religious house, and having arrived there he erected the monastery of Enachmacmiebriven. After his return to Westmeath he was consecrated a bishop and fixed his See at Killare, which he had already founded. He built other churches and abbeys, such as Rahugh near Kilbeggan, and is said to have performed several miracles. The "Four Masters" entered his death thus—"588, St. Aedh, son of Brec, Bishop of Killare, died on the 19th of November." Colgan tells us that there were three churches at Killare ; the first, dedicated to St. Aedh. was parochial, the next was called Temple Brigid, and the third the Court of St. Brigid. He adds that there were also three fountains or wells, the waters of which uniting miraculously together turned a neighbouring mill. One of the wells was dedicated to St. Aedh, the second to St. Brigid, and the third very probably to St. Conran. St. Brigid made her religious profession at Uisneach. She very probably resided for some time at Killare. The Rev. A. Cogan in his history of the diocese of Meath says that the old church of Killare measured sixty feet by twenty feet.

### Tyrrellspass and Its Environs.

Tyrrellspass, a post-town in the barony of Fartullagh, nineteen and a-half miles east from Athlone and forty miles from Dublin, on the old mail coach road to Athlone. The town takes its name from having been for many centuries the residence of the family of Tyrrell, of whose castle near the town, there are some remains. It is situated at a meeting of three roads, and consists of one long street. To the east rises the hill of Gnewbaune, which commands a fine

prospect westward and northwards. The country round Tyrrellspass is well wooded and ornamented by hedgerow planting, presenting in the variety of its surface, and in the number of its beautiful residences a country not unlike some parts of England. Northwards can be seen that beautiful oval expanse of water, Lough Ennel, with the narrow Brosna flowing forth and sweeping its tortuous way towards Kilbeggan. This fine lake, full of wooded islands, indented with picturesque promontories, and thickly adorned with beautiful demesnes, presents a rich, soft, smiling picture, worthy of the attention of lovers of nature. I would not desire nor expect to meet a much prettier village in Ireland than Tyrrellspass. wood-crowned, hilly, dry gravelled roads, neat whitewashed cottages, and the pretty Catholic church, erected some years ago on a charming eminence which at one time served as the eastern buttress on which rested the drawbridge for the possession of which Captain Tyrrell and Barnwell contended in the wars of Hugh O'Neill. The Protestant church is a handsome structure in the later English style, with a well proportioned spire. There is a monument to the memory of George Augustus Rochford, second and last Earl of Belvidere, erected by his relict, the mother of the late G. A. Boyde, Middleton Park, within the building, dated 12th May, 1814. There are also two white marble monuments to commemorate the memory of Jane, Countess of Belvidere, and her second husband, Abraham Boyde. These all meet the eye in and about Tyrrellspass, but all these interested me not as much as the old castle that stands a little way westward to the village, and which—placed at the extremity of a line of gravel hills that rise out of large bogs which formerly skirted it on either side, guards the only possible road leading to Athlone. It is said that the old castle of Tyrrellspass, now in ruins, belonged to the Tyrrell family, the ancestors of the gallant Captain Richard Tyrrell, who defeated the English and false Irish of the Pale in 1197. The first of the Tyrrell family known in Ireland was Sir Hugh, who in 1184 came over with Philip of Worcester. Lord Justice, and was identical with the Sir Hugh Tyrrell who was called the Grecian Knight. This Sir Hugh had two sons, one of them, Richard Ruadh (red), was ancestor of the Tyrrell family, who were hereditary sheriffs and sometimes governors of Westmeath, where they acquired the ancient territory of Fartullagh, which they enjoyed until confiscated by Cromwell. The castle of Castleknock was given by Strongbow to his friend Hugh Tyrrell, who was styled Baron of Castleknock. It was taken by Edward Bruce in 1131, and Hugh Tyrrell and Lady Tyrrell made prisoners, but released on the payment of large ransoms. The family possessed very considerable property in this and the adjoining county of Meath. The Tyrrell property in this county has long since passed into other hands, and the family is now extinct. A Maurice Tyrrell, of Kildangan, in the county Meath, in 1741 took a lease of four lives renewable for ever and five shillings fine on each renewal, from Robert Rochford, afterwards first Earl of Belvidere of the lands of Clermont at the yearly rent of £70. He died in 1746. Duke Tyrrell, his brother, succeeded, and was living in 1760.

Terence O'Toole (Rev. Cæsar Otway) in his tour to Connaught bears testimony to the military genius of Richard Tyrrell, his bravery, and unflinching devotion to the cause he espoused.

Sir Edward Tyrrell, a Norman Knight, came to England at the time of the Conquest, and is supposed to have shot William Rufus while hunting in New Forest. From him it is probable that the several branches of the Tyrrells have descended. Sir John Tyrrell of the Pass (now Tyrrellspass) was the chief of the Tyrrells during the latter end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. A considerable portion of the castle still stands near the village named. There were also William Tyrrell FitzMorice, of Newcastle. He was, perhaps, the Captain William Tyrrell of the Irish who was wounded at the battle of Cashel, where part of Captain Richard Tyrrell's



forces were engaged. O'Sullivan mentions a Walter Tyrrell, who with Thomas Plunkett, commanded 580 men at the battle of Rouen, which Desmond and MacCarthy fought with Essex. One of the Tyrrells was suspected of being bribed to let Essex pass through a defile unmolested. There was also Edward Tyrrell, of Caherstown, and Thomas Tyrrell, of Clonmoyle. Eight Tyrrells were attainted in Westmeath in 1691. The most famous of the Tyrrells was Captain Richard, the hero of Tyrrellspass. Mountjoy wrote to Cecil that next to Tyrone (Red Hugh O'Neill) "he was the most dangerous, being the most efficient soldier and of the greatest reputation through all Ireland, and better able to perform anything in this country than any Captain they have." O'Sullivan calls him "a veteran soldier, well skilled in war."

When the devastating sword of Elizabeth had swept over Ireland, when the land, drenched in blood and marked with misery and ruin, lay prostrate at the feet of its tyrant rulers, who calmly viewed the scene of death and desolation, which they had made, well might they exclaim, "the Irish are conquered now." Cornwallis, who replaced the cruel Camden as Viceroy, determined to regain in Ireland the laurels he had lost in America, as he was compelled to fly from that country with his shattered forces before the conquering heroes under George Washington, and with remorseless ferocity, he handed over our people to the mercy of his brutal soldiers; and, what was worse, the vile yeomen and loyalists. It is true that the insurgent forces melted away before overwhelming numbers of the loyalists—brute force and treachery. Their bravest were slaughtered, often in cold blood. Their best captains were slain, or gibbeted, but the spirit of the people was unconquered. Their flag had gone down, but not disgraced in battle, and if it did not wave over the walled towns and cities, it was still kept flying on the mountain tops, and in the glens and fastnesses, by many a bold outlaw, who braved death and danger beneath its folds, rather than safety, and submission to the slayers of their kith and kin. Many a gallant Irishman whose proud spirit would not bow to English power, and could ill brook the rule of petty upstart tyrants, and robbers, scorning to fly, took to the hills and gathering around him a few followers, lived, the life of a proscribed outlaw. This system of guerilla warfare, inaugurated in the time of Cromwell, was kept up until the first decade of the last century, and was a terror to the rackrenter, to the proctor and exterminator. A price was on their heads—large sums were offered by the Government for them alive or dead, but to the eternal honour of the Irish, be it said, they were never betrayed, The people loved them, and aided them as far as lay in their power against the common enemies of their country, and English gold could not tempt the Irish heart to betray. There is not a wood or glen in Ireland but has given shelter to hundreds of those oppressed and persecuted men

Who rose in dark and evil days,  
To right their native land.

Their very name and existence banned by English law, the lands of their ancestors in possession of adventurers, their altars desecrated, their very names a crime, the people trampled upon by a foreign soldiery, and hunted like wild beasts—what hardships and miseries they endured—but the Searcher of all hearts can tell.

#### Battle of Tyrrellspass.

In 1597 the Irish forces, which consisted of the O'Conors (Faily), O'Moores, O'Cavanaghs and the O'Byrnes of Wicklow, under the command of Captain Richard Tyrrell, defeated the forces of Elizabeth at Tyrrellspass. Tyrrell was a gentleman of the Anglo-Norman family of the Tyrrells, lords of Fartullagh, in Westmeath. He was one of the most

valiant and celebrated commanders of the Irish in the wars against the “ Virgin” Queen, and during a period of ten or twelve years, had many conflicts with the English forces in various parts of Ireland. He was particularly famous for bold and daring exploits and rapid expeditions, and copious accounts are given of him by Morrison, MacGeoghegan and others. The battle of Tyrrellspass is described by Leland, MacGeoghegan, and other historians. It was fought in the summer of the year named. When Hugh O’Neill, Earl of Tyrone, heard that the English forces were preparing to march into Ulster under the Lord Deputy Burrough. he detached Captain Tyrrell at the head of 400 chosen men to act in Meath and Leinster, and by their engaging some of the English forces of the Pale to cause a diversion and prevent them joining the Lord Deputy Burrough to co-operate with Sir Conyer Clifford. The Anglo-Irish of Meath assembled at Mullingar to the number of 1,000 men, under the command of Barnwell, Baron of Trimblestown, intending to proceed to join the Lord Deputy. Tyrrell was encamped with his small force in Fartullagh, and was joined in command by young O’Conor Faily of Offally. The Baron of Trimblestown, having learned where Tyrrell was posted, formed the project of taking him by surprise, and for that purpose dispatched his son at the head of the assembled troops. Tyrrell, having received information of their advance against him, immediately put himself in a position of defence, and, making a feint of flying before them as they advanced, drew them into a defile covered with trees, which place has since been called Tyrrellspass, and having detached half of his men under O’Conor posted them in ambush in a hollow adjoining the road. When the English were passing, O’Conor and his men sallied out from their ambuscade, and with their drums and fifes played Tyrrell’s march, which was the signal agreed upon for the attack. Tyrrell rushed on them in front, and the English being thus hemmed in on both sides, were cut to pieces ; the carnage being so great that out of the entire force only one soldier, who fled through a marsh, carried the news to Mullingar. O’Conor displayed amazing valour, being a warrior of great strength and experience. He hewed down many of their men with his own hand, while the heroic Tyrrell at the head of his men repeatedly rushed into the thick of the battle. Young Barnwell being taken prisoner, his life was spared, but he was delivered up to O’Neill. A curious circumstance is mentioned by MacGeoghegan that from the heat and excessive action of his sword-arm the hand of O’Conor became so swollen that it could not be extricated from the guard of his sabre until the handle was cut through with a file. In 1599, according to MacGeoghegan, Christopher Blanche was sent to Ireland and marched with his forces into Offally, but he was met by the O’Conors, and a fierce engagement ensued in which the English were defeated and 500 of their cavalry slain. The Marshal himself escaped with difficulty, having his leg broken in the battle. In 1600, O’Conor Faily, namely, the tribe of Bryan, son of Cahir, was in alliance with the Irish for three or four years till this time, and during that period they took and demolished the most of the castles in Offally, except Phillipstown and a few others. The Lord Justice of Ireland went there about Lammas (August) of this year, with many harrows, great Irish ploughs, rakes, scythes and sickles, and cut down and destroyed the crops of the country, ripe and unripe, and in consequence of this the inhabitants of that country went into flight, banishment, and exile, into Ulster and other countries until the end of this year. The Protestant historian, Morrison, thus describes the scene that followed the destruction of the crops by the brutal officials of England—“ No spectacle was more frequent in the ditches of the towns, and especially in wasted countries, than to see multitudes of these poor people, the Irish, dead, with their mouths all coloured green by eating nettles, docks, and all things they could find above ground.”

## Mountjoy and Captain Tyrrell

### *War of Devastation and Murder.*

An account of Mountjoy's plundering expeditions in Leinster and Meath is given by Fynes Morrison, Cox and MacGeoghegan. Mountjoy, in the month of December, 1599, first proceeded to Wicklow against the O'Tooles and O'Byrnes. He arrived at Naas on the 23rd, where he assembled the Leinster garrisons, and then marched to Monasterevan and next over the mountains covered with snow to the glens of Wicklow. On Christmas Day he arrived suddenly at the residence of Felim O'Byrne, Chief of Glenmalure. O'Byrne himself escaped, but Mountjoy made his wife and eldest son prisoners. He regaled himself plentifully in O'Byrne's house and remained there with his forces until the 20th January, plundering and laying waste the country in all directions with his usual ferocity and inhumanity. Even Morrison, his secretary and panegyrist, says :—

His troops spoiled and ransacked the Countries of Ranelegh and Cashay, swept away the most part of their cattle and goods, burnt all their corn and almost all their houses, leaving little or nothing to relieve the people, but to finish the work his lordship planted two strong garrisons on them, one at Wicklow on the east and the other at Tallyght on the west. Mountjoy next marched back to Monasterevan, and on the 29th January to Abbeyconnell, passing, (says Morrison), by the ruined city of Kildare, now altogether disinhabited. From thence he crossed the Liffey to Hussey's castle and thence to Maynooth, the ancient castle of the Earls of Kildare. He met no opposition in his progress from the O'Moores or O'Connors of Leix and Offalley, whose countries he laid waste the preceding autumn.

On the 31st he came to Trim, “ through which,” says Morrison, “ the Boyne runs, and it had the ruins of a sumptuous castle.” He remained at Trim till the 11th February, and then passed by the mansion of Barnwell, Baron of Trimbleton, to the residence of Nugent, Baron of Delvin, Westmeath. On the 12th he came to Mullingar, went thence to Ballymore, and to Sir Theobald Dillon, and on the 17th he arrived at Athlone. The greater part of these countries he laid waste, and he returned to Westmeath.

On the 19th he returned to Bryan MacGeoghegan's castle at Donore, and thence proceeded to act against Captain Richard Tyrrell, who was posted in a stronghold seated in a plain on an island encompassed with bogs and deep ditches running in line with the river Brosna, and with thick woods surrounding. Tyrrell secured in this fastness, violently defended the place against great forces, and Morrison says : “ that while he himself was along with some horsemen on a hill reconnoitring the place and riding on a white horse he was nearly shot, one ball flying close to his head, and the second went through his cloak and lodged in the saddle after it had bruised his thigh.” Mountjoy's cavalry was posted on a hill, and he sent Sir Christopher St. Laurence, Captains Winson, Roper, Rotheram, and other officers, with the wings of foot into the woods to attack the fortified places. But Tyrrell's men poured their volleys on them, by which Captain Darcy was shot in the neck. On the 22nd the English carried bundles of fagots to press into the island, but the water carrying them away, “ and his lordship's guard” says Morrison, “ being badly seconded by the Irish, we came off, with loss, and Captain Rotherham was killed.” On the 23rd Mountjoy again attacked the island and he got a supply of provisions for the camp from all parts, particularly from Athlone in boats ; he had 400 men lodged in the abbey, where he dined and proclaimed Tyrrell's head at 2,000 crowns, and, after dinner, drawing to the island, he divided the forces, sending one part to attack the island in boats, and burn their houses, and such things for their relief, the other party went into the

wood to seize on their corn secreted there. On the 24th, being Shrove Tuesday, there was a great fall of snow, and the next night Tyrrell withdrew from the island, on which Mountjoy found some wine, corn, cows, and garron. He continued to burn the houses and corn, and Morrison says he gave a piece of coin called an angel to one of his followers to swim over to an island on a lake to burn the houses. He next came to a river which divided Westmeath from Offally, the Brosna, and sent several companies with Sir Christopher St. Laurence to lay waste and burn the homesteads of the people.

Richard Tyrrell.

Historians of all shades of politics agree that Tyrrell was the bravest and most accomplished soldier, with the exception of Red Hugh O'Neill, that Ireland had during the stormy reign of Elizabeth, so fertile in every description of great men. The noted soldier was not only remarkable for the courage and devotedness with which he inspired his followers, but also for, in days of universal treachery, the faithfulness with which he adhered to his cause. True to his country, faithful and attached to friends, he never despaired of what he thought the cause of the old land which he was the last to desert

He clung to that cause in the midst of despair,  
When the tempest had terrified others.

The Battle of Tyrrellspass was not the only victory gained by the valiant Tyrrell during this sanguinary campaign. In a similar pass in the O'Moore's country he surprised the most successful and brutal of Elizabeth's generals, Lord Mountjoy, on which occasion the deputy was in imminent danger of his life and had a horse shot under him. Anyone who reads the history of that terrible struggle between the English and the Irish in those wars will recognise what an important part Tyrrell took in them ; how he was mainly instrumental in assisting O'Donnell to pass into Munster in spite of Lord Mountjoy's precautions, who supposed that he had every practical road guarded, but which Tyrrell and O'Donnell evaded by passing over the hitherto impracticable mountains of Slieve Phelim, and so thus gained the valley of the Shannon when the English supposed they had enclosed them in the valley of the Suir. Tyrrell led on the vanguard of the Irish forces at the disastrous battle of Kinsale. He defended Dunboy with another distinguished Westmeathman, Richard MacGeoghegan, as long as it was possible. Though often tempted by bribes by the English Generals, he refused to betray the cause of Faith and Fatherland, even to save his life and property. Often betrayed, and often thereby defeated, yet too vigilant to be taken ; too fertile in resources to be vanquished, he still held out, even when O'Donnell in despair retired beyond the seas, and O'Neill sought safety in another land, believing that all was over. Tyrrell, instead of surrendering, effected, along with his few faithful followers, his retreat out of Desmond, and passed in hostile array from the farthest mountains of Kerry, through the midst of traitorous Irish and watchful English, until he arrived in the fastness of the County Cavan, from which he effected his escape to Spain.

Chivalrous Tyrrell—noble, disinterested patriot. May the blessing of another, a purer and a better world compensate you for your suffering here and reward you for the nobleness with which you held true and faithful to Ireland, to the cause and to the country, leaving to that country an example bright as ever graced old Rome in her proudest days. Well may our country be proud of you.

The descendants of the Anglo-Norman families of Meath who supported Queen Elizabeth :—

Plunketts, Barons of Dunsany ; Preston, Viscounts of Gormanstown ; Flemings, Barons of Slane ; Taaffe, Louth ; Barnwall, of Trimbleston ; Butler, Baron of Dunboyne ; Nugent, Baron of Delvin ; Dillon, Baron of Kilkenny West.

Anglo-Irish, against the Queen :—

Richard Tyrrell, Fartullagh, and some of the Nugents, Plunketts and Fitzgeralds. In Meath, the son and heir of Sir William Nugent joined the Irish, “ and the country,” says Morrison, “ lying in the heart of the Dale, was greatly wasted by the Ulster rebels, and many castles lay waste without inhabitants.” In Westmeath Richard MacGeoghegan and others of his sept, with some of the Nugents and Fitzgeralds, had against the Queen, 120 horse ; and Richard Tyrrell, whom Morrison calls a rebel of the Irish race, had, of Ulstermen, 260 foot, and the rebels of Westmeath were increased at least 100 by the revolt of the eldest son of William Nugent, brother of Lord Delvin, with many of the Petits and Daltons. In Longford the chiefs of the O’Farrells joined the Queen, and the Castle of Longford was held by an English garrison. The other O’Farrells joined the Irish and had 180 foot.

Tyrrellspass, A.D. 1597.

By Robert Dwyer Joyce..

*Brosna.*

By the flowery banks of Inny the burning sunset fell,  
In many a stream and golden gleam, on hill and mead and dell,  
And from thy shores, bright Ennel, to the far-off mountain crest,  
O’er plain and leafy wildwood there was peace and quiet rest.  
Oh ! sunset is the sweetest of all the hours that be,  
For musing lone, or tale of love, by glen or forest tree ;  
But its radiance bringeth saddening thoughts to him whose good right hand  
Must guard his life in the coming strife ’gainst the foe of his fatherland ;  
For he knows, when thinking lonely by his small tent on the plain,  
The glories of the sinking sun he ne’er may see again.

Brave Tyrrell sat that summer eve amid the forest hills,  
With bold O’Connor at his side, by Inny’s fountain rills—  
Brave Tyrrell of the flying camps, and Owen Oge of Cong—  
And round them lay their warriors wild the forest glade along.  
Four hundred men of proof they were, these warriors free and bold ;  
In many a group they sat around the green skirts of the wold ;  
Some telling of their early loves, and some of mighty deeds,  
In regions wide by Shannon side, in Galien of the steeds—  
Some cursing the Invader’s steps, and wishing for the fray.  
That they might sate their burning hate ere the close of that bright day.

Now up the woody mountain-side the battle rolls along;  
Now down into the valley's womb the tugging warriors throng;

As hounds around a hunted wolf some forest rock beneath,  
Whence comes no sound save the mortal rush and the gnash of many teeth,  
Their charging shouts have died away no sound rolls upward save  
The volley of the murderous gun and the crash of axe and glaive !  
Oh ! life, it is a precious gem, yet many there will throw  
The gem away in the mortal fray for vengeance on the foe,  
And thus they tug more silent still, till the glen is covered wide  
With war-steed strong and sabred corse, and many a gory tide.

Hurrah ! that shout it rolleth up with cadence wild and stern ;  
'Tis the triumph roar of the gallowglass and the sharp yell of the kern !  
The foeman flies before their steel not far, not far he flies ;  
In the gorge's mouth, in the valley's womb, by the mountain foot he dies ;  
Where'er he speeds, death follows him like a shadow in his tracks—  
He meets the gleam of the fearful pike and the sharp and gory axe !  
Their leader of the boasting words, young Trimbleston, was ta'en,  
And his champions all, save one weak man, in that bloody gorge were slain ;  
He sped him on, unchased by kern, unsmote by gallowglass  
That he might tell how his comrades fell that morn in Tyrrellspass.

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