

Woods And Fastnesses In Ancient Ireland.

By

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“ Whylome when Ireland flourished in fame
Of wealth and goodnesse, far above the rest
Of all that bear the British Islands’ name,
The gods then us’d, for pleasure and for rest.
Oft to resort thereto, when seem’d them best :
But none of all therein more pleasure found
Than Cynthia, that is souveraine Queene profest
Of woods and forests, which therein abound,
Sprinkled with wholsom waters more than most on ground.”

—*Spenser.*

The author of the *Faery Queene* loved the woods with a poet’s love for the beautiful, the wild, and free. In the most perfect of his poetic pieces, his *Epithalamium*, a joyous ode upon the occasion of his own marriage, we meet with the pleasing idea of the woods around his abode echoing the shouts, music, songs, and sounds of happiness attendant on his nuptials. One of his sons, an offspring of this marriage, he named “Sylvanus,” another token of his affection for sylvan scenes. It is no slight tribute to the charms of Irish scenery that Edmond Spenser more than once warmly celebrates them. Perhaps we do not err in asserting that he is the earliest of English poets who evinces an appreciation of the picturesque. Living, as he did in Ireland, on the margin of a river, when the banks and surrounding country were either richly clothed with wood, or rendered even still more agreeable to a poet’s eye by their uncultured and uninclosed state, their gorse and heather luxuriance of colouring, he saw indeed, in wood, water, and the purple mountains standing like graceful distant wide and lofty ramparts, the noblest elements of landscape beauty. In our day, the scenery around Kilcolman is sadly deficient : the hills and the river are there, but the woods are gone.

Let us quit poetry for archæology the two not being always compatible, for the bard exercises his imagination, while the antiquary seeks truth unadorned. Doubtless, as Spenser says, woods and forests abounded in Ireland in his time; but we suspect the abundance was not extreme. Our notion of their real extent is formed on some notes made on this subject, which are about to be given, in order that the reader may form a sufficiently accurate idea of the sylvan state of green Erin in Elizabeth’s time. The “Books of Survey and Distribution,” compiled in 1657, and the maps of the Down Survey, give the exact area of every woodland in the kingdom. With regard to the earlier period, the one selected, it is so because Sir George Carew has left, in his MSS., brief notes of the area or dimensions of some of the old forests of Minister, as they flourished in his time. His data, however, must be regarded as mere rough calculations of the probable square measure of those woods, since it certainly was as impossible for him to have computed the actual quantity of ground occupied by them as to have counted their trees ; the extent of ground they covered having varied in outline, according to incidental circumstances. Again, it is to be observed that the mile of that time was longer than the measure now so called. Before entering into details respecting notable woods in three [1] of the provinces of Ireland, a brief archaic view may be taken of the general topic of “Woods and Fastnesses in Ancient Ireland ;” and we shall perceive, after even a glance, that trees fill an important part in the history of the Irish Gael.

Strabo describes the Britons as making their forests “their towns, of which,” says he “they fence in a large circle with felled trees, and make huts there for themselves, and stables for

their cattle ; but *not for a long time.*” This last expression gives us an idea of the nomad life of the Britons, with which, it may be believed, the life of the Celtic Irish corresponded. Indeed, we find that the same wandering unsettled habits were prevalent in Ulster, even so recently as the 17th century; many of the people living as “ *creaghts*” that is to say, as septs or *sliochts* dwelling in common, subsisting on the produce of their herd of cattle, with which they wandered along the sides of mountains and through the woods ; content, during this pastoral existence, with the nightly shelter of shearings or huts that an hour or two sufficed to construct. It is probable that the “ large circle” mentioned by Strabo closely resembled the *pal-lis*, or palisadoed rath, the Irish *poleis* of Ptolemy. That famous historic territory, “ the Pale,” is said to have obtained its name from the fact that the un-walled villages and towns, within this wide colony of the Englishry, were defended with palisades of timber-- in military parlance, stockades. Its Norman appellation, *Jo Pal*, must have been derived from some actual defence of this kind, rather than from an imaginary separation. In 1515 it was recommended that every village and town in the barony of Kells (co. Meath), that lay “ within six miles of the wylde Iryshe, be dycheyd and hegeyd strongly about the gates, of tymbre, after the manner of the Co.of Kildare, for dredde of fyre of ther enymyes.” The settlers in Leinster under Strongbow had, of course, taken possession of the champaign naturally the richest land, and artificially the freest from wood, “ Maghery ground,” the name by which such land was designated, derives its name from the Gaelic word *machaire*, a plain. From passages in records, it would seem that the colonists in the Pale arrogated the right to all bordering land of this denomination. Long and frequent were their contests with the old natives for the possession of the soil ; since these enemies lay ever around them, in the depths of the dark forests that skirted the horizon, or in the recesses of the blue mountains that rose above it. The aspect of Ireland in the 16th century must have differed almost in *toto caelo* from the appearance it now presents. The rivers are, indeed, the same that then brightened the landscape, and the mountains those that ennobled it ; but the vast untouched tracts of forest, and wide wastes of heather, have given place to a multitude of small, ill-fenced fields, not too well cultivated, and dotted with habitations, many of which one sees but to hope they will be displaced by better. At that early period, the wayfarer instead of, as now, finding but little wood visible from the highway save “ plantations,” which never look sylvan found the level plains so overrun with natural wood that the few roads of the time, necessarily avoiding mountains and morasses, had been cut through forests, but were closed in many places by the rapid growth of underwood. The remedy ordained by the parliament of 1297 for overcoming this serious impediment is curiously set forth in the following clause :

“ The Irish enemy, by the density of the woods, and the depth of the adjacent morasses, assume a confident boldness; the king’s highways are in places so overgrown with wood, and so thick and difficult, that even a foot passenger can hardly pass. Upon which, it is ordained that every lord of a wood, with his tenants, through which the highway was anciently, shall clear a passage where the way ought to be, and remove all standing timber as well as underwood.” [2]

Giraldus Cambrensis states that the woodlands of Ireland exceeded the plain, or cleared and open land. After the partial conquest of the natives, these great forests became the fastnesses and abodes of such septs and clans as retained their independence, and were to them what castles were to the Norman barons ; for the Irish were accustomed to improve the impregnable character of a wood by cutting down trees on both sides of passages through it, casting some in the way, forming breast-work with others, and plashing or interlacing the lower branches of standing trees with the undergrowth. It may be safely asserted that, for three centuries subsequent to the invasion, a troop of the colonial cavalry could not ride twenty miles in any direction, when in chase of their turbulent and destructive enemies, without finding the pursuit obstructed by a wood, which instantly served as a redoubt to the fugitives. Such having been the extent of the sylvan shelter into which the Gaels retired before the invaders fortifying every path in their ingenious manner, and righting bravely in defence of it,

while ever and anon they sallied out and plundered the Saxon colonists we may conceive that the forests presented the greatest obstacle to a complete conquest of the country, and that the efforts of the settlers were constantly directed to their destruction. It was repeatedly declared that “ the Irish could not be tamed while the leaves were on the trees ;” implying both that woods sheltered them from their enemies, and that the foliage and summer’s grass supported their horses and cattle ; so that “ the best service that could be done,” to quote the phrase of the day, was to attack the wild foe in the winter, and cut and burn down their thickets. Abundant evidence could be adduced from our archives that the Norman sway was almost paramount in Ireland during the century that succeeded the invasion. The Gaelic race, even in the centre of Ulster, were then in tolerable subjection. Still, the extensive woods throughout the island formed safe retreats to clans that were driven from the cleared and fertile tracts, and long continued to be the resort of predatory marauders. This evil became greatly aggravated after the invasion of the Bruces, when the natives yearly grew in strength ; an invasion, indeed, induced by the very cries of the Gaels from their wretched retreats. In their address, at this period, dated 1318, to Pope John XXII., they describe themselves as driven from their hereditary lands and former spacious habitations, and compelled, for safety of their lives, to seek shelter in mountains, forests, bogs, and other barren places, and even in the caverns of the rocks, like wild beasts ; while the borders or marches between them and their enemies were not one definite line, dividing the country into two parts, but were interspersed throughout the whole island, wherever the barrenness of the soil caused it to be unoccupied by those enemies, or where the strength of the fastnesses deterred them. Owing to the fact that the lands of the two opposing parties everywhere inter-mingled, and were without fixed boundaries, border war lasted for centuries throughout the length and breadth of Ireland.

Of instances in which the impregnability of Gaelic fastnesses enabled their hardy occupants to hold out against the foe, one of the most remarkable is the case of the O’Conors of Connaught, the “ Sil-ilurray,” *sliocht*, or seed, of Muiredhach. At the period of the invasion, Roderic O’Conor, as is well known, was monarch of Ireland. His successors withstood the conquering advances of the Normans by means of forest and mountain retreats, from whence all the chivalry that could be mustered by De Burgh, feudal Baron of Connaught and Earl of Ulster, was not able to expel them. In 1305, a legal inquiry was held at Castledermot, at the request of the Earl, respecting his title to a certain territory, containing two baronies and a half, in Outer Connaught, when it was found, by verdict of the jury, that “ *if* those parts were *cleared of Irish*, their value would be 250 marks yearly ; but that this expulsion could not be effected without a great power (*magno posse*) of the king’s men, and incalculable expenses, exceeding the value of the said land, and principally because the said O’Conoghur is one of the five chieftains of the Irish.” [3] As one of the five kings of the ancient national dynasties, O’Conor would have been supported by a large clannish and half-feudal force. So long as the Irish kept in their woods and fastnesses, they were safe enough ; for it was only when they risked battle in the field that they were overcome by the more disciplined forces of their opponents, as at Athenry, where the Sil-Murray were nearly annihilated.

Let us here notice some English and Irish sylvan etymologies. “ Field” signified originally cleared or *fell’d* ground. “ Weald,” a wild, or wilderness, equivalent to the Gaelic *fassagh*, is derived from the German *wald*, the root of our word, wood. *Gleann* is Irish for a glen, or wooded vale, equivalent to the English *dene*, Scottish *dean* (as in Hazeldean), and found in the name of the wood of Arden, in Warwickshire, and perhaps that of Ardennes, in Hainault.

During the reign of Elizabeth, when the Irish sword of state was no idle emblem in the hand of the governor, it was of deep political moment, as will be presently seen, that English axes should be busily at work in the woods. The historian of Tyrone’s rebellion observes that “ Ulster, and the western parts of Munster, yield *vast* woods, in which the rebels, cutting up trees, and casting them on heaps, used to stop the passages.” It was perhaps a social evil of no

less magnitude, that almost every large wooded glen bordering on the Englishry held a nest of human wasps, the Irish “ wood-kerne,” who lived by robbing the neighbouring colonists. The most cogent reasons, therefore, urged the destruction of woods. Still, even so recently as when the troops that entered Ireland under Cromwell, on being disbanded, settled down in districts over almost the entire island, many ancient woods remained in their pristine grandeur. To call up but a single witness ; Lady Fanshawe, who landed at Youghal, passed through the west, and sailed from Galway, having spent a year in this kingdom just before the usurper entered, observes, in her interesting *Memoirs*, that this country “ exceeded in timber.” The shock of the Restoration shook down many of those old woods. During the uncertainty felt by the Cromwellian settlers as to retaining their hold of the land, they realised what they could do by stripping it of its feathers ; and, subsequently, the vengeful dryads of the departed groves appeared to them in the shapes of “ Tories” and “ rapparees.” A similar political earthquake in 1688 caused the fall of many more thousands of tall trees. The trustees of the estates then forfeited, notice in their report “ the general waste committed on the forfeited woods” by the grantees, on receiving possession ; “ particularly on those of Sir Valentine Browne,” around the Lakes of Killarney, “ where to the value of £20,000 has been cut down and destroyed.” The waste by simultaneously cutting clown, and glutting the market with, the extensive woods in the late Earl of Clancarty’s territory was computed at no less than £27,000. “ So hasty,” wrote the trustees, “ have several of the grantees, or their agents, been in the disposition of the forfeited woods, that vast numbers of trees have been cut and sold for not above *six pence a-piece*.” They add : “ The like waste is *still continuing* in many parts of this kingdom, and particularly on the lands of Feltrim, within six miles of Dublin, and the woods of O’Shaghnessy, in the county of Galway, purchased for about £2,500, which were valued to above £12,000.” In 1616, Richard Milton obtained Letters Patent licensing him to cut timber, except such as had been marked by the king’s officers for the use of the navy, for making pipe-staves, clap-boards, &c, and to export the same, for 21 years.

Dr. Boate, in his *Natural History of Ireland*, accounts for the diminution of timber “ by the incredible quantity consumed in the iron works, and by the exportation of pipe-staves in whole ship-loads.” Neither the English colonels whom Cromwell metamorphosed into Irish landlords, nor the Dutchmen whom William of Orange rewarded with Irish soil, regarded their new forests with much liking ; even their successors do not seem to have looked on their woods as ancestral inheritances, since the same recklessness was common in the days of Swift, who remarks, in his *7th Drapiers Letter* :— “ I believe there is not another example in Europe of such a prodigious quantity of excellent timber cut down in so short a time, with so little advantage to the country either in shipping or building.” — “Trees are an excrescence provided by nature for the payment of debts,” according to Sir Jonah Barrington, who quotes this saying as the sentiment of the “Teat Irish landlords of his day. Obviously, there is no infallible preservative for the old timber of an estate during the lordships of several successive heirs, one of whom, however lofty his genealogic tree, may prove a —

“ Foe to the dryads of his fathers’ groves.”

Perhaps it is not erroneous to believe that, whatever may have actuated Irish proprietors, a large majority of English and Scottish landlords, during the last fifty years, have been planters, and the cases of “ cutters-down” but few : at least, one does not hear of such flagrant instances as are alluded to in the following passage in a letter from “ Walpole, the wit, to Mason : “ When the forests of our old barons were nothing but dens of thieves, the law in its wisdom made them un-alienable. Its wisdom now thinks it very fitting that they should be cut down to pay debts at Almack’s and Newmarket. I was saying this to the lawyer I carried down with me. He answered, ‘ The law hates a perpetuity.’ ‘ Not all perpetuities,’ said I ; ‘ not those of lawsuits.’ ”

ULSTER.

Our province of Ulster, not the part of Ireland least civilised in Queen Victoria's days, was styled by statute in Queen Elizabeth's time, "the most perilous place in all the isle." Its fastnesses, which we shall presently enumerate and briefly describe, were peculiarly strong, consisting, for the most part, of islands, natural and artificial, in lakes a species of fortress so special to our ancient province that we propose to devote some future paper to this particular subject. Primevally, using this term in its historic sense, the entire district now called Ulster was, without doubt, densely wooded. The name *Uladh*, *Scandinavice* Ulster, was anciently confined to a very circumscribed part, namely, the present County of Down, of which *Machaire Uladh* was the plain or open country. It was in this "Maghery ground," to use the term employed by the Englishry of the Pale, that the colonists under Sir John de Courcy settled. At the time Shane O'Neill assumed his despotic sway, it was almost impossible, by reason of the danger, for an undisguised Englishman to enter the province by land. The natural strength of the territory was the principal cause that had enabled the native Gael to maintain their liberty so long. It was vulnerable, indeed, on three sides, by sea; but not until Drake and Randolph carried the flag of St. George around the northern shore, did soldiers bearing the red cross conquer the country once defended by the "Knights of the Red Branch." A glance at the map of Ireland will show the long and strong lines of waters that were natural and broad fosses of defence against southern invasion. Indeed, there were but two roads into Ulster, namely, the passage by Carrickmacross, thence called "the gap of the North," and the historically famous "Pass," by Magh-rath, or Moiry. From the former place to Belturbet, the country was nearly impassable, owing to its network of bogs, lakes, and mountains; while the river and lakes of the Erne, compassed with great woods (as Moryson observed), formed a complete barrier as far as the Atlantic. "Whenever English troops succeeded in penetrating to the centre of Ulster, they found it a jungle. In 1542, the Earl of Tyrone's country is described as not containing one single "castell," wherein any of the king's army might reside securely "in case the Earl were clearly banished;" "not yet one town walled, nor other hold; but full of wooddes, grete boggis, and waters, called here loughes, which be some of them twenty myles in length, so that hard it wold be to have the same inhabited, without great charge, and peril of those who should inhabit the same." The Earl, while yet bearing the title of the O'Neill, had consented, by articles, that "all and singular the thicketts, groves, and woods, lying between his country and the bordering Englishry, should be cut down, and made plain land." [4] Axes were doubtless kept going all around the confines of O'Neill's country, and within them also, from that year, 1541, until a century afterwards, 1641; yet there is ample testimony to show that the least accessible parts, such as Glenconcan (in Derry) and Killultagh (in Down) remained, not indeed untouched, but with their woody nature as little extirpated as was the Irish race.

Sir George Carew gives the following brief note of:

"WOODS AND FASTNES IN ULSTER.

Glenbrasell, by Loughaugh, a great boggy and woody fastnes.

Glencan, a boggy and woody contry, environed with two rivers, viz., the Blackwater and the Ban.

Killultagh, a safe, boggy, and woody contry, upon Logh Eaugh.

Kilwarlen, the like bounden together.

Kilautrey, lying between Kilwarlen and Leeale.

Glanconkeyne, on the river Ban's side, in U'Chane's country, the chief fastnes and refuge of the Scotts." —

Clanbrassil and O'Neilland were woodlands in the time of Sir IH. Bagenal ; and formed the principal settlement and fastness of the O'Neills.

It was on the border of these marshes that Shane O'Neill formed his safest fastness, thus mentioned after his death in a letter from lord-treasurer Winchester to lord-deputy Sidney, congratulating the successful viceroy on the fierce chief being " delivered from his evil doings ;" and adding, " you shall do verie well to see Shane's lodgings in the fen, where he *built his lodging*, and kept his cattell and all his men." This stronghold seems to have been the insular artificial fort named *Fuad-na-Gall*, in the south-west of Lough Neagh, a description of which, with accounts of other celebrated Lister fastnesses, would be very acceptable, and gratefully acknowledged.

Clancan was easily defended on account of its insular position.

Killultagh (*Coill-Ultach*, the wood of the Ulster men?), probably so called from being the abode of the Gaels of Uladh, when this name was confined to the country east of the Bann. In 1573 Lord Essex wrote that he was joined by " the Captain of Killulto," who, with his clan, " lay in the woods of Killulto ;" and the earl describes the country as " a woodland and strong fastness." That this forest was at one period not merely the fastness, but one of the especial dwelling-places, of the eastern O'Neill's, appears from the statement in a recommendation of 1515, that fresh English colonists be sent into Ulster, in order that " all the noble issue of Hugh Boye Oneyll be avoyded clere and expelled from the Greene Castell to the Bann, and be assydneyd and sufferyd to have ther habytation and dwelling in the greate forest Keylultagh and in the Pheux, whic habytations and placeis they bathe, and *dwelleyth ofte before now by compulsion*." Sir G. Carew states, in another MS. (No. 617) that this forest had been let to the clan of Yellow Hugh, before the murder of the Earl of Ulster, for one hundred pounds a-year.

Kilwarlin, (or *Coill-warlin*,) with its strong island retreat, Innisluoughan, was the fastness of Mc Gennis; and, being joined to " the wood of the Ulster men," added much to the strength of this ancient native stronghold.

" Killoutrey" is *Coill-uachtrach*, the upper wood.

Glenconcan, (or *Gleann-coneadhain*,) a broad, deep, and beautiful vale, bounded on the south by the remarkable mountain of *Sliabh Callain*, or Sliav Gallion, and on the north by the Dungiven and Banagher mountains. Anciently, it was the best fastness in the north, being adjacent to the forest of *Coill-iochtrach*, or the lower wood, and to Sliav Gallion, the skirts of which were described as all rock and bog for a circuit of forty miles. Carew calls it the chief refuge of the Scots, because the Mc Donnells made it their retreat whenever military expeditions were undertaken by the viceroy to drive them out of Ireland. It belonged, however, more immediately to the O'Neills, and was the safest fastness of the Earl of Tyrone during his rebellion. Sir Henry Dockwra calls this district " the Glynns," and describes it as covered with thick wood for twenty miles in length and ten in breadth ; and speaks of the earl as lying impenetrably encamped in it, " plasht all about with trees :" and Sir Josias Bodley speaks of the subsequent fighting with Tyrone in his woods of Glenconcan. On the flight and attainder of the insurgent lord, and the sequestration of his estate, the intelligent Sir John Davys writes in 1608 :

" From Dungannon we passed into the county of Colraine, through the Glinnes and woods of Clanconkeyn, where the wild inhabitants did as much wonder to see the lord deputy, as Virgil's ghosts did to see Æneas alive in hell. But his lordship's [the viceroy's] passing that way was of good importance two ways for his majesty's service ; for both himself and all the officers of his army have discovered

that unknown fastnes ; and also the people of the country, knowing their fastnes to be discovered, will not trust so much therein as heretofore, which trust made them presume to commit so many thefts, murders, and rebellions : for assuredly they presumed more upon our ignorance of their country than upon their own strength.”

Davys then wrote to the English government to suggest that “ the great forest of Gleneonkeyn, well nigh as large as the New Forest in Hampshire, and stored with the best limber,” should be retained as a reserve for the royal navy. But as it was important to the peace of Ulster that this vast shelter for rebels and robbers should be destroyed, and more suitable that its oaks, in place of being used in building “ wooden walls” for England, should be employed in erecting a town whose walls would prove a “ chief fastness and refuge” to colonists in the North of Ireland, the king, in 1609, gave permission to cut down 50,000 oak-trees at 10s. a piece, 100,000 ash-trees at 5s., and 10,000 elms at 6s. 8d., for the purpose of building Londonderry. The total value of the timber cut, amounting to £53,033 6s. 8d., an enormous sum at that time, proves the great extent of valuable timber the forest contained.

Some other woods in Ulster require brief notice. The Dufferin [*Dubh-thrian*, the black third], was the woody part of the territory of the *Cinel-Artaigh*, belonging to Mc Artan, and also partly occupied in the 15th century by Mc Quillin, whose “ creaght” was attacked here by O’Neill in 1433. It is therefore probable that it was here, rather than in the woods of Kilnasaggart, that Edward Bruce seized the creaghts of those chieftains, as mentioned by Barbour, the Scottish poet.

Old maps show a large wood near Omagh ; and Dockwra describes the pass through it as being a mile long, having “ high oaken timber” on either side, and as the scene of an engagement in which Sir Cahir O’Dogherty was knighted for loyal bravery. He also describes the country of the Sleught Art, a sept of the O’Neills, near Castle Derg, as being 16 miles long, and for the most part bog and wood. *Rossmore*, the great wood on the border of Lough Ross, in Monaghan, is remarkable as having been the retreat of Edward Bruce and his troops at the time the Earl of Ulster and Viceroy Butler were marching with two armies in search of those invaders, of whom the metrical narrator, Barbour, says :

“ Till a gret forest come thai,
Kylrose it hat [called] as Ik hard say.”

The “ Glens of Antrim,” that singular district which, during the middle ages, was inhabited by alien races of Scandinavian Scots, who were frequently hired to fight in the civil wars throughout Ireland, must have then been densely clothed, throughout its vales, with wood. When the sons of John *Cahanach* M Donald, lord of the isles, concealed themselves in these glens, their more powerful enemy, a chief of their name, “ hearing of their hiding places, went to cut down the woods of those glens, in order to extirpate their whole race.” [5]

The district of the “ Pheux,” (the *Fiodha*, or Fewes of Armagh,) bordering on the Pale, and inhabited by a sept of the O’Neills, (who, as Marshal Bagenal states, “ were accustomed to live much on the spoile of the Pale,”) were the dread of all English travellers into the North ; as “ the Passe” up to Newry lay through these woods, which were always infested by robbers. Moryson mentions “ the Pass of Feddom.” Shane O’Neill, at the outset of his usurpation of Ulster, took up his abode in these woods for the special purpose of preventing British subjects from passing northward. Under the well-known names of “ Invermullane “ and “ the Moiry pass,” the passage of these woods by armies during war is celebrated in history. These “ Fewes” were the special resort of an Irish “Rob Roy,” the renowned “ Count Hanlon,” to check whose highway exploits a barrack, capable of containing two companies of foot, was erected in them. Yet the bold Count contrived to make the military subservient to his purpose;

for, having slain several of the soldiers, he put their uniforms on his men, and, until the trick became notorious, many a traveller suffered by it.

The ancient wood-kerne, bands of outlaws and “guerillas,” closely resembling the cate-rans of the Scottish Highlands, “living,” as stated by O’Flaherty, “in woods in a barbarous manner, and subsisting on depredations,” the predecessors of torics, rapparecs, and highway-men, have been already mentioned; but it maybe noted that those of Ulster were the most consummately wild and daring of the whole national fraternity. The northern Gaels are indeed well known to have surpassed the southern in warlike qualities. These outlawed banditti were “the wylde Irish,” so dreaded by English colonists, and whose havoc and slaughterings almost paralysed the settlement in central Ulster prior to the outbreak in 1641. It may be said that every great glen or wooded vale throughout the kingdom was the heritable haunt of a *clann* or race, who were “the old evil children of the wood,” as a marauding southern tribe was called. Indeed, to these wretched pariahs of a land, the noblest of whose Gaelic race gloried in making war on and despoiling the Saxon, and in which the arts of peace were almost altogether confined to the enemy, there was nothing left but to continue their hereditary course of life. The desperate recklessness of the wood-kerne robbers in this respect became proverbial in an antique Irish “rhyme,” the gist of which is, that if their lives were lost in any excursion in quest of cattle, their children, “when their teeth grew,” might betake themselves to the Glynnns, as their fathers had done before them !

MUNSTER.

In the south-west of this province lay the five great forests that formed the natural fastnesses of the Earls of Desmond, those strongholds in which these lords so trusted; for it was the possession of these retreats, which they were confident were almost impregnable, that led to their frequent revolts against any superior authority. Glengarriff and Killarney, at one period the least accessible of these mountain holds, are now visited at ease by “the million,” and reward connoisseurs of the picturesque, however far travelled, with a wild yet perfect beauty that may claim to be unsurpassed by any scenes to which these miniature ones may fairly be compared.

During the height of the last Earl of Desmond’s rebellion, in 1579, Sir Warham St. Leger wrote to Lord Burleigh, that “the scope of the Geraldines’ range includes the Great Wood, Aharlogh, Dromfynine, Glanmore, and Glanflesk, which are their chief fortresses ;” and he proposed to employ a force of 1,000 English soldiers, besides the army already in the field under the Earl of Ormond, to protect labourers in hewing down and burning these woods. Philip O’Sullivan mentions that the Irish troops, in retreating after the battle of Kinsale, weak with wounds and hunger, were actually attacked by wolves that issued out on them from the woods.

The following is a note by Sir George Carew of “the length and breadth of the Woodds and Fastnesses in Munster :

Glangarriff, in O’Sullivan More’s country, 4 miles long and 2 broad.
Glanrought, in Desmond, 3 long and 2 broad.
Leanmore, in do., 3 do. and 3 do.
Clenglas and Kilmore, in the co. Limerick, 12 do. and 7 do.
Dromfynine, in the co. Cork, on the Blackwater, 6 do. and 2 do.
Arlogh and Muskryquircke, in Tipperary, 9 do. and 3 do.
Kilhuggy, in Tipperary, bordering on Limerick, 10 do. and 7 do.
Glanflesk, 4 do. and 2*do."

Glengarriff [*Gleann-garbh*, the rough glen], the large rocky and wooded vale that opens into Bantry Bay, was, as the Gaelic annalists wrote, “one of O’Sullivan’s most impregnable retreats.” Surrounded by lofty and precipitous hills, save where the sea enters, forming an inland bay of winding shape and exquisite beauty, Glengarriff, with its verdant glades, interspersed with masses of rock and groves of varied foliage, presents from its heights a scene that, uniting woods and rivers, and contrasting dark, steep, and rugged mountains with the calm, bright, island-studded bay and distant ocean, hardly yields to the finest view in Killarney.

Glancrough [the glen of the river Roughty], near Kenmare. The Englishry of Cork, in the time of Henry VI., when the Clan Carthy had repossessed themselves of the land round the very walls of the city, referred retrospectively in their letter to Edmond Plantagenet, Earl of Rutland and Cork, then lord chancellor of Ireland, to that period of triumph after the first conquest of Munster, when “all the Irishmen were driven into the great vallie called Glanehought, betwixt the two great mountains called Maccort [Mangerton] and the Leapers’ Island, and then lived long on their white meats,” until feuds between the conquering lords enabled them, as they gained in numbers and strength, to spread themselves once more over the fertile territories wrested from their ancestry.

Leanmore [the fastness of Loch Lean or lake of Killarney] derives its name from the *Leamhain* or Leune river, whence the lake, like Loch Leven in Scotland, was named. The woods on *Sliev Torc* still abound in red deer; and the Gaelic name of the mountain designates that it was anciently famous for wild boars, as *muck-ross* [the swine promontory] was for fattening the porcine breed on its acorns. Loch Lean was the best stronghold of McCarthy-more, as Lochow, in the Highlands, of a yet more powerful chief, Mc Allan-more. During grand stag-hunts, the Irish lord usually took his station on a rocky eminence on *Torc* mountain, near the gap of Dunlo, to enjoy the spectacle of the chase; and, when the deer made for the gap, as they generally did, he descended with his men, intercepted the stateliest quarries, and often struck them down with his spear. A daughter of one of these chiefs, the Baroness of Kerry, is described by the annalists as, during the Geraldine rebellion, “passing her last days upon the lake, moving from one island to another,” for fear of robbers.

The two sylvan districts of Clenglas and Kilmore formed amass of wood which, with the exception of Glenconkeyn, was the largest forest in Ireland. *Claon-ghlais*, now anglicised Clonlish, a wild district in the south-west of Limerick, was, when dense with wood, the first gathering-place of James Fitz-Maurice in his outbreak of 1579; and here perished miserably his companion, Dr. Saunders, the papal legate. The name of “Jhon of the Grene Wode,” which appears on the map of Ireland made in 1572 for Sir Thomas Smith, Colonel of the Ards, was probably that of John Fitz-Gerald, chief of a Geraldine clan that possessed Claenglais, “the green retreat.”

Another chieftain of Geraldine race, John Fitz-Gibbon, was lord of *Coill-mhor* [the great wood], now Kilmore, a barony in the County of Cork, and in modern times a well-known haunt of insurgents.

Druim-Finghin [i.e. Fincen’s ridge,] divides the two baronies of Decies. Gerald, the 16th Desmond, is described as, during his rebellion of 1582, passing and re-passing from the shelter afforded by this wood to that of Aharlagh and Coill-an-choigidh, and from thence sending out his men to lay waste the lands of his enemy Ormond.

Gleann-Eatherlach is the Gaelic name of “Arlogh,” now called “Harlow,” the most renowned forest in the south, as having been the principal fastness of the western Geraldines during

rebellion, and rendered famous from being frequently celebrated by Edmond Spenser. “ Who knows not Arlohill ?” asked the poet, declaring that it was —

“ Of old the best and fairest hill
That was in all this Holy Island’s hight:”

and that, whenever Diana visited Erin to chase the deer, her favourite resorts were —

“ All those faire forrests about Arlo hid ;
And all that mountaine, which doth overlooke
The richest champain that may else be rid.”

In later ages, Mars and Mercury were the presiding deities. During the protracted war between James Fitzmaurice and the English forces, the wily chieftain, if overmastered by numbers, generally retreated with his men into this easily defended wood, and either fought a flying skirmish through it, or succeeded in daunting his pursuers from following him. The annalists describe his horse-troopers, after the sack of Kilmallock, in 1571, as being occupied for three days and nights in carrying the spoils of the town “ to the woods and forests of Eatharlach,” and then so completely destroying the town that it became the abode of wolves.

The following “ description of Arlough wood” was given by Sir Warham St. Leger, lord president of Munster, in 1580, at the time this extensive tract was a vantage-ground to the rebel Desmionians: “ It contevneith in length three miles, in breadth six miles, distant from Limerick, south by est, sixteen miles ; situated betwixt two mountains south and north ; the south mountain being a marvelous high mountain called Slivegrote ; the north mountain (being far lower) is called Slievenemuckigh. The lands invironing it on the south and west is the White Knight’s countrie in the counties of Tipperary, Corck, and Lymerrick ; on the north the Burghe’s countrie called Clainleame, in the county of Tipperary ; on the est Muskrie Querck, also in the county of Tipperary : And as the same Arlough is altogether wood between the twoe mountains, so there is a ryver from the west to the est of the said wood, dividing them almost equallye in the middest of the vallye, untill the said river, through Muskrie Corck on the est, falleth into the river of Sure that leades to Waterford.”

Gleann-Eatharlach seems to have owed its serviceableness as a fastness to its proximity to numerous lurking-places afforded by the ravines and caves of the surrounding mountains, and to the miry nature of the ground among its dense thickets, alluded to by Spenser when comparing it to his poetic “ salvage wood” in “ Astrophel :”

“ So wide a forest and so waste as this.
Nor famous Ardeyn, nor fowle Arlo, is.”

In these hiding-places, the “ *sugane*” Earl of Desmond long attempted to elude pursuit, shifting from one to another; but was at length taken in a cavern in Slieve Grot.

“ Kilhuggy” [*Coill-an-choigidh*, the wood of the province], anglicised “ Kilquegg,” was the bleak place in which the 16th Geraldine Earl kept a cold Christmas in 1582. Glenflesk, the wooded valley of the river Flesk, was the country of O’Donoughue of the Glens, chief of a branch of the Clan-Carthy.

Besides the foregoing forests, Carew, in another document, enumerating the “ Eyries of Hawks sequestered after Desmond’s rebellion,” notices other woods, viz., “ Reynyss, in Kennale ; Ross y-Donoughow,” (now Lord Kenmare’s seat, at Ivillarney); “ Dungerott ; Dunbekan, in Carbery ;” Lord Condon’s woods; and “ Clanmauricc woods ;” in all which

there were eyries of those prized means of sport falcons and goshawks. These substitutes for “fowling-pieces” were only part of the *deliciae* afforded by our woods to the ancient sportsman ; who, be it observed, if, like Chaucer’s yeoman, “of wood-craft could he well all the usage,” found in their deer, wolves, tree-birds, &c, plentiful objects for the indulgence of his manly pursuits.

After the destruction of the 16th Desmond, a document was presented to the Queen, giving a list of “such lands as have tymbre-trees fit for building of shippes, to be reserved for her majesty’s use” in the grants of the forfeited estates of the Earl and his adherents, viz. : —

“The lands and castle of Strancally, standing towards the mouth of the brode water by Yoghall.

“The lands of Condon, adjoining to the brode water.

“The land- adjoining to Maccollop, if any way they may belong to your majesty, and Maccollop itself.

“The lands and woods called Lisfinnin, sometyme belonging to Sir John of Desmond and others.

“The lands and tymbre woods of Lismore, scituated nere the brode water, with all other woods lying within four miles of the said brode water, or upon any of the branches of the said river, which shall be fitt to convey tymbre to the mouth of the same.”

The “brode water” is, of course, the Black water, of which Spenser wrote

“Alio hight — Broad water called farre.”

Payne, the English “undertaker,” stated in 1589 that there was much good timber in many places in this province, and that it was so straight and so easy to rive, that a woodsman with a brake-axe could easily cleave a great oak into boards, which, at 15 foot long and 14 inches broad, by 1 thick, were sold at the low rate of 21/2d. each. In this year the value of the oak on the forfeited lands in Munster was again pressed on the notice of government; and it was recommended that a high steward should be appointed over the royal manors in Ireland, who should also be “wood-ward and chief forester” in this province. But neither this proposition, nor the recommendation of the foregoing state paper, (the original of which has some notes in the autograph of Lord Burleigh,) were attended to when the grants of the forfeited lands were made. Richard Boyle, afterwards Earl of Cork, who is remarkable for having acquired a vast estate, (which was obtained, however, in a manner very different from that described by himself,) and who is justly celebrated for the great improvements he effected, bargained with Sir Walter Raleigh, at the time of the attainder of that chivalrous adventurer, to buy his grant of 12,000 acres for the inconsiderable price of £1,500, (of which only a third was paid,) and immediately began cutting down the woods ; in imitation of a notorious English usurer of the day, who inveigled men into selling him their estates, and afterwards sold the timber so profitably that it paid for the land ; making, as he said, “the feathers pay for the goose.” Boyle joined in partnership with one Henry Pyne in purchasing the woods belonging to Lord Condon, the Anglo-Irish owner of a barony named from his family. These partners also bought the timber property of other native lords and chieftains, whose simplicity, or ignorance of the market, or perhaps, as in the cases of Raleigh and Condon, impending attainders, led them, as was said of similar sales, to part with what was worth thousands for a song. The attention of government in England had been frequently drawn to the public value of the vast quantity of oak then existing in Ireland; and in 1608 one Philip Cottingham was sent over to survey the woods, and report what amount of timber he found suitable to build ships for the royal navy. This surveyor does not seem to have inspected any woods beyond those in the counties of Waterford and Wexford ; and, in September, he wrote to the secretary of state, from Mogeely Castle, stating that he had examined the woods belonging to Sir Richard

Boyle, and that, although the best and most accessible timber had been cut down for pipe-staves and planks, there still remained much that was valuable for ship-building ; and he adds that the woods called “ Kilbarrow” and “ Kilcorran,” in the county of Waterford, were at that time being cut by Boyle, who had also purchased the forests of Glengarriff and Glenclawrence, in Desmond, with a view to their sale. The destruction that was taking place in the principal forests in Ireland, in which noble oaks, fit to construct ships that would “ carry Britain’s thunder o’er the deep,” were riven up to make barrels, aroused the attention of viceroy Chichester ; and he drew up a despatch, setting forth in another public and unusual point of view, the ill effects of the purchases made by Boyle and his fellow speculators. After mentioning that a pretended right was advanced to certain woods in Dowallo, the country of O’Donoughue, by Sir Richard Boyle, (who was in such favour that the viceroy merely ventured to hint he was a grasper of lands,) and stating that fifty-six tons of Irish timber were about to be sent up the Thames as a specimen, though merchants would not then give 13s. 4d. a ton for it, the lord deputy concludes with this significant passage :

“ There are forests in this kingdom of many thousand acres, some principal ones of which ought to be reserved for the use of the Crown, and not wasted, as they now are, by private men, who purchase them for trifles, or assume them upon tricks and devices from the simple Irish, who perhaps have no good title to sell them, or at least know not what they sell. But, finding that private subjects, as mean or meaner than themselves, do for the most part make extraordinary profit of their folly, they oftentimes fall into discontent, and from discontent into rebellion, when the king must be at the charge of its suppression.”

Dr. Boate, in his *Naturall History of Ireland*, in giving an account of the woods formerly flourishing in this country, notices the great havoc made of those in Munster by the first Earl of Cork.

CONNAUGHT

This province does not seem at any time to have been remarkable for forests ; their extended growth having probably been hindered by the mountainous nature of the country, and its proximity to the Atlantic. But in no other part of Ireland were the aborigines sheltered from attack by fastnesses rendered stronger by a complication of rivers, lakes, mountains, and bogs.

Under the year 1210, the *Four Masters* write of “ the wilderness of Kinel-Dofa,” the ancient name of a territory in Roscommon, which contained the largest woods in the province.

Sir George Carew’s list is as follows :

“ WOODS AND FASTNESSES IN CONNACHT.

The woods and boggs of Kilbighcr.
Killcallon, in Mac William’s contry.
Killalooa, in county of Leitrim.
The woods and boggs near the Corleus.”

The first name cannot be traced. The second, probably, is the “ Forest of Kellelon,” figured on Lithe’s map of Connaught (dated about 1572) as situated in the country of Mac William Burke, of Mayo. Besides this extended sylvan district, the map delineates several other forests in the province; as in Clancostello, Achill, Sligo, Leitrim, and near Roscommon. About this period the Bourkes of Mayo and O’Flahertys of Connemara were declared to possess a stronger country than any other clan in Ireland. Their territories were indeed rendered

secure by vast forests, numerous loughs, with their islands, and the river Shannon with its lakes, which encompassed them ; while the ocean, with its many isles, presented itself as a last refuge, whither they might retire if over-powered. Such was the case in 1582, when, as the annalists state, the fierce governor of Connaught devastated Tirawley, and drove out the inhabitants so determinedly, that neither castles nor even woods and forest valleys proved any shelter against him.

Coill Conchobhair [or O'Conor's wood], in the barony of Boyle, County Roscommon, which gave Mc Dermot Roe his title of " Lord of the Woods," as he was chief of the clan then inhabiting them, probably had more anciently been the fastness of O'Conor himself, when dispossessed of the plains of Connaught by the Englishry.

The *Feadha* or " Faes" of Athlone was the name of O'Naghton's country. O'Sullivan describes how the brave and patriotic chieftain, Donnell O'Sullivan-Beare, when endeavouring to effect a junction with the northern insurgent lords, concealed himself and his men in the thick woods near Ballinlough in Roscommon, which were so wide that an entire night was spent in marching through them. It is stated in the *Four Masters* that the Faes contained 30 quarters of land.

The " woods and bogs near the Corleus," named in the foregoing list, were the *Fasach-Coille*, or wilderness of wood, in the north of the County of Sligo. The woody and dangerous defile through the Curlew mountains is memorable for the defeat of Sir Conyers Clifford in 1598.

Our few notes on the *Woods and Fastnesses of Ireland, divided into Provinces*, must not close without reference to the marked historic fact, that the isolated and remote positions of the four principal fastnesses caused Erin of old to be quadriparted, and, subsequently, deprived the resistance made by the native provincial dynasties of all national character. This circumstance is somewhat illustrated by Chief Baron Finglas' list of " Dangerous Passes," anno 1529, which he gives thus, with a preliminary recommendation :

That the lord deputy be eight days in every summer cutting Passes in the Woods next adjoining to the king's subjects, which shall be thought most needfull.

The Passes names here ensueth : —

Downe, Callibre, the Newe Ditch, the Passes to Powerscourt, Glankey, Ballamore in Foderth going to Kearnes [6] Le Roge, Strenantoragh, Pollemounty, [7] Branwallehangry, Morterston, two passes in Feemore in O'Morye's country, the passes in Ferneynobegane, Killemark, Kelly, Ballenowe, Toghernefine, two passes in Reynalegh, [8] the passes going to Moill, two in Kalry, the passes of Brahon Juryne, Killkorcky, the Lagha, and Ballatra, Karryconnell and Killaghmore, three passes in Orior, one by Donegall, another by Taghert, and the third by Omere, Ballaghkine and Ballaghner."

This suggestive catalogue of ancient military passes around the Pale has been given in the hope that some reader of it, who can elucidate its obscure names, will favour us with annotations; telling us of the chivalry that was wont to charge through these defiles, and of the bravery with which they were defended, in times when many an Irish forest-road was so often strewn with helmet feathers as to be, like that where Essex was encountered by O'More, a " Pass of Plumes." For example, one of the passages mentioned as leading into Ranelagh is, probably, the glen still known as " the Deputy's pass ;" but neither legend nor local tradition tell who the Lord Deputy was that first forced this *bearna baoghail*, or " gap of danger." Again, some resident near Ravensdale, the romantic seat of Lord Clermont, might

oblige us with a description of the glen country between Carlingford and Newry, which comprises the most renowned historic passes in Ireland. Although we have refrained from much comment on the mere notes now strung together, we cannot quit our delightful theme which embraces a period extending from pagan days, when Celtic kings of Connaught used to propitiate the god of victory, by clothing with their mantles a sacred oak at Bearnasmore, the grand defile among the Donegal mountains, (probably in traditional memory of the Scythian ceremony described by Herodotus,) down to the transformation of Irish woods, during the Commonwealth, into pipe-staves and beer-barrels without making one concluding observation.

We have made antiquarian pilgrimages to some of our most famous sylvan scenes at one time to Carew's-Wood, where Henry the Fifth received his spurs of knighthood, and where the courtly and gallant Sir Peter Carew may have often stalked a stag, and recalled to mind the "three-men song" he used to sing with the jovial Harry the Eighth and the sentimental Surrey, commencing, "As I walked the wood so wild;" thence turning our steps to Fairwood, we have searched for the site of Strafford's timber-palace, constructed within his "park of parks," as he fondly styled the land he enclosed from the wilderness of Shilelagh; and, at other times, we have sought "the great wood of the Picts," near Tara, in which Robert Bruce bivouacked; and the spot in Glenaginta, once a wood in Kerry, notorious as the scene of the 16th Desmond's decapitation; in all these once celebrated woodlands, we found small trace of goodly timber, and nothing worthy to be compared to the venerable trees and rich glades of Savernake, in Wiltshire, perhaps the finest forest in Great Britain, and which, together with Tottenham Chase, composes the most magnificent breadth of sylvan scenery she possesses. This stormy isle of ours is deficient in the deep soil and the constant shelter, physical and moral, indispensable to a luxuriant growth of trees, those feathery plumes of the land, lacking which we see but baldness. But "*non omnes arbusta jurant*;" so we must now take our literary walking-stick, and our leave, offering the trite remark, that since Irish oak is long in arriving at maturity, this should be a cogent reason, with all who love to enrich and adorn their native soil, to lose no time in following the dying laird's advice to his son "Be aye planting a tree, Jock; it'll be growing while ye're sleeping!"

[1] Leinster has already appeared in the Kilkenny Archaeological Journal.

[2] Sir William Betham's Constit. of England, p. 269.

[3] West Connaught, p. 101.

[4] Printed S. P. vol III., pp 355, 377.

[5] Note to Four Masters 1894.

[6] Ferns. (?)

[7] Between Mt. Leinster and the Barrow.

[8] Ranelagh.

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