CHAPTER 2

To Ireland

It was seen in the last Chapter how the Duke of Normandy, now King William I of England, rewarded his half-brother, Harlowen de Burgh's son, Robert, already honoured as Count of Mortain in Normandy, by creating him Earl of Cornwall in the year 1068 for his participation in the Battle of Hastings. It was no perfunctory gift. This grant included seven hundred and ninety-three manors, according to Sir Bernard Burke (3). It may be of interest to note in passing that Robert's son and successor, William de Mortain, Earl of Cornwall, rebelled against Henry II (r.1154-89) and was duly executed, having his eyes put out first.

But William left a son; this story focuses not so much on this son, Adelm, but on his son's son, William Fitz Adelm. (See the Chart on page 2). To appreciate the relevance of these matters to the general drift of the Saga it should be understood that all the foregoing were of the line of de Burgo, or de Burgh, which name later evolved to Burke or Bourke.* This narrative commences with the above William Fitz Adelm de Burgh. He appears to have been one of the first of the Normans to land in Ireland under Henry II, who reigned from 1154 to 1189. In fact MacGeoghegan (5) reports that he

> went with Henry II to Ireland, who confirmed to him by charta five military fiefs in a place called Toth, where the castle of Canice (at present Castle Connel) is situated. He then gave him large estates in Connaught, where the noble family of the Burkes, his descendants, became settled.

It seems that the Norman Kings of England had some anxiety about Ireland as a potential enemy source or staging point and they set out to prevent trouble arising there by less expensive and more practical alternatives than attempting to subdue the whole island. The country was also a useful repository for younger kinsmen or troublesome English barons, who, it was hoped, would take the King's side in the event of a disturbance and so act as a safeguard. Grants of land in Ireland could be, and were, used for paying debts in Norman and later times. It was in the reign of Henry II that the only English Pope, Adrian IV, granted overlordship of Ireland to England in the same way, I suppose, as Pope Alexander VI later approved the division of the New World between Spain and Portugal (1494). The Pope's approval would, one expects, have at least encouraged Henry II to take a proprietory interest in the country. Cecil King (6) writes:

> Whether or not this grant (of the Pope's) made much difference, it was the invasion of Ireland by Strongbow that began the relationship which has continued for 800 years its tragic course between Ireland and Great Britain.

Who was Strongbow ? It must be understood that at this time the Irish population consisted of those of Celtic origin and an admixture of Norsemen, mainly Danes,

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* By 1957 Edward MacLysaght could write (4): 'Burke is much the most numerous of the Hiberno-Norman surnames. It is estimated that there are some 19 000 people of the name in Ireland today.' Interestingly, Robert O'Hara Burke of 'Burke & Wills' fame is said to have been of this de Burgh line. There is a modern family connection with William John Wills. See page 111.

who had invaded Ireland, as their brothers had inundated England a couple of hundred years or so before. It is said that all strangers settling in Ireland are soon transformed into Irishmen. This happened to the Danes and was soon to be the fate of those Normans and Englishmen who decided to live there. Who, the researcher wonders, are the real Irish ?

With the resulting conjunction of cultures and customs, plus the turbulent Norman barons, it was no surprise that the inhabitants were often at odds with one another, with the stronger 'petty' king dominating. Dermot Macmurrough was the leader of one such militant group. He was the 'Irish King of Leinster' who was at the time in conflict with the 'High King' of Ireland. Macmurrough was so bold as to approach the King of England, Henry II, in person and request his aid. With some financial assistance from Henry and an authority to recruit what men he could, he eventually persuaded the Earl of Pembroke, known as 'Strongbow', to come to Ireland as his ally. Robert Kee (7) records:

> It was at Baginbun on the south-western tip of County Wexford that a small party of Normans, who sailed across the sea from Wales, landed on 1 May 1170... They were soldiers, not of the King of England, but one of his Barons, the Earl of Pembroke, 'Strongbow', invited over by the Irish king of Leinster, Dermot Macmurrough, to help him in the fight he was having with his own High King. Within a year Strongbow had not only captured Dublin for Macmurrough, but married his daughter and become king when his father-in-law died... Norman adventurers stormed into Ireland in the wake of Strongbow.

Several points in the above call for explanation. One of the reasons for the success of the Norman invaders, in spite of their small numbers, apart from the existence of local inter-clan rivalries, was a 'new' weapon - the bow and arrow. The local Irish used pikes, spears, swords and even battle-axes, but not the strung bow. Hence the sobriquet of the Welshmen's leader.

All Ireland was, and still is, divided into four provinces (and these provinces in turn into a varying number of counties). As will be seen from the map on page 6, Leinster is the province of Ireland in which Dublin is situated and is of course the central east coast portion; today it extends from beyond Dundalk in the north to Waterford in the south and as far west as Athlone where it borders the province in which the McWilliam family interests lie, viz. Connaught (the more modern spelling being Connacht). The counties of this second province include Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare. The de Burgh and MacWilliam families were mainly involved in the counties of Roscommon, Galway and Mayo. The remaining two provinces of Ireland are Munster in the south-west and Ulster in the north-east. The 'High King' of Ireland was far from being monarch of a united country, as his title might suggest. Rather he was a leader, centred at Tara some forty kilometres north-west of Dublin, elected by the local chiefs who gave him limited authority and made tenuous submission to him. Notice how Strongbow soon became absorbed into the Irish ambience, marrying the king's daughter and then becoming king.

Notice, too, that last sentence in the quotation above, 'Norman adventurers stormed into Ireland in the wake of Strongbow.' Another writer, Terence de V.White (8), is more precise:

> In Strongbow's train came Fitzgeralds, de Courcys, de Lacys, de Burgos (Bourke)...

From the above we can be confident that William Fitz Adelm de Burgh, the son of Adelm, went to Ireland in the reign of Henry II, possibly with the King which was in 1172, or

I R E L A N D


Atlantic
Ocean
ULSTER
Larne
NORTHERN
IRELAND
Belfast
Dundalk
CONNACHT
Roscommon
Irish
Sea
Athlone
Dublin
Galway
Shannon R.
LEINSTER
Wexford
Waterford
MUNSTER
Scale:
0
50
100
Km

'in the wake of' Strongbow's expedition in 1170. There is a little disagreement among the sources here. One, for example, says that the de Burgo family came to Ireland in 1169 which suggests that it was before Strongbow. On page 3 we saw that MacGeoghegan wrote that it was Henry II who gave William 'large estates' in Connaught. Another author records that Prince John (the King's son and the later King John of England of Magna Carta fame) was the one who granted fiefs to William de Burgo 'in the country of the Shannon'. This north-south natural dividing line, consisting of the river Shannon and a string of loughs, separates the provinces of Leinster and Connaught and also marks part of the eastern border of the county of Roscommon. A 'fief' is a territory held in 'fee' in feudal terminology; ie land granted to a person in return for service in the king's cause if needed. Desiree Edwards-Rees (9), in recounting this gift as described above, to William de Burgh, goes on:

> The famous family of de Burgo or de Burgh were the ancestors of the Burkes of Connacht. They and other families, split into branches in the course of centuries and the two lines of MacWilliam in Connacht were originally de Burgos.

The position has now been reached at which the story of William Fitz Adelm de Burgh is able to be continued. William Fitz Adelm obviously prospered for he became Lord Deputy of Ireland to which high but exacting office he was no doubt appointed by the King himself (Henry II). His son was Richard de Burgh, surnamed The Great, and styled Lord of Connaught. He was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1227 under Henry III (r.1216-72). He built the castle of Galway in 1232 and that of Loughrea in the same year. He died on his passage to France in January 1243 whither he was proceeding to meet King Henry III of England at Bordeaux.

Richard was succeeded by his son, Walter and he by his son, Richard (10). Thus the posterity of William Fitz Adelm (of the 'house and lineage' of de Burgh) was firmly established in Ireland as large land owners and men prepared and able to serve the King of England in their adopted country.

It was evidently the brother of this William Fitz Adelm de Burgh (or Burke) who figures in The General Armory of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales (11). He was Walter de Burgh, 'lord of Connaught, brother of William de Burgh'. Walter married Maude, daughter of Hugh De Lacie, Earl of Ulster. When the Earl died in 1241 he had no son to succeed him. As a consequence the title devolved upon his daughter's husband, such was the law of succession at that time. Thus Walter became Earl of Ulster jure uxoris, as the lawyers put it, meaning 'by the right of the wife'.

It was the same Richard, son of Walter, second Earl of Ulster, to whom reference is made in one of the sources. Of him it says that in 1269 Richard ... was Viceroy (Proregem) or Lord Deputy of Ireland. His story will be taken further in the next Chapter.

References (3) Burke, Sir Bernard, A Genealogical History of the Dormant, Abeyant, & Extinct Peerages of the British Empire. Page 88.
(4) MacLysaght, Edward, Irish Families, 1957. Page 66.
(5) MacGeoghegan, Abbe James. (See (2), page 3). Page 263.
(6) King, Cecil, On Ireland, Jonathan Cape, London, 1973. Page 85.
(7) Kee, Robert, Ireland, A History, Weidenfeld & Nicholson London, 1980. Page 29.
(8) White, Terence de Vere, The Anglo-Irish, Page 270.
(9) Edwards-Rees, Desiree, Ireland's Story, Constable Young Books Ltd,London, 1967. Page 47.
(10) Burke, Sir Bernard. See (3). Page 161.
(11) Burke, Sir Bernard, Ulster King of Arms. The General Armory of E.,I.,S., & W. A Registry of Armorial Bearings from the earliest to the present times. Harrison, London 1884. Page 147.