

CHAPTER 5

The Turmoils and The Troubles

Tussles of conscience and conflicts of loyalty continued for the Irish inhabitants until near the end of the seventeenth century. They were made worse by the attempts of the English to convert the people and to treat Ireland as a colony. The efforts of the Crown to change religious (and thus the national) allegiance of the masses were manifold. One ploy was to plant, as already described, loyal Protestant English, and Scots too, in all parts of the country. A great effort was made to establish the latter, the Scots, in Ulster, in the north-eastern counties, after the 'flight of the Earls' (1607). These were the Earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnell who lost their nerve and abandoned the struggle. The renewed waves of this land plantation here and elsewhere, produced fury and resentment as well as actual physical suffering among those who had to make way. The theory was, of course, to dilute the menace of Catholicism in Ireland by means of good healthy English Protestant settlement. King James I gave the key order, 'Plant Ireland with Puritans and then secure it.' Planting served another purpose. Shortage of money in Tudor and Stuart times meant that the soldiers' pay was usually in arrears. Land grants provided a way of discharging this debt, ie grants of land belonging to the Irish. Massacres were as nothing, though there were those too, compared with the evil caused by plantations.

But there was plenty more in the way of evil visited upon the people of luckless Ireland. The laws of inheritance were tampered with in such a way that Catholics could only inherit property from a deceased owner if it was equally shared by all the family, unless one turned Protestant in which case he received the lot !

Then there was 'souping': this was the gift of soup and other food to the starving peasantry on the condition that the recipients turned to Protestantism ! This repulsive practice obtained for many years. There was more, of course. The law at the beginning of the eighteenth century decreed that a Roman Catholic could not hold any office of state, nor stand for Parliament, nor buy land. He could not lease land for more than thirty-one years and so on. In 1641 the 'Old English' and the Irish Catholics united to recover their lost lands. There was a wide-spread rebellion and much loss of life.

It must be said to the credit of the fourth Earl of Clanricarde that the situation was a little better in Connacht, at least in his time. Dudley Edwards (46) records, in the reign of James I,

In the west, Richard Burke, fourth Earl of Clanricarde, became sufficiently anglicised to exercise a considerable influence over Connacht, which to some extent kept in check the exactions of the new English official.

It seems, however, that the MacWilliams did not escape the trauma of transplantation altogether. O'Hart (47) notes:-

Among persons transplanted in Ireland, 1653-4, the following occur in "Transplanters' Certificates, City and County of Limerick: McWilliam (Christian names) Connor, Daniel, Donnagh, Edmund,..."

Maybe these transplanters were only remotely connected with the de Burghs of Connacht, just as they were separated by distance and fortune.

It is interesting to note in John O'Hart's (48) Irish Pedigrees:-

The following have been the noble families in Galway and Roscommon since the reign of King James I (1603-25): In Galway De Burg, or Burke, earls and marquise of Clanrichard; Bourke, viscounts of Galway, and Barons of Britas.

This would be the Richard Burke, or De Burgh, fourth Earl of Clanricarde, who in the peerage of Ireland, is shown as having been created a peer in England on 3 April 1624. It is reassuring to note that this same peer encouraged the literary arts, for it is recorded that there was a poet attached to the household of MacWilliam of Clanricarde during the reign of James I. His name is given by E. MacLysaght (49) as Brian MacOwen O'Donnellan who flourished round about 1610.

Next is the interesting story of Ulick Bourke, 'otherwise de Burgh', Earl of Clanricarde. He succeeded his brother, Richard, to the earldom when the latter died on 12 November 1635. He was unequivocally a Roman Catholic, but when the great rebellion by the dispossessed, mainly Roman Catholics and ancient Irish, and their sympathisers began in 1641 he sided with the English government of Charles I. One is able to understand that, as a great landholder and having personally resisted fairly effectively the transplantations in his own Province, his inclinations, not to say self interest, lay with the establishment. His efforts on behalf of the government were evidently noted with gratitude, for he was raised to the Marquessate in 1646. His convictions were, however, more than skin deep, for he opposed Oliver Cromwell at the head of a considerable force. His resistance to him was to no avail. His estate was sequestrated by the Parliamentary government and it is astonishing to note that the value of its income was officially put at £29 000 a year. Many who took a part in opposing Cromwell in Ireland were later granted a pardon under the Act of 12 August 1652. It is indicative of the effectiveness of Ulick Burke's resistance to Cromwell that he was selected as one of the few to be excluded from the general pardon.

Leaving behind him the massive anguish caused by Cromwell the Earl departed from Ireland for Kent and in July 1657 the Marquessate became extinct, though the earldom of Clanricarde continued. The records further show that Ulick Burke was succeeded in the Earldom by Richard in 1657, by William in 1666 and another Richard in 1687. It is specially informative to learn that this Richard Bourke, Earl of Clanricarde, was a Privy Councillor to James II and that after the King's flight from England in 1689, he was outlawed on 11 May 1691 according to the records. He lived on till 1702 and died on 17 October of that year.

The succession went on, however. The next Earl (1704?) was John Bourke who was born in 1642. He fought on behalf of James II and was taken prisoner at the Battle of Aughrim (12 July 1691). He was accused and arraigned of high treason. Notwithstanding the evidence he was by Act of Parliament (1 Anne, 1702) acquitted of all treasons and attainders and restored 'in blood and estate'. He had by this time conformed to the Established Church and one supposes that this had much to do with his lenient treatment. Who can blame him? After all he had everything to gain, wealth and life itself, and nothing to lose - except, perhaps, his self-esteem and his reputation as a man of principle.

References (46) Edwards, R. Dudley, Page 108. See (13), page 13.

(47) O'Hart, John. Page 328. See (14), page 13.

(48) O'Hart, John. Page 855. See (39), page 20.

(49) MacLysaght, Edward. Page 85. See (4), page 7.