

THE O'DWYERS  
OF KILNAMANAGH

THE HISTORY OF AN IRISH SEPT

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WITH MAP

LONDON

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## CHAPTER I

EARLY HISTORY DOWN TO THE  
BATTLE OF CLONTARF, A.D. 1014

NEARLY all the Irish tribes or septs of any importance claim direct descent from two legendary ancestors, Heremon and Heber, sons of Milesius, King of Spain, who about 1300 B.C. led the invasion which overcame the previous conquerors, and established the Milesian race as the rulers of Ireland. The distribution of the island among the various Milesian tribes, their wars with one another and later with the Danes, and the history of the country up to the Anglo-Norman invasion, are described in picturesque detail by the Irish historian, Dr. Geoffrey Keating, D.D., whose monumental work was written in Gaelic between 1632 and 1640 and published in English in 1723. It contains a series of genealogical tables tracing the descent of the 110 main tribes and septs from the early Milesians down to about A.D. 1640, with engravings of their coats of arms. A similar history or rather historical summary of the main events from the earliest days down to the end of Elizabeth's reign was compiled about A.D. 1632-6 by the Four Masters, entitled, *The Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland*. The chief author, Michael O'Clery, at the same time compiled the invaluable *Irish Genealogies* which form the basis of Dr. Keating's and O'Hart's *Irish Pedigrees*, as well as of MacFirbis's *Irish Genealogies*, published in Gaelic in 1666.

Whatever may be thought of the attempts of those learned men to carry the pedigrees back to the ages before Christ, there can be no doubt that under the tribal organization, a faithful genealogical record showing the descent of each member from the original founder or

founders of the clan or sept was scrupulously maintained by the hereditary genealogists up to about A.D. 1600. For only thus could the Chief determine the portion of the common tribal land to be allotted to each head of a family and those dependent on him. O'Clery's genealogies are admittedly based on these collections; hence their great value. It may be noted that wherever the tenure of land is founded on the tribal system, similar tables of descent are maintained by the tribal genealogist (known in Northern India as the "Mirási" or "he who regulates inheritance of land"); and since the British occupied the Punjab and N.W. Frontier about the middle of the last century, these tables of descent from the common ancestor are, at the wish of the native landowners, usually accepted as the measure of right in the village or tribal lands.

In Elizabeth's reign the English authorities similarly came to recognize the great potential value of the Irish genealogies, and their efforts to collect and classify them by Sir George Carew (President of Munster and later Earl of Totnes) and others are embodied in the *Book of Pedigrees*. This book is headed:

"In this book is contained the descent of the meer Irish families with the several monarchs of them which ruled in that land, whose government continued until that Henry II of England conquered and suppressed them. The same was formed by sundry collections of the Earl of Thomond (O'Brien) and was corrected by divers of the natives according to the true orthography of the Irish writing. This book with the tables (pedigrees) before annexed was made in the year of Christ 1617 by commandment of——"

In that list there are about 100 names, that of "O'Dwir of Tipperara" appearing as stem No. 110.

In this way an enormous mass of genealogical material—which Dr. Keating proudly asserts, no other nation could equal—has been accumulated. This would have been invaluable had the tribal organization been maintained, but with its disappearance, it becomes only of historical interest.

The pedigree of "Dwyer (O'Dwyer) of Leinster and Munster Lords of Kilnamanagh Co. Tipperary" will be found at pp. 430-1 of O'Hart.

*Arms* : Argent, a lion rampant, gules between three ermine spots.

*Crest* : A hand, couped at the wrist and erect, grasping a sword all proper.

*Motto* : Virtus sola nobilitas."

O'Hart, following Keating, writes :

"Cairbre Clutheachair, the youngest son of Cucorb, King of Leinster, who is no. 85 in the O'Connor Faly pedigree, was the ancestor of O'Dwyer of Munster and Leinster. This Cairbre went into Munster where his grandfather, Conaire Mor the 97th Monarch of Ireland (B.C. 109 to B.C. 89), gave him the territory after him called Dal Cairbre—the lands of Carberry."

According to O'Hart's pedigree, the sixteenth in descent from Cairbre was "Dubhiur" (black skirt) whose descendants were known as "O'Dubhiere, anglicized into O'Dwyer, Dwyer and Duier"; and four generations later (seventh century) "Padraic O'Dwyer" is shown as Lord of Kilnamanagh (the Cell of the Monks)<sup>1</sup> in Co. Tipperary.

O'Hart further notes :

"Of the Leinster Milesians<sup>2</sup> of the race of Heremon were some chiefs and clans of note in Munster, as O'Felan, prince of Decies in Waterford, and O'Bri, Chief in Waterford. O'Dwyer and O'Ryan, Chiefs in Tipperary and O'Gorman, Chief in Clare."

Dr. Keating, in his Appendix 12, traces the O'Dwyer pedigree forty-seven generations back from Philip O'Dwyer (the Chief who died in 1593 as noted by the

<sup>1</sup> The ruins of this "Cell (little Church) of the Monks," 60' × 21', which gave its name to the Territory, are still visible close to the well-preserved O'Dwyer Castle of Ballysheedy in Donohill.

<sup>2</sup> One branch remained in Leinster in the Wicklow Hills and often joined the O'Tooles in attacking Dublin (see Ch. XIX).

Four Masters) to Breasal Breac, where it merges in that of "Fitzpatricks, Kings of Ossory, and also at times Kings of Ireland"; then eighteen generations further back to the legendary Ugain Mor, King of Ireland, where it joins up with the O'Neills of Ulster, and twenty generations more to connect Ugain Mor with Heremon the son of Milesius.

Keating confirms O'Hart and O'Clery in stating :

"From Cairbre the son of Cuchorb, King of Leinster, who lived four generations before Cathaoir Mor, were descended the families of O'Dwyer, in the Irish O'Duibidhir, who were Kings of Cairbre, Coillnamanagh, etc."

He goes on to quote an ancient poem, which, translated, runs :

"Lughaid and Conla, princes of renown,  
Descended from the valiant Breasal Breac ;  
The men of Ossory (Fitzpatricks) were derived from Conla,  
And from Lughaid, eldest of the two, began  
The noble family of the O'Dwyers."

Mahon in the Topographical appendix to Keating's History gives a translation of O'Heerin's reference to the Sept :

"Ui Amrit, the land of hospitality,  
Is inherited by the tribe of O'Dwyers ;  
Above all others they own the country,  
They are the pillars of each battle-field."

After an interesting reference to the shifting of various Milesian septs from their earlier settlements, Keating writes :

"The same changes and divisions happened likewise in other tribes of the Milesians (who were) separated from the possessions that were first assigned to them ; particularly in the family of the O'Dwyers (or, as some write them, O'Dwirs), in Irish called O'Duibidhir, descended from Cairbre the son of Conchorb [Cucorb in O'Hart] who lived four generations before Cathoire Mor monarch of Ireland of the line of Heremon.

"The same alterations appear likewise in the tribe of O'Ryans, who were of the same family and [also] removed from the province of Leinster to Munster where their posterity remain to this day."

Thus from the seventh century till the Cromwellian Conquest, a thousand years later, we find the Sept settled in the present Barony of Kilnamanagh, an area or "territory" of about 100 square miles lying in the centre of Tipperary between Cashel and Emly on the south, Thurles and Killaloe on the north. On the south it is a fertile and well-wooded tract, bordering on the "Golden Vein," with level plains round Dundrum, Killinure and Clonyhorpe—the headquarters of the tribal leaders in the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries—with their fortified castles, which were stormed by Cromwell in March, 1650, and rising into low hills round Cappawhite and Doon on the north and west. The neighbouring tribes were on the south and east the O'Briens, Kings of Cashel and Munster; on the north the O'Meaghers of Ikerrin, the O'Carrolls of Ely (including parts of the present King's County), a powerful clan which played a big part in Irish history; on the north-west the O'Kennedys of Upper and Lower Ormond, stretching to the Shannon; and on the west the O'Ryans (also known as O'Mulryans) and a branch of the O'Briens (also known as Mac-i-Briens) extending west into Limerick. The O'Dwyers were of minor importance as compared with the O'Briens and O'Carrolls and at times paid the O'Briens a nominal allegiance. In pre-British days the O'Briens of Thomond (North Munster) dominated most of Munster and at the time of Brian Boru's defeat of the Danes at Clontarf were Kings of Ireland: the Munster clans revolved in their orbit, and some played a part in O'Brien's formal inauguration. O'Donovan has an interesting account (in Latin and not easy to interpret) of these ceremonies.

"In Magh Adhor (Clare) O'Briano dignitas confere; batur à Mac-Conmara (Macnamara); O'Duibidhir (O'Dwyer) de Coolnamanagh et O'Gorman (Clare) erant O'Briano á Militiæ præfectura."

Apparently the Chiefs of the O'Dwyers and O'Gormans succeeded by virtue of their military rank under O'Brien.

The Irish tribal organization is well described in the attached quotation from Macnamara (*History of an Irish Sept*) :

“The members of the tribe and of its sub-divisions into Septs and families, bound together by congenital qualities, formed a complete society, social and political; the tribe was the proprietor of everything, including the land within its own territory: individuals as such had no property: even Kings and Chiefs held the greater part of their lands by virtue of their office and not as individuals. . . . A chief was elected to his office by the Freemen of his tribe or of his Sept as the case might be and was selected as ‘the next in blood that was eldest and worthiest to the deceased Chief.’ Under such a system the tribe or sept might have been left in the midst of a battle or other emergency without a proper leader. To obviate this difficulty when the Chief was chosen, they elected a substitute Chief or Tanist as he was called.

“The eldest son of a Chief was often elected as Tanist to his father, but he must be the most capable member of his family. No other claim was allowed.

“On the death of one of the Sept the Chief made a reparation of the land belonging to the family per stirpes and not per capita—Gavelkind.

“By the redistribution of the land and its allotment under the system of Gavelkind, the descendants of the original head of a family claiming land were kept within due limits.”

It is not easy to follow the fortunes of the Irish septs till Brian Boru as King of Ireland issued an edict that all the members of each clan or sept should adopt as surnames the name of the Chief, O'Brien, O'Connor, O'Dwyer, etc. Thenceforward identification becomes possible: and many of the leading tribes are mentioned by name in the following vivid account of the Battle of Clontarf by an early Irish chronicler which also throws light on the Ireland of the eleventh century.

saying to the brave Munster men, those most war-like heroes,  
the posterity of Owen the Great, how they first plundered