

## THE STORY OF IRELAND

(By A. M. SULLIVAN.)

### XVII.—THE TREASON OF DIARMID McMURROGH.

About the year 1152, in the course of the interminable civil war desolating Ireland, a feud of peculiar bitterness arose between Tiernan O'Ruarc, prince of Brefni, and Diarmid McMurrough, prince of Leinster. While one of the Ard-Righana favorable to the latter was for the moment uppermost, O'Ruarc had been dispossessed of his territory, its lordship being handed over to McMurrough. To this was added a wrong still more dire. Devorgilla, the wife of O'Ruarc, eloped with McMurrough, already her husband's most bitter rival and foe! Her father and her husband both appealed to Torlogh O'Connor for justice upon the guilty prince of Leinster. O'Connor, although McMurrough had been one of his supporters, at once acceded to this request. McMurrough soon found his territory surrounded, and Devorgilla was restored to her husband. She did not, however, return to domestic life. Recent researches amongst the ancient *Manuscript Materials for Irish History*, by O'Curry and O'Donovan, throw much light upon this episode, and considerably alter the long prevailing popular impressions in reference thereto. Whatever the measure of Devorgilla's fault in eloping with McMurrough—and the researches alluded to bring to light many circumstances invoking for her more of commiseration than of angry scorn—her whole life subsequently to this sad event, and she lived for forty years afterwards, was one prolonged act of contrition and of penitential reparation for the scandal she had given. As I have already said, she did not return to the home she had abandoned. She entered a religious retreat; and thenceforth, while living a life of practical piety, penance, and mortification, devoted the immense dower which she possessed in her own right to works of charity, relieving the poor, building hospitals, asylums, convents, and churches.

Thirteen years after this event, Roderick O'Connor, son and successor of the king who had forced McMurrough to yield up the unhappy Devorgilla, claimed the throne of the kingdom. Roderick was a devoted friend of O'Ruarc, and entertained no very warm feelings toward McMurrough. The king claimant marched on his "circuit," claiming "hostages" from the local princes as recognition of sovereignty. McMurrough, who hated Roderick with intense violence, burned his city of Ferns, and retired to his Wicklow fastnesses, rather than yield allegiance to him. Roderick could not just then delay on his circuit to follow him up, but passed on southward, took up his hostages there, and then returned to settle accounts with McMurrough. But by this time O'Ruarc, apparently only too glad to have such a pretext and opportunity for a stroke at his mortal foe, had assembled a powerful army and marched upon McMurrough from the north, while Roderick approached him from the south. Diarmid, thus surrounded, and deserted by most of his own people, outwitted and overmatched on all sides, saw that he was a ruined man. He abandoned the few followers yet remaining to him, fled to the nearest seaport, and, with a heart bursting with the most deadly passions, sailed for England (A.D. 1168), vowing vengeance, black, bitter, and terrible, on all that he left behind!

"A solemn sentence of banishment was publicly pronounced against him by the assembled princes, and Morrogh, his cousin—commonly called 'Morrogh na Gael,' (or 'of the Irish'), to distinguish him from 'Morrogh na Gall' (or 'of the Foreigners')—was inaugurated in his stead."—McGee.

Straightway he sought out the English king, who was just then in Aquitaine quelling a revolt of the nobles in that portion of his possessions. McMurrough laid before Henry a most piteous recital of his wrongs and grievances, appealed to him for justice and for

aid, inviting him to enter Ireland, which he was sure most easily to reduce to his sway, and finally offering to become his most submissive vassal if his majesty would but aid him in recovering the possessions from which he had been expelled. "Henry," as one of our historians justly remarks, "must have been forcibly struck by such an invitation to carry out a project which he had long entertained, and for which he had been making grave preparations long before." He was too busy himself, however, just then to enter upon the project; but he gave McMurrough a royal letter or proclamation authorising such of his subjects as might so desire to aid the views of the Irish fugitive. Diarmid hurried back to England, and had all publicity given to this proclamation in his favor; but though he made the most alluring offers of reward and booty, he was a long time before he found anyone to espouse his cause. At length Robert Fitzstephen, a Norman relative of the prince of North Wales, just then held in prison by his Cambrian kinsman, was released or brought out of prison by McMurrough, on condition of undertaking his service. Through Fitzstephen there came into the enterprise several other knights, Maurice Fitzgerald, Meyler Fitzhenry, and others—all of them men of supreme daring, but of needy circumstances. Eventually there joined one who was destined to take command of them all, Richard de Clare, earl of Pembroke, commonly called "Strongbow": a man of ruined fortune, needy, greedy, unscrupulous, and ready for any desperate adventure, possessing unquestionable military skill and reckless daring, and having a tolerably strong following of like adventurous spirits amongst the knights of the Welsh marches—in fine, just the man for Diarmid's purpose. The terms were soon settled. Strongbow and his companions undertook to raise a force of adventurers, proceed to Ireland with McMurrough, and reinstate him in his principality. McMurrough was to bestow on Strongbow (then a widower between fifty and sixty years of age) his daughter Eva in marriage, with succession to the throne of Leinster. Large grants of land also were to be distributed amongst the adventurers.

Now, Diarmid knew that "succession to the throne" was not a matter which any king in Ireland, whether provincial or national, at any time could bestow; the monarchy being elective out of the members of the reigning family. Even if he was himself at the time in full legal possession of "the throne of Leinster," he could not promise, secure, or bequeath it, as of right, even to his own son.

In the next place, Diarmid knew that his offers of "grants of land" struck directly and utterly at the existing land system, the basis of all society in Ireland. For, according to the Irish Constitution and laws for a thousand years, the fee-simple or *ownership* of the soil was vested in the sept, tribe, or clan; its *use or occupancy* (by the individual members of the sept or others) being only regulated on behalf of and in the interest of the whole sept, by the elected king for the time being. "Tribe land" could not be alienated unless by the king, with the sanction of the sept. The users and occupiers were, so to speak, a co-operative society of agriculturists, who, *as a body* or a community, owned the soil they tilled, while individually renting it from that body or community under its administrative official—the king.

While Strongbow and his confederates were completing their arrangements in Chester, McMurrough crossed over to his native Wexford privately to prepare the way there for their reception. It would seem that no whisper had reached Ireland of his movements, designs, proclamations, and preparations on the other side of the Channel. The wolf assumed the sheep's clothing. McMurrough feigned great humility and contrition, and pretended to aspire only to the recovery, by grace and favor, of his immediate patrimony of Hy-Kinsella. Amongst his own immediate clansmen, no doubt, he found a friendly meeting and a ready following, and, more generally, a feeling somewhat of commiseration for one deemed to be now so fallen, so helpless, so humiliated. This secured him from very close

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