

RINUCCINI IN SLIABH LUACHRA

The following is an extract from the *Commentarius Rinuccinianus* translated from Latin. The *Commentarius*, 1645-1649, was compiled by Fr Barnabas O'Ferrall and Fr Daniel O'Connell in the 17th century and edited from the Manuscript by Fr Joaness Kavanagh [Fr. Stanislaus], in 6 vols, for the Irish MSS Commission in 1932-49. It is a collection of documents on the Nuncio's mission to Ireland but they haven't yet been translated and published in English. The accounts rely quite a lot on Rinuccini's views on the area as described by his Secretary, Dionysius Massari. This extract by one of the priest authors takes up the story of his visit after landing at Kenmare on 21 October 1645. The Nuncio went to Macroom, via St. Gobnait's shrine in Ballyvourney. He spent a week in Macroom and was then persuaded by Boetius MacEgan, the future Bishop of Ross, to go to Dromsicane the seat of a junior branch of the McCarthys and to Clonmeen, the home of Donough O'Callaghan. He would have had to go via Millstreet for this part of his journey. He then went on to Kilmallock and Limerick on the way to the Confederation at Kilkenny.

"Thus far I have described the journey of the Nuncio from Rome to Ireland. It now remains to tell what happened after he landed. Related to this are the things written by the Most Illustrious Massari in his letter from Ireland to Florence, a small part of which I have inserted above. He followed it with one in Italian. I shall append mention of the relevant matters in Latin, having omitted the sections dealing with the pirate's attack, since I have already given these facts from the Nuncio's records.

Following the customary practice of the ancient Irish, whereby title and estate pass always and only through the male line, the whole area of Glanarought at the time was Mac Carthaigh Mac Fionnain territory. Their sphere of influence extended to that fort and harbour on the coast, called Kenmare by the locals. It was here that the Nuncio landed. There was, however, at that time a Mac Fionnain who was also very famous on account of his peculiar virtues. He was Donnchadha Mac Carthaigh Mac Fionnain of the royal and most ancient Clann Mhic Carthaigh, a family with very numerous and very flourishing branches spread broadly throughout that region. Since remote antiquity this family had clients, so that related bloodlines of less noble but yet wealthy and powerful families—namely both the Ua Suileabhain Mor and the Ua Suileabhain Beara, as well as the Ua Ceallachain, the Ua Caoimh, and many other families partly local and partly neighbouring—were all remarkably filled with a desire to see the Nuncio, and desired to grant him every honour, upon hearing he had arrived. Mac Carthaigh Mac Fionnain, and his most famous and noble wife Catriona Xic Carthaigh, daughter of Cormac "the Blind", of the dynasty of Muskerry, received with utter kindness as many of these relatives as had suddenly come to Ardtully, as well as the Nuncio and his retinue, along with all those Irishmen who had arrived from abroad.

Meanwhile, the Nuncio oversaw the installation of no small part of the military equipment that he had brought with him into Mac Carthaigh Mac Fionnain's fortress at Ardtully. But he ordered other equipment to be transported by sea to Waterford. When he had rested there for two days with a mind beset by so many great anxieties and a body wearied by labours, and when from that same place he had written the three letters to Rome which are printed (f.887v) above, he really wanted to depart; but he was hindered from doing so by problems which were neither small nor few in number. This was because Ardtully was located near the base of Mount Mangerton, in a charming area towards Limerick, which obstructs the road that had to be taken through the rest of County Kerry, through the mountains of County Cork, and its rough and uneven roads, and that marshy tract of country which in Irish is called Sliabhluachra, a location exceedingly blessed, which does not suffer the feminine excess and luxuriousness of carriages or the intrusive racket of horses and buggies of the sort from which in Paris one does not receive any respite by night or day, for the peace and quiet of one's soul before God.

Besides this the Nuncio's dry skin and itching were growing worse all over his body and, accordingly, the itching grew worse day by day as he scratched; also at this point he was limping, as he was unaccustomed to travelling on foot. Furthermore, he was emaciated by a pre-existing illness from which he had not yet well recovered. Thus he was not easily able to travel on the aforesaid road by horse or on foot. Therefore the aforesaid Lord Massari followed what the enthusiasm of the people had suggested. Concerning Ardtully he said: 'The Most Illustrious Lord rested there for two days, after which he reached Macroom, the seat of Lord Viscount Muskerry, who is the first prince in the kingdom, by means of the convenience of a litter constructed from boards, osiers, and tarpaulins as best as we are able to tell. Moreover, the son of the aforesaid ruler of that place, who was accompanied by fifty armed knights, walked three miles to meet his Most Illustrious Lordship, who had been transported to that place, and honourably received him. When we were already near to the castle we came upon a formation of infantry and (next to them), stationed in

the order of a solemn supplication, were all the Churchmen both secular and regular, by whom the Most Illustrious Lord was received with a cross. He sat on his horse until he was a mile distant. He was thereupon conducted into a church, into which a huge number of people had poured. All of these people prostrated themselves and gave applause and signs of joy in order to get a blessing from His Most Illustrious Lordship. From the church His Most Illustrious Lordship was moved to the palace. At the gate of the palace he was received by the Lady Viscountess, since her husband was absent, being then in camp or at any rate engaged in peace-talks as Commissar in Dublin. She, however, with her family and all her children knelt at his feet and kissed His Most Illustrious Lordship's clothing, and so obtained his blessing (as she had requested) with the greatest devotion."

(Commentarius Rinuccinianus Vol. II, part 1.)

A priest member of Rinuccini's party, probably his confessor Fr. Arcamoni, wrote another account of his visit and there is a letter of his to Rinuccini's brother in Florence (1645) and because of the date these comments are likely to be based on what he saw and experienced in the Cork/Kerry area described above. He wrote:

"The courtesy of the poor people among whom my Lord the Nuncio took up his quarters was unexampled. A fat bullock, two sheep, and a porker, were instantly slaughtered, and an immense supply of beer, butter, and milk, was brought to him; and even we, who were still on board, experienced the kindness of the poor fishermen, who sent us presents of excellent fish and oysters of the most prodigious size in the utmost abundance.

While we were crossing along in the frigate, in the track of the Nuncio, I observed a harbour about half-a-mile in length, and a pistol-shot in breadth, so very beautiful, that curiosity led me to take the boat and go onshore, for the purpose of examining the wonders of the place. In a short time I was surrounded by an immense multitude of men, women, and boys, who had come running down from different places in the mountains to see me; and some of them happening to observe the crucifix which I wore on my breast, they all made a circle around me, and kissed it one after another.

After this, they made signs of the greatest affection and friendship to me, and conducted me, almost perforce, to one of the nearest huts, where I was seated on a cushion stiffer with feathers; and the mistress of the house, a venerable lady, sat down beside me along with her daughters, and offered to kiss me, according to the usage of the country; and had I not explained by signs, that it would not be becoming in one who bore Christ crucified on his breast, and who accompanied the Nuncio as priest, I think they would have been offended. The lady then brought me a wooden vessel, a great draught of most delicious milk, expressing the utmost anxiety that I should drink it. As it was of a most excellent flavour, I drank copiously of it, and was quite revived by the draught. They all endeavoured to stand as close as possible, and those who were able to touch me, considered themselves happy; so that it was with difficulty I could disengage from them, in order to return to the frigate; on the contrary they wished to escort me to the very water edge, and some of the young men wished to accompany me altogether. What is most remarkable, is, that in these wild and mountainous places, and among a poor people who are reduced to absolute misery, by the devastations of the heretic enemy, I found, notwithstanding, the noble influence of our holy Catholic faith, for there was not one man, woman, or child, however small, who could not repeat the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Creed, and the commandments of the Holy Church."

"The country, through which we have passed, though mountainous, is agreeable; and being entirely pasture-land, is most abundantly stocked with cattle of every kind. Occasionally one meets a long tract of valley, interspersed with woods and groves; which, as they are neither high nor densely planted, partake more of the agreeable than the gloomy. For seventy miles the country which we met was almost all of this character; but having once crossed the mountains, we entered upon an immense plain, occasionally diversified with hills and valleys, highly cultivated, and enriched with an infinite number of cattle, especially oxen and sheep; from the latter of which is obtained the very finest of what is called English wool..

The men are fine-looking and of incredible strength, swift runners, and ready to bear every kind of hardship with cheerfulness. They are all trained in arms, especially now that they are at war. Those who apply themselves to letters are very learned; and you meet persons of every profession and science among them.

The women are distinguished by their grace and beauty, and they are as modest as they are lovely. Their manners are marked by their extreme simplicity, and they mix freely in conversation on all occasions without suspicion or jealousy. Their dress differs from ours, and is somewhat like the French. They also wear cloaks reaching

to their heels and tufted locks of hair, and they go without any head-dress, content with linen bands bound up in the Greek fashion, which display their natural beauty to much advantage. Their families are very large. Some have as many as thirty children; all living; not a few have fifteen or twenty, and all these children are handsome, tall and strong, the majority being fair-haired, white-skinned and red-complexioned.

They give most abundant entertainments both of flesh and fish for they have both in great abundance. They are constantly pledging healths, the usual drinks being Spanish wines, French claret, most delicious beer and most excellent milk. Butter is used abundantly on all occasions with all kinds of food and there is no species of provisions which is not found in great abundance. As yet, we have all accommodated ourselves to the usages of the country. (A line is here effaced).

There is also plenty of fruit - apples, pears, plums and artichokes. All eatables are cheap. A fat ox costs sixteen shillings (a pistole), a sheep fifteen pence (thirty bajocchi), a pair of capons, or fowls, five pence (a paul); eggs a farthing each, and other things in proportion. A good-sized fish costs a penny (soldo), and they don't worry about selling game. They kill birds almost with sticks and especially thrushes, blackbirds, and chaffinches. Both salt and fresh water fish are cheap, abundant, and of excellent flavour and for three pauls we bought one hundred and fifty pounds of excellent fish; as pike, salmon, herring, trout, &c all of excellent quality. We got a thousand pilchards and oysters for twenty -five bajocchi."

The horses are numerous, strong, well built, and swift. For five pounds (twenty crowns) you can buy a nag which in Italy could not be got for a hundred gold pieces."

(From 'The Dublin Review,' March 1845)

This is a startlingly positive description of the people which contrasts sharply with the image usually painted by most travellers from Britain who published accounts of their visits.

What is noticeably absent from the vast variety of food described is the potato. It refutes the idea that the Irish were in some way addicted and dependent on it. The society became dependent on it when the structures of the society described above were systematically destroyed during the following centuries.

The Nuncio's Italian retinue clearly enjoyed themselves immensely and found everybody and everything very much to their liking - apart from the political development of the Confederation.

Jack Lane