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The life of  
Saint Grellan,  
patron of the  
O'Kellys and  
of the tribes ...

John O'Hanlon

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THE LIFE  
OF  
SAINT GRELLAN,

PATRON OF THE O'KELLYS,

AND OF THE

TRIBES OF HY-MAINE.

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BY THE

REV. JOHN O'HANLON, M.R.I.A.

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## Dedication.

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TO THE RECOGNISED LIVING REPRESENTATIVE

OF HIS

DISTINGUISHED FAMILY AND NAME,

**CORNELIUS J. O'KELLY,**

*Count of the Holy Roman Empire,*

**GALLAGH CASTLE, COUNTY OF GALWAY,**

**The Present Memoir**

OF HIS PATRON SAINT

**IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED**

**BY THE AUTHOR.**



## LIFE OF ST. GRELLAN.

---

BESIDES the universal reverence and love, with which Ireland regards the memory of her great Apostle, St. Patrick, most of our provincial districts and their families of distinction have patron saints, for whom a special veneration is entertained. Among the latter, St. Grellan's name is connected with his favoured locality. The extensive territory of Hy-Many is fairly defined,<sup>1</sup> by describing the northern line as running from Ballymoe, county of Galway, to Lanesborough, at the head of Lough Ree, on the River Shannon, and in the county of Roscommon. It extended nearly due east and west, taking in all the southern part of this last-named county. The eastern boundary ran along the River Shannon's course, from Lanesborough to Scariff, in Clare county, and west of Lough Derg. Thence, the southern and western boundaries proceeded by Feacle, on Lough Graney, county of Clare, and passed some distance west of Loughrea to Athenry; thence, they continued through Killererin parish, near Tuam, and on to Ballymoe. All of these last-mentioned localities are situated within the

<sup>1</sup> See "The Topographical Poems of John O'Dubhagain and Giolla na Naomh O'Huidhrin," edited by John O'Donovan, LL.D., M.R.I.A. In this work may be found O'Dubhagain's poetical description of this territory, in the original Irish, with the editor's translation, at pp. 68 to 73, with the explanatory notes, 338 to 362, pp. xliv. to xlii.

county of Galway.<sup>1</sup> The earliest noted aboriginal inhabitants of this great extent of country were the Firbolgs, who were also a race of people tributary to the Kings of Connaught.<sup>2</sup> These are thought to have been the successors of Partholan and his followers, who are regarded as being the earliest colonists of Ireland;<sup>3</sup> but all of whom perished in a great plague that came into the island.<sup>4</sup> Before this occurred, however, their rule had been disturbed by the Fomorians, thought to have been pirates from Africa. The northern as well as eastern nations most generally commenced their historic pedigree with a deity; or at least, they ascribe to their first founders heroic qualities or virtues, closely bordering on the possession of supernatural powers. So have we a variety of bardic stories, giving very circumstantial accounts, regarding the migrations of our ancient colonists; but, we have good reasons for supposing those narratives are largely mythological in character. Legends are framed for the acts of our earlier

<sup>1</sup> According to an accurate map of this district, prefixed to the "Tribes and Customs of Hy-Many," by Mr. O'Donovan, the foregoing lines and places designated the former boundaries of that territory. The Irish tract in question was edited by him, from a copy in the Book of Lecan, fol. 90 to 92. An English translation, with notes, he has also given.

<sup>2</sup> It was supposed, by John O'Donovan, that the Book of Hy-Many was in the possession of a private collector in England, A.D. 1843, and that it was a distinct compilation from what had been published.

<sup>3</sup> According to the O'Clerys, following the chronology of the Septuagint, Partholan arrived, A.M. 2520 years. Sir Dr. O'Donovan's "Annals of the Four Masters," vol. i. pp. 4, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Jeffrey Keating, who quotes the Psalter of Cashel and Ninus, gives an account of this expedition. See Dermot O'Connors, Keating's "General History of Ireland," part i.

heroes, as history fails to shed light on their period, now so remote from our own times.

About the year of the world 2029,<sup>1</sup> a Scythian<sup>2</sup> hero, known as Nemed or Nenidh, signifying "the holy one," brought a number of colonists with him into Ireland. He is said to have been remotely related to Partholan, if not a direct descendant. His name has been Latinized in latter days into Nemethus or Nemidius. With four sons, and a fleet of thirty-four ships, each containing thirty persons, he arrived in Ireland, from the Euxine Sea. Finding the island without inhabitants, these took possession and settled therein; at the same time, they began to clear away the thick woods in many places, and to improve the soil by cultivation.<sup>3</sup> We are told, likewise, that Nemed employed master-builders, distinguished by the name Fomhoraicc, to erect royal seats for his purpose. After a time, his people were much annoyed by pirates called Fomorians. These wasted the coasts by their inroads, and the interior they even harassed. Nemed fought four battles with them; he was successful in the first three; but he was defeated in the last battle, when his son Art, who had been born in Ireland, was slain, with most of his people.<sup>4</sup> This so afflicted the king that he died of grief.<sup>5</sup> Should we follow the authority of bardic history, the Nemedians were exterminated. Ireland was again left

<sup>1</sup> See O'Flaherty's "Ogygia," Pars. ii. p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> See Sir James Ware's "De Hibernia et Antiquitatibus ejus Dissertationes," Cap. ii., p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> According to Dr. Jeffrey Keating.

<sup>4</sup> See L'Abbé Ma-Geoghegan's "Histoire de l'Irlande." Tome i., chap. iii. p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> See Sir William Betham's "The Gael and Cymbri," p. 427.

to its native woods, and a wilderness<sup>1</sup> during two hundred years or more; while, according to certain computations, four hundred and twelve years<sup>2</sup> passed away, before it was again inhabited. O'Flaherty does not say a word respecting the fate of the Foghmoraicc,<sup>3</sup> by some confounded with the Fomorians, and by others distinguished from them. After a succession of ages, the Scuits, Scythians, or Scots, who had migrated to Ireland, are also called Gaidelians and Phenians; while these appellations denote a mixture of Celts, Scythians, and Pœnicians from that part of the Continent whence these arrived.<sup>4</sup> In the remote periods, dialectic incorporations were common among the Celts and Scythians, especially in Spain, where the latter settled, and whence the Scoto-Milesian colony came.

Frequent mention of the Firbolgs, or Bolgæ, occurs in our ancient Irish poems and annals. Whether they preceded or followed the Celts in Ireland has been a matter of controversy among modern historians.<sup>5</sup>

The Firbolgs are called also Sial m Bolgæ, and Slioght m Bealidh. These people were invaded by the Tuatha De Danann, known as the People of the Gods of Danann, daughter of Dalbaoit, and said to have been descended from Nemed. Her sons are thought to have

<sup>1</sup> See William F. Skene's "Celtic Scotland: a History of Ancient Alban," Vol. i., Book i., chap. iv. p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> See O'Flaherty's "Ogygia," Pars ii. p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> See Wood's "Inquiry concerning the Primitive Inhabitants of Ireland." Introduction, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> See Mr. Charles O'Conor's "Dissertations on the Origin and Antiquities of the Ancient Scots," p. xxx.

<sup>5</sup> See Thomas Moore's "History of Ireland," Vol. i. chap. i. pp. 2, 3.

been famous for sorceries and necromantic powers, which arts were communicated to their descendants. The Tuatha De Danann are thought to have invaded Ireland A.M. 2737.<sup>1</sup> Regarding the origin of the name Bolgæ, however, the learned are far from agreeing in their opinions; but various statements have been ventured upon by different writers, from the early to our own days. A received opinion is, that they came from Britain; but, from what particular part of it has not been determined. A Belgic origin has been assigned to them, likewise, and it has been supposed originally they were of German or Gothic extraction.<sup>2</sup> If such were the case, their previous manners and customs are best revealed in the descriptions left us by the early classic writers, aided by modern investigators.<sup>3</sup> Some think that by Clan Bolus are meant the Belgæ of Britain, who, having passed over from Belgium, or from Lower Germany, spread themselves over the countries of Somerset, Wilton, and the interior of Haverford; and that the British language, which they made use of in Ireland was eloquently and expressively designated Belgaid, intimating it to be a Belgic idiom. Another supposition has it, that the name Firbolg is connected with superstition, and derived from the worship which this people paid their gods. For, in the language of the

<sup>1</sup> According to Keating and O'Flaherty. The Four Masters' computation have it at A.M. 3303.

<sup>2</sup> Sir William Wilde's "Beauties of the Boyne and its Tributary Blackwater," chap. ix. p. 218.

<sup>3</sup> In this connexion the late Emperor of the French, Napoleon III., has left us a very interesting account of the Belgæ and of the Gaulish Celts, in his "Histoire de Jules César," Tome ii. Lio. iii. chap. ii. pp. 13-44.

Celts, the Germans, and all the northern nations, it is thought, that Bel stood for Sol or Apollo, the sun; and this deity was indiscriminately called Bal, Beal, and Sol, intimating his dominion as lord of the world. This idea they are said to have received from the Phœnicians, the authors of such superstition, who in the excess of their false zeal, scrupled not to offer human sacrifices to their Baal, though he afterwards condescended to acquiesce in the substitution of brute immolation.<sup>1</sup> Others would have them called Bolgæ, from *bolg*, "a quiver," as excelling in archery; others state *bolg* means a "leathern pouch," or "bag;" others deduce their name from the Irish word *bol*, "a poet," or "sage," as they were eminent in these respective characters. Another ingenious derivation of the name,<sup>2</sup> found in the Irish version of Nennius,<sup>3</sup> *Viri Bullorum*, suggests a possibility of their having been so designated, because they carried shepherd's crooks.<sup>4</sup>

If we follow the accounts of certain writers, those people were distinguished into three nations, or tribes viz., Firbolgæ,<sup>5</sup> Firdomnan,<sup>6</sup> and Firgalion,<sup>7</sup> generally

<sup>1</sup> See that insipid, ill-digested, and ridiculously pedantic compilation called "Phenician Ireland," edited by Henry O'Brien, Esq., A.B., and which professes to be the translation of some Latin papers on Irish History, by a learned Spaniard, Doctor Joachimus Laurentius Villaneuva, chap. xxii. pp. 209-212. Hence the first of May is called in Irish, La Beal—that is, the "day of the fire Beal."

<sup>2</sup> By Rev. Dr. James Henthorn Todd.

<sup>3</sup> The "Historia Britonum," so well known. This version was edited by Dr. Todd and the Hon. Algernon Herbert.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 44, note (r.) Du Cange asserts that *Bullum*, in the Latinity of the middle ages, signified "baculum pastoris."

<sup>5</sup> Also called by Nennius *Viri Bullorum*.

<sup>6</sup> Also called by Nennius *Viri Dominiorum*.

<sup>7</sup> Also called by Nennius *Viri Armorum*.

interpreted, Clan Bolus, Clan Domnan, and Clan Gallon. These are said to have been of Nemed's race.

The Firbolg, or Bolgæ, are thought to have established themselves at first in the neighbourhood of Wexford and Wicklow, on the south-east of Ireland. These Teutonic people are said to have divided the whole island into five great provinces, over which they established a sort of royal sway.<sup>1</sup>

A colony of Firbolgs, it would appear, had been settled in the district of Hy-Many, province of Connaught, even before the introduction of the Christian religion, and probably for a long time previous to the beginning of the fifth century. The Firbolgs, as also the Tuatha De Danann tribes of Ireland, were accustomed to build not only their fortresses and sepulchres, but also their houses of stone, without cement, and in the style, now usually called Cyclopean and Pelasgic.<sup>2</sup> The Firbolgs were certainly in Hy-Many during the reign of Duach Gallach, who was supreme ruler over these parts.

It has been said, that the literal meaning of Iath Maine is the country or inheritance of Maneus, who first gave it a distinctive appellation; and, as we are told, this territory takes its origin from Maney-Mor, or Maneus the Great, one of the Milesian race, who conquered—about the year of Christ, 450—the former inhabitants of that very considerable portion of Connaught—an extent of country which from him afterwards retained the name of Imaney. This celebrated chieftain was

<sup>1</sup> See Elias Regnault's "Histoire de l'Irlande," chap. ii. p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> See Dr. George Petrie's "Ecclesiastical Architecture and Round Towers of Ireland," Part ii. sect. ii. p. 127.

the first of his race, who embraced the Christian faith in the western parts of Ireland.

Kellach, King of Imaney, was a prince, renowned for his valour and deeds of arms. One of his lineal descendants was Maney-Mor, who flourished towards the year 470<sup>a.d. 890</sup>. From his proper name was formed the patronymic name of O'Kelly,<sup>1</sup> which signifies grandson or descendant, of Kellach;<sup>2</sup> for, as we are informed, about the eleventh century, Irish chiefs began to adopt family names in order to distinguish more exactly their posterity, and the particular scions of each family.

The chiefs of the tribe of Imaney were successively styled kings, princes, or chieftains, or simply O'Kelly or O'Maney-Mor. These two names, held as titles, denoted the chief of the clan or tribe of the O'Kellys. They served as war-cries in the field, when called to active service.

<sup>1</sup> The most complete account of this family we possess is that contained in the "Tribes and Customs of Hy-Many."

<sup>2</sup> The writer has been favoured by Thomas A. Kelly, Esq., St. Grellan's, Monkstown, County Dublin, with the perusal of a very interesting family Manuscript. It is intituled, "Gone Days of I Maney, Memorials of Clan-Kellae, (an Tuir an Dia,) or of the Sept, Clan, or Tribe of the O'Kellys of the Tower of God, whose chiefs were successively styled Kings, Princes, and Chieftains, or Lords of Imaney or South Connact, in Ireland—present county of Galway—Hereditary Marshals of the Province of Connact. Drawn up from the National Records of Ireland and family papers of the Branch af Skryne, or Athlone Branch, Chief of the Name. By Charles Denis Count O'Kelly Farrell, 1850." This work is learnedly and laboriously compiled, while it contains coloured drawings of the O'Kellys' armorial devices, with a very complete history of the family, and from the earliest times. We hope it may be published, as a valuable record of men and deeds, almost as yet buried in oblivion, but deserving a niche among our national archives.

Independent in all their rights of jurisdiction,<sup>1</sup> they however acknowledged the priority of the provincial King of Connaught, in conformity with the federative system of Ireland. When the province was engaged in a general war, the chief, O'Kelly, exercised the hereditary office of Marshal, or General of the Connaught armies.

In the national wars against the Danes and Northmen, as afterwards against the English, the O'Kellys signalized themselves by their patriotism and intrepidity. For their patron saint, they manifested a singular devotion.

It is to be regretted, that so few biographical particulars have been given, in the only brief accounts we can find, regarding the Patron of Hy-Many. A very ancient copy of St. Grellan's Life is quoted by Duard Mac Firbis, in his Genealogical Book, as a proof of the existence of the Firbolgs in the province of Connaught, after the period of the introduction of Christianity; and, also, it is cited, by Gratianus Lucius, in his "Cambrensis Eversus," as a proof of the fact, which he thinks it establishes, namely, that the ancient Irish paid tithes.<sup>2</sup> No vellum copy of this Life is now in Dublin. There is an Irish Life of St. Grellan in paper, and transcribed by Brother Michael O'Clery. It is kept in a thick quarto volume, among the Manuscripts.

<sup>1</sup> Of Hy-Maine we find O'Kelly styled "supreme lord" in Roderick O'Flaherty's "Chorographical Description of West or H-Iar Connaught," written in 1684, and edited by James Hardiman, M.R.I.A. Additional Notes, A. p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> See John O'Donovan's Translation of "Tribes and Customs of Hy-Many," p. 8, note (v.)

of the Burgundian Library, at Bruxelles.<sup>1</sup> Besides this there is a paper copy of his Life<sup>2</sup>—probably containing similar matter—and preserved in the Royal Irish Academy, among its manuscripts. This Life of St. Grellan is in a quarto Miscellany of 352 written pages copied by James Maguire, a good and faithful scribe,<sup>3</sup> according to Eugene O'Curry. This transcript was finished, in the year 1721, and in some place called Dubh-bhaile (Black Town). The pages are written in double columns, and chiefly Lives of Saints are to be found in it. The Life of St. Greallan is contained there, from page 235 to 240.<sup>4</sup>

The usual name given to this holy man is Grellan, or Greallain, in Irish, and this has been Latinized into Grellanus. Dr. Lynch writes of him as Grillan,<sup>5</sup> when alluding to this Patron of Hy-Many, in his celebrated work.

According to the accounts we have of the saint, he was a contemporary with St. Patrick, and he must have flourished about the close of the fifth century. He is classed among the Irish Apostle's disciples,<sup>6</sup> and this too is stated, in the tenth chapter of his own Life.<sup>7</sup> He

<sup>1</sup> Classed Vol. XI., fol. 83. This Manuscript appears to have been written in the years 1628 and 1629. It contains 270 folios.

<sup>2</sup> The quarto paper MS., classed No. 33.5.

<sup>3</sup> This appears from an entry at p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> The transcript of this Life was finished, on the 10th day of January, 1720, as an appended Irish notice declares.

<sup>5</sup> See "Cambrensis Eversus," edited by Rev. Dr. Kelly. Vol. ii. chap. xv. pp. 260 to 263.

<sup>6</sup> Letter of Very Rev. Canon Ulick J. Bourke, P.P., Claremorris, Co. Mayo, dated 7th March, 1879.

<sup>7</sup> See "Martyrology of Donegal," edited by Rev. Drs. Todd and Reeves, at the 10th of November, pp. 302, 303.

also obtained the episcopal rank, being renowned for his sanctity and miracles.

His father's name was Cuillin, son of Cairbre Cluais-derg,<sup>1</sup> of the Lagenians, while Eithne was the name of his mother. He was born in the time of St. Patrick, as the first chapter of his Irish Life states,<sup>2</sup> and a legend is there introduced, as serving to illustrate the prognostications of his subsequent distinguished career, and specially accompanying the event of his birth.

In the time of Lugaidh<sup>3</sup> Mac Laoighaire Mac Neill, a great thunder-storm was heard by all the men of Erinn, and they were astonished at its unusual loudness. They asked Patrick, the son of Alpin, what it portended. He answered, that Greallan was then born, and that he had been only six months in his mother's womb, at the time. Hence, we may infer, that he came into the world about the middle or towards the close of the fifth century. Wars and commotions are said to have prevailed in Ireland, at the advent of our saint's birth. We are told, likewise, that Greallan had been fostered by one named Cairbre, probably a relation among his family connexions.

Among the many other cares of his Mission, St. Patrick took charge of Greallan's education, and made him a companion. He enrolled this young disciple amongst his brethren, taking him to Ath-Cliath, Dublinne,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Or as Anglicised, Cairbre of the Red Ears.

<sup>2</sup> See "Martyrology of Donegal," edited by Rev. Drs. Todd and Reeves, pp. 302, 303, at the 10th of November.

<sup>3</sup> His reign over Ireland was from A.D. 479 to 503, or twenty-five years, according to the chronology of the Four Masters.

<sup>4</sup> In English it means, "the ford of the hurdles of the black pool." This is said to have been the ancient name for the present Metropolis of Ireland, and since known as Dublin.

when he went there. This must have been after the middle of the fifth century. Then is quoted a poem, in which St. Patrick said, that a noble person should be in the land of Leinster. This promise was an allusion to our saint, whose purity and virtues are there praised.

A kinsman to the celebrated Colla da Chrioch chieftains in Ulster possessed great influence in Hy-Many, a territory of the Firbolgs, in the time of St. Patrick, when he is said to have visited Echin, the son of Briain,<sup>1</sup> son to Eachach, King of Connaught. Eachin refused to be converted,<sup>2</sup> but all his brothers embraced the faith. Eoghan, who was son to Duach Gallach,<sup>3</sup> one of Eachin's brothers, was afterwards baptised by St. Grellan. On this occasion a great miracle was wrought, at a place called Achadh Fionnabhrach. When only a child, Eoghan had died, to the inexpressible grief of his parents. However, when St. Grellan beheld this afflicting state of affairs, he raised his staff, and then applied it to the body of their child. This touch caused him to be resuscitated, and it impressed a mark on their son, which was afterwards visible. As a consequence, he bore the name, by which he was best known, namely, Eoghan Scriabh, or "Owen the Striped."<sup>4</sup> The mira-

<sup>1</sup> He is said to have had four-and-twenty sons. Among these, we find the names of Echin, or Echenus, Duach Gallach, Fergusius, Eochad, Ercus Derg, Aengussius, Ball-Derg, Tenedus, and Muchitius.

<sup>2</sup> His wife and children also refused baptism; yet, afterwards, she sought to be reconciled with the Irish Apostle, and her husband, Echen, was baptised by St. Benignus. See this whole account, taken from a Life of the latter, in Colgan's "Trias Thaumaturga," Appendix iii. ad Acta S. Patricii, pp. 203, 204.

<sup>3</sup> He is called "frater junior de filiis Briain."

<sup>4</sup> "St. Grellan's Irish Life," chap. iii. See "Martyrology of Donegal," edited by Rev. Drs. Todd and Reeves, pp. 302, 303.

culous crozier was thenceforward held in great veneration. It is said, that Duach Gallach was a Christian, having been baptised by St. Patrick, while the wife of Echin, called Fortrui, was aunt to St. Benignus,<sup>1</sup> a favourite disciple of the Irish Apostle. The latter proclaimed that he should be a king, and that from his race kings should proceed. In fine, Eachin was baptised at Kilbennin, near Tuam.<sup>2</sup>

At Achadh Fionnabhrach, Duach Gallach bestowed a tract of land, and he gave possession of it to St. Grellan. The name was even changed—owing to this peculiarity of circumstance—from Achadh Fionnabhrach to that of Craobh Greallain, which signifies, the “Branch of Grellan.” This name is said in his Irish Life to have been owing to a branch, which Duach and St. Patrick gave our saint in token of possession. Here, east of Magh-Luirg, this saint is said to have built a Church, before the arrival of Maine-Mor in Connaught. When alluding to Craobh Ghreallain, Mr. O’Curry remarks, that he believed its precise situation was not known.<sup>3</sup>

As a token of the veneration for our saint, Duach required that every chieftain’s wife should give seven garments, as a tribute to Grellan; and, for payment of this ecclesiastical assessment, the guarantee of St. Patrick had been asked and obtained afterwards by the local Patron.

<sup>1</sup> He was the son of Sesonean, a disciple of St. Patrick; and his mother was called Sadeliua, descended from Cather, King of Leinster.

<sup>2</sup> See Very Rev. Ulick J. Bourke’s “Aryan Origin of the Gaelic Race and Language,” chap. xiii. pp. 408, 409.

<sup>3</sup> See a brief description of this specified Life of St. Grellan in the “Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts of the Royal Irish Academy,” by Eugene O’Curry. First Series, Vol. ii. pp. 445, 446.

A romantic and, as there are good reasons for supposing, a very questionable narrative of particulars regarding the conquest of Hy-Many by Maine-Mor and the Colla da Chrioch's race is given, in the Life of our Saint. We are there told, that Eochaидh Ferdaghiall, father to Maine-Mor, took counsel with his son as to how the Colla da Chrioch tribe, over whom they ruled, should be able to procure a sufficient scope of territory for their numerous and increasing population.

Then they held possession of Oirghialla, with the hostages of this place, and of Ulidia. It was generally allowed, that quarrels might break out amongst the chiefs of this descendant tribe, were they to be confined within any one province. But, considering the Firbolgic territory of Hy-Many as a fair object for a predatory excursion, and as it had been thinly inhabited, they resolved on securing a considerable portion of it by conquest.

Under the leadership of Maine-Mor, the enterprising Colla da Crioch assembled their forces at Clogher, in the county of Tyrone, and then they proceeded in battle array, towards the territory of Hy-Many. This nomadic tribe—for such it had now become—collected the herds and flocks, which belonged to them; and these animals were driven on their line of march by the invading host, who set out in quest of new settlements. Crossing the Shannon, they came to Druim Clasach, and plundered all that district of country, lying between Lough Ree and the River Suck. They also despatched messengers to Cian, Chief of the Firbolgs, who dwelt at a place called Magh-Seincheineoil. The English equivalent to this is, “the plain of the old tribe,” probably in allusion to the aboriginal colony there settled.

The length and breadth of the plain was from Dunn-a-riogh to the river of Bairduin, and from Ath-n-fasdoig to Ath-dearg-duin, which was afterwards called Ath-an-Chorrdhaire.<sup>1</sup> They required from him tribute and territory. This unjust demand he refused, and he also prepared to resist. He raised a force of 3,000,<sup>2</sup> or, as some accounts have it, of 4,000 Firbolgs,<sup>3</sup> armed with swords, bucklers, and helmets.<sup>4</sup> These dwelt in the plain of Magh Seincheineoil.<sup>5</sup> At their head, Cian marched to meet the invaders.

About this time, St. Grellan, who had journeyed over the territory of Hy-Many, came to a place, denominated Cill Cluaine, and now called Kilclooney, in the neighbourhood of Ballinasloe, and the present barony of Clonmacowen, County of Galway.

Thus, in a manner, he was placed between the contending forces; and his name and influence seem to have been respected, by chieftains on both sides. He was waited upon by Cian, who, in all probability, gave the saint an exaggerated account, regarding his means for defence against the invaders. However this may be, Grellan induced the Colla da Crioch race to enter into articles of truce with the Firbolgs, and to deliver

<sup>1</sup> The limits of this plain are given, in that portion of the Life of St. Grellan, quoted by Dr. O'Donovan, in "Tribes and Customs of Hy-Many," p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> According to Dr. Lynch.

<sup>3</sup> This latter seems to have been the number, according to an old Irish poem, in the Life of St. Grellan.

<sup>4</sup> See Rev. Dr. Kelly's edition of "Cambrensis Eversus," Vol. ii. chap. xv. pp. 260, 261.

<sup>5</sup> See an account of the Firbolg possession of Hy-Many, in Eugene O'Curry's work "On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish," edited by Dr. W. K. Sullivan, Vol. iii. sect. xxii. pp. 83, 84.

twenty-seven chiefs of the invading host, as hostages for the observance of peace. Amhalgaidh, son to Maine, was one of these hostages, and he was delivered for keeping to Cian's Brehon. But the Brehon's wife conceived an unlawful passion for this young prince. The particulars of this affair becoming known to the lawgiver, he was filled with jealousy and resentment. Having great influence over the mind of Cian, this latter was persuaded to murder all his hostages.

It is indeed a difficult matter to understand that mixture of generosity and ferociousness, which has been known to characterize the manners of our forefathers. The wild excesses of barbarity owe their origin to ungovernable fits of passion, which overcharge man's nature with the ripe growth of licentiousness. Innate generosity is overshadowed or extinguished, where custom sanctions actions of treachery and bloodshed. The barbarous deed it was designed to put into execution, during the cover of night and darkness.

However, the most awful punishments are inflicted by Divine Providence, on the crimes of perfidy and cruelty, as happened in this case. To complete his perfidious proceeding, Cian invited the Colla da Crioch chiefs to a feast, which was prepared, as he said, for them. His real intention was to surprise them, and at a moment when they should be least on their guard against his treacherous designs. With such a purpose formed, he placed some soldiers in ambuscade, to slay the expected guests. Religious feeling and principle are necessary to control heartless savagery. True civilization can only follow, in the wake of Christian morals and influences, while here too, the miraculous power

possessed by the holy Grellan, and also his prophetic spirit, were rendered manifest to all concerned.

The Colla da Crioche host was then encamped, at the foot of Seisidh-beag, in the territory of Maenmagh. At this time, Eochaith and Maine were at the foot of Bearnach na n-arm. Having some intimation respecting the design of Cian and of his armed bands, and being apprehensive regarding the violation of a truce to which he was the principal guarantee, St. Grellan perceived the armed bands from the door of his church. Raising his hands towards heaven, and beseeching the God of hosts to avert the consequences of such foul treachery from those chiefs who were doomed to destruction, his prayer was heard, as the account declares. The hosts of Cian, with their leader, were swallowed up, and buried beneath the plain, on which they stood. It was suddenly changed into a quagmire, and here they all miserably perished. This place afterwards received the name Magh Liach, *i.e.*, "the plain of sorrow," since it proved such to the perfidious Firbolgs;<sup>1</sup> and, Dr. Lynch declares, that in his day, this marsh was quite impassible either for man or beast.<sup>2</sup> It is said, St. Grellan then informed Maine and his people about this treacherous plot contrived against

<sup>1</sup> "Hodieque invia est; incedentium gressibus ita coedens, ut in ea nec homines nec pecudes vestigia figere possint."—"Cambrensis Eversus," Vol. ii. chap. xv. pp. 260, 262.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding this event, Mr. O'Donovan remarks, "It is to be lamented that no Firbolgic writer survived to relate the true account of this transaction, for every acute investigator of history will be apt to suspect that the treachery was on the side of the conquerors, the Clann Colla. But who would have the courage to write this in the fourteenth century?"—"Tribes and Customs of Hy-Many," p. 12, note (z.)

them, and its signal failure followed in the manner described. He then counselled them, to take possession of the Firbolg's territory, to cultivate brotherly love, to abominate treachery, and to establish a legal rate for ecclesiastical purposes, by accepting a law imposed on them by himself. The Clann Colla agreed to his proposals, and Maine desired the saint to name his own award. In compliance with such request, he is said to have repeated in the Irish language some verses given in his Life. These, however, bear intrinsic evidences of having been extracted from bardic remains, or of having been composed by his biographer. The following is the literal English translation, as furnished, from the original Irish verses, by Dr. John O'Donovan :—

“ Great is my tribute on the race of Maine, a screaball (scruple)<sup>1</sup>  
out of every townland.

Their successes shall be bright and easy ; it is not a tribute  
acquired without cause.

The first-born of every family to me, that are all baptized  
by me.

Their tribute paid to me is a severe tribute, every firstling  
pig and firstling lamb.

To me belongs—may their cattle thence be the more num-  
erous ;—from the race of Maine, the firstling foal.

Let them convey their tribute to my church, besides territory  
and land.

From Dal Druithne I am not entitled to tribute or other  
demands.

<sup>1</sup> In another part of the “Tribes and Customs of Hy-Many,” p. 81, we are told, that “The race of Maine, both women and men, pay a sgreaball caethrach to St. Grellan.” And Mr. O'Donovan, in a note on the passage, remarks, “Sgreaball caethrach (*Sgreaball*), which literally means a scuptulum or scruple, and was at three-pence, is sometimes indefinitely used to denote any tribute.” Here sgreaball caethrach signifies “tribute,” or “tribute in sheep.”

Their fame is much heard of ; the Muinntir Maeilfinnain  
belong not to me.

Of all the Hy-Many, these excepted, the tributes and rents  
are mine.

Let them protect my church for its God. Their chief and  
his subjects are mine.

Their success and injunctions it was I that ordained, without  
defect.

While they remain obedient to my will, they shall be victo-  
rious in every battle.

Let the warlike chiefs observe the advice of my successor.  
And among the Gaels, north and south, their's shall be the  
unerring director.

Frequent my sacred church, which has protected each  
refugee.

Refuse not to pay your tribute to me, and you shall receive  
as I have promised.

My blessing on the agile race, the sons of Maine of chess  
boards.

That race shall not be subdued, so as they carry my crozier.  
Let the battle standard of the race be my crozier of true  
value.<sup>1</sup>

And battles will not overwhelm them, their successors shall  
be very great.

“Great,” &c.<sup>2</sup>

Afterwards, St. Grellan selected at Kilcloony the site  
for a church. There he built on a rising ground, or  
Eiscir, a little distance to the north-west of the Ballinasloe  
town. Some ruins are yet remaining there, but it  
should be hazardous to assert the walls date back to  
the fifth century.

<sup>1</sup> In the “Tribes and Customs of Hy-Many,” p. 81, it is said of  
Maine’s race, “St. Grellan presides over their battles,” i.e., “the crozier  
of St. Grellan,” or some such object is borne in the standard of the  
King of Hy-Many.

<sup>2</sup> See Mr. O’Donovan’s translation, in “Tribes and Customs of  
Hy-Many,” pp. 13, 14.

The Irish were accustomed to impose voluntary assessments of the nature, already indicated by the record we have quoted, to mark their consideration and respect for those distinguished by their ministerial works. It is stated, in the Irish Life of St. Grellan, that he received the first offspring of any brood animal; such as hog, and lamb, and foal, in Hy-Many.<sup>1</sup> These tributes were regularly paid to the successors of the holy man, in the church honoured by his presence and labours during life.

St. Grellan was honoured with particular devotion in the Church of Killcluian, diocese of Clonfert, on the 17th of September.<sup>2</sup> On this day his feast occurs,<sup>3</sup> according to our traditions or Calendars,<sup>4</sup> while he seems to have had a second festival, at the 10th of November.<sup>5</sup> It seems strange, that at neither day he is mentioned in the Feilire of St. Ængus the Culdee, nor is the date for his death recorded in our Annals. However, we may fairly assume, that he lived on, until near the middle of the sixth century.

St. Grellan is the principal patron of those portions

<sup>1</sup> The same is stated by Dr. John Lynch, in his "Cambrensis Eversus," p. 186. "E singulis Manachiae domibus patroni sui S. Grillani successoribus tres denarii quotannis, primus porculus, primus agnus, et primus equinus, deferrebat."

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Lynch's "Cambrensis Eversus," Vol. ii. chap. xv. p. 262.

<sup>3</sup> In the "Martyrology of Donegal," edited by Drs. Todd and Reeves, there we find only the simple entry "Greallan, Bishop." See pp. 250, 251.

<sup>4</sup> Whether the entry, "Giallani Eps. o Laind," at this date, in the "Martyrology of Tallaght," edited by Dr. Kelly, have reference to our saint or not, I am unable to determine, yet no other seems there to account for his feast.

<sup>5</sup> See some further notices, at this date, in the "Martyrology of Donegal," pp. 302, 303.

of Galway and Roscommon counties, formerly known by the designation of Hy-Many; and, for many centuries, even to the present age, the crozier of St. Grellan had been preserved in the territory.

Dr. Lynch declares, also, that in his time this pastoral staff of St. Grellan was held in great veneration.<sup>1</sup> A relic of this kind, when used as a standard, was usually called cathach, *i.e.*, "proeliator,"<sup>2</sup> such as the celebrated cathach of St. Columkille.<sup>3</sup>

This crozier of St. Grellan was preserved for ages, in the family of O'Cronghaile, or Cronelly, who were the ancient Comharbas of the saint. This term of Comharba had an ecclesiastical meaning, and generally it signified successor in a see, church, or monastery; but, in due course, it had a wider signification, and the *Comhorba* was regarded as the vicar—a legal representative of the Patron Saint, or founder of the Church. But, the word *Comhorba* is not exclusively ecclesiastical; for in the ancient laws of Erin, it meant the heir and conservator of the inheritance; and, in the latter sense, it is always used, in our ecclesiastical writings.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See "Cambrensis Eversus," Vol. ii. chap. xv. p. 262.

<sup>2</sup> See Colgan, "Trias Thaumaturga," p. 409. col. 2. "Et cathach, id est proeliator, vulge appellatur, fertque traditio quod si circa illius exercitum, antequam hostem adoriantur tertio cum debita reverentia circumducatur, eveniat ut victoriam reportet."

<sup>3</sup> Described by Sir Wm. Betham in his "Antiquarian Researches."

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the foregoing, the late Professor Eugene O'Curry, whose acquaintance with the laws, manners and customs of our ancestors, renders his opinions of great weight on a subject of this nature, has given the following information to the author, and for a much fuller account, the reader is referred to his "Life of St. Malacy O'Morgair."—chap. xiii.:—

"There was an understood original compact, recognised by the 'Brehon Laws,' which vested the *Comhorbship* of the Church and its

The shrine of St. Grellan was in existence so late as the year 1836, it being then in the possession of a poor man, named John Cronelly, the senior representative of the Comharbas of the saint, who lived near Ahasca, in the east of the county of Galway ; but, it is not to be found now, in that county.<sup>1</sup> It was probably sold to some collector of antiquities, and it is not now known to be in the possession of any person ; yet, it

lands in two families ; namely, in that of the Patron Saint or founder, and in that of the person who gave the original site and endowment.

“ It was the family of the Patron Saint, that invariably supplied the Abbot, as long as there could be found among them even a psalm-singer, to take the office ; and, when they failed to supply a fit person, then he was sought from the family of the owner of the land. If, in the meantime, a better and more learned man of the Patron’s family should spring up, the abbacy was to be handed over to him ; but, if he were not better, he should wait until it became vacant by death or otherwise.

“ If, however, in the absence of a qualified person from either family, an unqualified person should succeed as temporal heir, he was obliged to provide a suitable clergyman to discharge the offices of the church, according to its dignity, whilst the natural abbot administered the temporal offices and the management of the land.

“ The *Airchinnech* or *Erenach* was a mere temporal agent or steward of the church lands, under the *Comhorba*, whoever he might be. He sometimes took the tonsure and some other minor order, which raised his *Eric*, or composition, in case of any insult or injury offered to him. He was generally a married man, without any official value or reverence of person, but what was derived from the character, or ecclesiastical dignity of the Patron Saint, whose secular inheritance he managed. It happened often, however, that the whole administration of the Church and its land was performed by one and the same person. This was when the abbot, bishop, or priest performed himself the clerical duties, and also acted as his own *Airchinnech* or steward.”

<sup>1</sup> Such is the statement of Canon Ulick J. Bourke, P.P., of Claremorris, Co. Mayo, in a letter, dated thence March 7th, 1879.

seems incredible, that such an interesting relic could have been lost, as we have been enabled to ascertain the fact of its preservation to a comparatively recent period.

The house of Imaney was known, since the eleventh century, by the name of O'Kelly. Formerly this renowned family enjoyed all the rights of sovereignty in the western parts of Ireland, where they possessed so very extensive a territory. Even from the invasion of the English down to the reigns of Mary and Elizabeth, the chiefs of this house maintained their independence.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the house of O'Kelly divided into four principal branches, each family of which had for its appanage one of the four baronies of Kilyan, Athlone, Tiaquin, and Kilconnel; the southern half-barony of Ballymo falling to the share of the branch of Kilyan.

The government of Imaney was alternatively exercised by the chiefs of the first and two last of those branches. However, that of Kilconnel or Aughrim, though a younger branch, held in latter times the dignity of chieftain of the O'Kellys. The principal seat of their residence was at Aughrim, while their burial place was at Clonmacnoise, and in latter years they were interred at Kilconnel.

The chieftains of the Kilconnel or Aughrim O'Kellys was but titular, at the accession of James I. This branch was dispersed under Cromwell, and at this day it is extinct. The branches of Kilyan and Tiaquin, or Gallagher, also lost the greater part of their properties.

<sup>1</sup> According to Charles Denis Count O'Kelly Farrell's Manuscript, "Gone Days of I Mainey, Memorials of Clan-Kellae," p. 1.

during the Revolutions of 1641 and of 1688. The present representative of this branch is Count Cornelius J. O'Kelly, of the Holy Roman Empire, now living at Gallagh Castle, near Tuam, and he still retains the ancient Irish title of the O'Maine Mor, or, Chief of Hy-Maine.<sup>1</sup> The chieftains of Athlone or Skryne, whose territory lay still nearer to the English settlements, required all their watchfulness to guard against the common enemy. Those O'Kellys did not lay claim to their rights of alternative government. Wearyed at last with disastrous wars, which had retarded the march of civilization in their unfortunate country, they submitted to Mary Queen of England, thus sacrificing their feelings to take a step, which they believed should secure to their posterity civil and religious liberty. However, they found themselves compromised and deceived, under the following reigns.

The Athlone branch of the O'Kellys still possesses part of the ancient principality of Imaney, of which Colonel O'Kelly, its lord, was deprived under Cromwell. He was afterwards reinstated in it by letters patent from Charles II., in reward for services rendered by him to the Royal cause, during the Revolution.

Like most of their countrymen, the O'Kellys were remarkable in every age for their attachment to the faith of their fathers; but abroad were most of their ex-patriated gentlemen distinguished, in the camps, cabinets, and courts of the Continent. More ample details than the author could be expected to insert, in the present brief Memoir, will be found in that work, to which allusion has been already made—"The Tribes and

<sup>1</sup> See Thom's Directory for 1880, p. 757.

Customs of Hy-Many." There, not only are the O'Kelly's territory, family, and kindred tribes recorded, but, in his Appendices to that Tract, its learned editor has very fully treated regarding personal history and genealogy, which must have an interest for Irishmen, who are anxious to be informed about the career and fortunes of their gallant, adventurous, and enterprising countrymen, at home and abroad.

After a scarcely interrupted struggle during many ages at home, yielding at last to the advantages possessed by an enemy, favoured by more fortunate circumstances, they were obliged to capitulate and submit to the English. Our Irish Annals record their valiant opposition to the invading hosts, and they were among the last Irish chieftains, who fell under the foreign yoke. Notwithstanding changes of times and fortunes, since the days of their greatness have passed as magnates in the land ; still, on the bead-roll of our history in Ireland, many a distinguished man of the name deserves the honour and gratitude of his fellow-countrymen, for public spirit and private worth have never been wanting, when the cause of creed or country needed effort and sacrifice. So may it prove in the future, as it has happened in the past.

Divers may descend to the lowest depths of ocean, and take therefrom only glittering but worthless shells ; while the true pearl-fisher, by habit and instinct, will select only those shells filled with valuable pearls. Thus it happens, also, with men of this world, as contra-distinguished from others, who seek pearls of still greater price. Bold, resolute, and vigorous efforts are required to secure the highest prizes of earth or heaven. Dangers

must be incurred in many if not in most cases. Worldlings tempt God's judgments, and at the end, find their hands empty, a just measure of punishment awaiting their transgressions. The saints obey promptings of duty, and they triumph over all adversities, even when encountering the greatest trials and dangers; because the Almighty is ever found on their side, aiding, inspiring, and directing their earthly struggles, with the object of preparing them for their ultimate end. They rest with God, when called away from this life, and they leave pious memorials to their clients of the Church militant in this world. They pray for us on high, and teach us by their examples and actions the way that conducts to everlasting happiness.

THE END.













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