

A
HISTORY
OF
IRELAND
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FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES TO THE TREATY OF LIMERICK



PART
1

EDUCATIONAL COMPANY OF IRELAND

FOREWORD

THIS beginner's history aims at giving, not just a record of battles and campaigns, but some account of the factors—religious, social, literary, agricultural, industrial, etc.—which not only form the background to military history, and help to make it intelligible, but are at least as important a part of our country's story.

In addition—since nations, like men, do not live in isolation—the great world movements which have affected our history are given due consideration.

The result is a book that is at once concise and comprehensive; never burdened with detail, but giving such detail as will help the young learner to understand and remember. Finally, the writing is as simple and direct as the nature of the subject will allow.

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CHAPTER I

IRELAND IN EARLY TIMES

THOUSANDS and thousands of years ago, Ireland lay covered by a thick sheet of ice and snow. Little by little the climate grew warmer: the great ice sheet slowly melted away, and land appeared.

In the course of time, dense forests rose over most of the country. There were also many bogs and marshes, and the climate was much wetter and colder than it is now.

In that far-distant age, Ireland was not yet an island. From what is now the north-eastern corner of the country, dry land stretched all the way to the mainland of Europe.

Wild Animals

Wild animals made their way to Ireland across this neck of land, and in the great forests and marshes lived wild pigs, savage dogs, wolves, and bears. There were also great deer, called elks, with enormous branching horns.

A long, long time was to pass before the arrival of man.

The First People

The first people are thought to have come to Ireland about nine thousand years before the birth of Christ.

CHAPTER 29

THE PALE AND THE GREAT LORDS

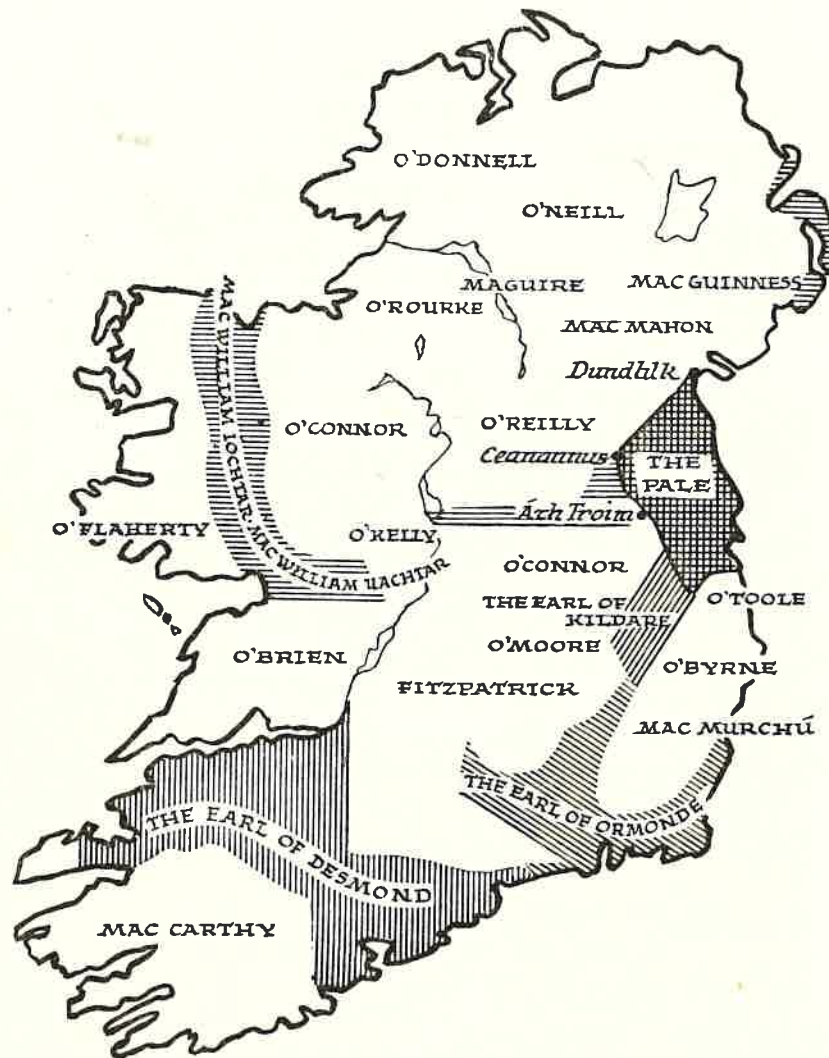
At the beginning of the fifteenth century, English power was confined to a small area embracing some five Leinster counties, with Dublin at the centre. This part of Ireland came to be known as the Pale.

Only in the Pale were English laws enforced and the English king obeyed, and so weak had the English power become that the settlers of the Pale paid Black Rent to the neighbouring Irish chiefs for leaving them in peace.

In the first half of the fifteenth century, England was at war with France, and as a result lost all her possessions there. Then civil war broke out in England, when two branches of the royal family, the Lancastrians and the Yorkists, claimed the throne. This struggle, which lasted thirty years, was known as the Wars of the Roses.

Meanwhile the Pale grew smaller and smaller, until towards the end of the century it consisted of a strip of land, some twenty miles wide, running from Dublin to Dundalk. Moreover, even in this small area, and despite all the efforts of the Government, the Irish language, dress, and customs were steadily gaining ground.

Outside the Pale, of course, Ireland was Gaelic, and the Irish chiefs and the Norman-Irish lords were completely independent of England.



THE PALE
AT THE END OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

The Government

The Lord Deputy and a small council formed the "Government", but its rule did not extend beyond the Pale. The Parliament, which met occasionally, consisted almost solely of members from within the Pale.

The Great Lords

Three Norman-Irish families had risen to great power in Ireland: the Fitzgeralds of Leinster (Earls of Kildare); the Fitzgeralds of Munster (Earls of Desmond); and the Butlers (Earls of Ormond), whose headquarters was Kilkenny. Between the Fitzgeralds and the Butlers there was constant strife.

These lords were in possession of large territories, which they ruled like independent princes.

CHAPTER 30

THE LEINSTER GERALDINES

The Great Earl of Kildare

In 1477, Gerald (Gearóid Mór) Fitzgerald succeeded his father as Earl of Kildare, and for the next thirty-five years he was the most powerful man in Ireland. He ruled large territories in Leinster, and as he was Lord Deputy for over thirty years, he controlled the Parliament of the Pale as well. His sister and three of his daughters were married to Irish chiefs, and he



Gearóid Mór

had the support of many of the leading Irish families. He was supported, too, by all the Norman-Irish, except the Butlers.

The Tudors

The Wars of the Roses ended in 1485, when the Lancastrian leader, Henry Tudor, became King of England as Henry VII. The power of the English nobles was broken at last, peace and order were restored, and Henry was to be the first of a line of powerful Tudor sovereigns.

Poynings' Law (1495)

Henry VII determined to gain complete control over the Dublin Parliament and to curb the power of Gearóid Mór. He sent Edward Poynings to Dublin as Lord Deputy, and dismissed Kildare.