

The Loftuses of Mount Loftus

BETTINA GRATAN-BELLEW

THIS story of the Loftuses of Mount Loftus is taken principally from a book in manuscript left by my father, Major Loftus. "Records and Notes on the Loftus Family and Tales of old Mount Loftus," which he wrote down for his children.

The first known habitation here was Drumroe Castle, a stronghold of the Kavanaghs. There is a reference in Dowlings Annals "In the year 1526, Carolus Kavanagh, son of Maurice the Younger, his mother Maeve and others in the castle of Drumreagh near Killanne sometimes called 'Old Abbey,' were burnt by Cahir McArt of Polmounty." This must have given rise to the popular local legend that it was sacked by Cromwell's soldiers and Maeve was thrown over the battlements.

The next reference to Drumroe is in the Down Survey of 1660, which mentions the Earl of Ormond's portion of Drumroe, parish of Powerstown, 51 acres. Later, the Galmoy Butlers, who had castles at Barrowmount and Lower Grange, were in possession of it, but they forfeited all these lands after the Williamite wars and Confederation of Kilkenny.

The next mention is in 1703: a lease of the surrounding lands to John Eaton, presumably a Cromwellian settler, who built a house and enclosed part of the demesne and called it Mount Eaton. He settled it on his son Theophilus in 1715.

Apparently John Eaton Junior must have deviated from his Puritan ancestors. He gambled and was heavily in debt, and in 1752 Nicholas Loftus of Loftus Hall in Co. Wexford acquired all his property. Some say that Eaton wagered it all to Loftus and lost it.

Be that as it may, Lord Loftus had much difficulty in getting possession. John Eaton refused to quit, and kept two prize-fighters, one armed with a pike and the other with a blunderbuss, who never left his side so as to prevent the Chancery writ being served.

However, at last in 1758 Lord Loftus got possession of the property, and changed the name to Mount Loftus. He and Eaton came to an agreement in which Eaton was granted a lease of part of the land and lived on here

until his death. In the meantime, Lord Loftus, I presume, built the "Old House," as it was popularly called.

Nicholas Loftus, son of Henry Loftus of Loftus Hall and great-grandson of Adam Loftus, first Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, and Archbishop of Armagh and of Dublin, was created a baron in 1751, and 1st Viscount Loftus of Ely of the 2nd creation in 1756.

His father, Henry Loftus, who acquired Redmonds Hall under the Act of Settlement of Charles II and changed the name to Loftus Hall, was born in 1636. He married in 1668 Anne Butler of Garryhendon, Co. Carlow, widow of Mr. Keating of Ballymanny.

His son Nicholas, who was also M.P. for Wexford, married firstly Anne Ponsonby of Bessborough, by whom he had issue, and secondly Laetitia, widow of Arthur, 3rd Viscount Loftus of Ely of the 1st creation. The title of Viscount was re-created in Baron Loftus' favour in 1756.

Having got possession of Eaton's property in Co. Kilkenny, which consisted of 1,832 Irish acres, and his Wexford property as well, Lord Loftus settled it on his favourite but illegitimate son Edward, who was made a Baronet at his father's request, and granted the right to use the Loftus arms. I have the original patent. Lord Loftus seems to have spent the end of his days at Mount Loftus as he is buried in the vault at Powerstown Church (1764).

We are not sure who was Edward's mother. She may have been a Miss Phillips, a celebrated Dublin actress. Certainly she lived for a time at Ullard House, a few miles away. Her miniature is still here; on the back is engagingly written, "The Divine Miss Phillips."

Sir Edward married in 1745 Anne Read, daughter of the Rev. Adam Read, a young lady of some fortune in Donegal and Tyrone. She was a niece of Alexander McCauley, and her grandmother was Milfred Watson—all north of Ireland people.

Lady Loftus was a great reader, and I still have many of her books on all sorts of subjects, including novels. She was noted for her small hands and feet. She was rather a haughty lady, and Sir Edward just the opposite. In later life she was sometimes taken for his mother on their travels, which somewhat annoyed her!

They lived in style at Mount Loftus, and also at Ballymagir Manor, known as Richfield, the ancient home of the Devereuxes in Co. Wexford, and they also had a house in Dublin in Gardiner's Place.

The portraits of Sir Edward and his wife were done in 1745. I am not sure who the artist was.

Sir Edward as a young man was a Cornet in Lord

Conway's Horse, and among the Loftus papers is the "Order of Campaign of 1743 in Flanders," in what is most likely Sir Edward's handwriting, from which I conclude that he fought there under Sir John Lignier against the French under Marshal Saxe.

Sir Edward was High Sheriff of Kilkenny in 1784 — a year memorial in Irish history — and for Wexford in 1786. He was Colonel of Yeomanry in Wexford, and afterwards Colonel of the Barrow Rangers in 1797. From a letter in our records, he had a high opinion of Napper Tandy. At this time, his half-brother Henry Loftus of Richfield, afterwards 1st Earl of Ely, and Thomas Loftus, his cousin, sat in Parliament in Dublin. He himself was offered a peerage but declined it on the advice of his wife, who said they "were well-off as baronets but would make very poor Lords!"

Sir Edward and his wife had five sons and two daughters: Nicholas, Henry, Edward, John and Francis, Mary and Elizabeth, and when he died in 1818 he was succeeded by his son Nicholas as 2nd Baronet.

But I must return to the events of 1798.

Mary, Sir Edward's elder daughter, married a Rev. Mr. Carey of Mount Finn in Co. Wexford. The story of how she rescued William Farrell from the steps of the gallows is told in "Carlow in '98," the autobiography of William Farrell edited by Roger McHugh:

"In the midst of this terror and confusion, there was a Protestant clergyman, a Mr. Carey of Mount Finn, in the County of Wexford, obliged to fly with all his family, wife, children and servants, and take refuge in Carlow, to save their lives. Mrs. Carey was daughter to Sir Edward Loftus of Mount Loftus in the County of Kilkenny, and sister to Lieutenant Loftus (Edward) of the 9th Dragoons, who were quartered in the town, and as all the family dealt with us for their saddlery and goods and had a particular friendship for us, they took up their lodgings in our house. (The house of Mr. Fitzgerald, brother-in-law to Farrell.)

"As soon as the Rebellion broke out in Co. Wexford the Careys were obliged to fly for their lives and as my brother-in-law was well-known to both families, from many years of dealing, as soon as they arrived in Carlow, they came straight to his house with all their children and servants, to take lodgings, and were of course most kindly received.

"Mrs. Carey on hearing my sister's cries, ran downstairs and on seeing the condition she was in,

exclaimed, 'Oh dear Mrs. Fitzgerald, what's the matter with you?'

"'Oh Ma'am, enough is the matter with me! This unfortunate boy (W. Farrell) is to be destroyed today at Leighlin Bridge and if they'd shoot him itself, I wouldn't think so bad of it. But to make a public spectacle of him, to mangle his flesh and sacrifice him, oh, I can't bear it!'

"'Be patient, my dear Mrs. Fitzgerald, be patient; God Almighty is good,' said the kind hearted lady; 'and who knows what may be done? who knows but I can do something myself? I will go off this moment to Colonel Mahon and see what can be done.'

"She immediately ran to the door, and seeing one of the Ninth Dragoons going by, she called out, 'Soldier. soldier, come here!' The man came immediately. 'Do you know Lieutenant Loftus?' said she.

"'I do, ma'am.'

"'Well he is my brother and you must come up with me to the barracks; I want to see Colonel Mahon.'

"'Oh by all means, ma'am, I'll go with pleasure.'

"She got ready in a twinkling and set off. When she arrived at the barracks, she sent at once to enquire if the Colonel could be seen, and received for answer that he was not up. 'Go back,' said she, 'and let him know there is a lady waiting for him and that I will stay here until he comes.'

"Colonel Mahon had to get up instantly and when he came down she explained the business to him at once and begged and entreated of him to interfere for me."

Mrs. Carey must have got the reprove, for, accompanied by her brother Edward Loftus she set out with all haste to Leighlinbridge where they arrived just in time to save William Farrell's life.

It seems that the sympathy, at least of the ladies of the Loftus family, lay with the rebels, as this story is told about Elizabeth: Sir Edward had received a warning "that the climate of Mount Loftus might not suit him," so he took his wife and daughter down to Richfield in Co. Wexford when the Rebellion broke out. Elizabeth was said to have been engaged to one of the United Irishmen, Bagenal Hervey, I think. Unaware of her lover's fate, she and her mother were driving into Wexford a short time afterwards when she beheld her lover's head stuck on a pike on the bridge. She never married, and lived with her brothers at Mount Loftus until her death. Her portrait is in the drawing-room.

Sir Edward's half-brother, Colonel Nicholas Loftus, also a natural son of Nicholas Viscount Loftus of Ely by his housekeeper, Mary Heron, was in the regular army and fought under Clive in India. He returned home a rich man and was advanced to the rank of Brigadier-General and commanded a Brigade at the Battle of Vinegar Hill. A contingent of the rebel army was said to have come to Mount Loftus; they drank all the wine in the cellars and one of them stabbed the portrait of Lord Loftus with a pike. You can still see the hole.

Sir Edward's eldest son, Sir Nicholas, succeeded as 2nd Baronet in 1816. Nicholas was the first Captain gazetted to the Kilkenny Militia in 1794. He was Deputy Lieutenant for Kilkenny. He remained in the regiment until 1816 when he retired after commanding the regiment 1814/1816 in England. It was a fine Corps in 1814 and took part in the Review at Portsmouth before the Allied Sovereigns. The band was the finest in the whole army, and was maintained to a great extent by its honorary Colonel, the Marquis of Ormonde. The Duke of York had it placed in the suite of the Allied Sovereigns in England that year. Curiously enough, my father was the last to be appointed Captain to the Kilkenny Militia before it was disbanded in 1907 and re-formed as the 4th Royal Irish Regiment (special reserve).

Sir Nicholas never married and he and his brother Frank and sister Elizabeth all lived at Mount Loftus, and Nicholas kept up great style. He had a pack of Harriers which he hunted. He had the best racing stable in Ireland at the time. Among the stud were the well-known race-horses Whalebone, Hesperus and, most famous of all, Hollyhock. His brother Francis had a splendid strain of Irish red and white Setters. His diary setting out their pedigrees and training was in my father's possession until the disastrous fire here in 1934, when it was unfortunately burnt together with the paintings of Hollyhock and Hesperus. Also destroyed was a painting of three of the Setters, Quail, Flourish and Rake, and a picture of the old house with the race-horses exercising in the foreground. About three years ago, an article on the Irish Setter, mentioning the Mount Loftus strain, appeared in "The Field." I followed it up and was able to trace that some of the strain still exist though the red and white colour has been lost.

The portrait of Sir Nicholas by Gilbert Stuart shows him as a rather jolly-faced young man. He was a bit of a rake, and he and his brother Frank were notorious for their amours.

There was a regular routine for visitors to Mount Loftus. An enormous breakfast first, then a visit to the Captain's Setters. Then a visit to the stables, and after that a walk down to the Harrier kennels, the remains of which are still to be seen in the Kennel Field. Then back to the house for a Hunt breakfast. This was usually washed down with plenty of liqueurs, after which the hounds were "had out" and there was usually a hard run in which men rode hard and fast, fortified by their host's spirits and wines!

Sir Nicholas himself rode hard, drank as much as any man, loved not wisely but too well, and pleased himself, but he was a very popular man "and I never heard anything but good spoken of him," (my father writes).

Here is one of his love stories :

One day he was walking in the Barracks in Kilkenny when he saw one of his sergeants beating and abusing his wife. The wife was an extremely good-looking young woman but her husband did not seem to appreciate her properly. Sir Nicholas was touched. He had an eye for beauty and, being a gallant, still more for beauty in distress. He bought the woman from her husband there and then and took her to Mount Loftus, where he installed her in a house called Whalebone Hall near the present walled garden. Her bedroom was over the loose box of his favourite race-horse, Whalebone, and he was wont to say that he was never so happy as when he was in the arms of his mistress with his favourite racer neighing in his box below.

Of course, this was not to be stood for by his sister Elizabeth, who went off and rented a house on the Parade in Kilkenny with her niece, Mary, daughter of their brother Edward, of whom more anon, leaving Nick and Frank in possession.

They were a gay pair of bachelors and devoted to each other. Nick always sat at the head of the table and Frank at the foot opposite. Every day at dinner, Frank used to say, "Brother, I wish to drink a glass of wine with you," in the most formal manner, and Nick responded in suitable terms.

Sir Nicholas was returning from hunting one day when he was accosted by a hawker of holly sticks, which in those days were used to make whip handles, who asked "his honour" to buy one. Sir Nicholas did, but his attention was attracted by the young horse in the hawker's cart, and the hawker agreed to sell him for £5. The horse soon improved vastly, and was called Hollyhock.

He turned out to be the finest race-horse of his day in either Ireland or England. He won 15 King's Plates, The Kirwan Stakes in 1810, and the Challenge of the Kirwan Stakes three times, and the Ulster Stakes, and it was supposed no horse in England could beat him. After two trials over there he broke down and was sent to stud. His progeny, Spot and Hesperus, were both very successful. Hollyhock lived to be twenty-four. He is buried in a ring of trees in the Forge Field, and his silver-mounted hoof became an heirloom in the family.

There are many stories told about Sir Nicholas and Hollyhock, but this one I believe is true: One of Sir Nicholas' neighbours in Co. Wexford also had a very good horse. He was Mr. Boyce of Bannow, and he was anxious to match his horse against Hollyhock and lay a large wager. While Sir Nicholas was away, he sent a bribe to one of the ostlers at Mount Loftus to bring out Hollyhock for a secret trial. There was a regular training gallop here at the time, known as the racecourse — one of the gates into the park is still known as the Racecourse Gate. The groom or ostler (as they were called) was too clever for Boyce's man. The horse he brought out was not Hollyhock, and the man went home certain that their horse could beat him. Of course, on the day of the "trial" the real Hollyhock just walked away with it and Boyce, realising he had been deceived, challenged Sir Nicholas to a duel. This was to take place at dawn near Ullard, but word got around the countryside, and when Boyce arrived his carriage was stoned by the people, while others carried Sir Nicholas back to his carriage by force. His rapier and one of his shoes lost in the scuffle were at Ullard House until some years ago.

Sir Nicholas had a royal time with the old Kilkenny Militia. These were sent to Dublin in 1810, but had to be transferred to Manchester because the officers were too popular with the ladies of the Viceregal Court!

In Manchester, they were soon the rage, and afterwards marched to Harwich. At Bradford, on their way to Portsmouth, they entertained Lord Ormonde and some friends. They drank all the port in the town, broke all the glasses and ended up by drinking all the claret out of soup plates with spoons!

Next day, they had to cross a river. The revels were kept up till four a.m. They marched at five. When they came to the river, the officers all marched through it while their men went over the bridge. The officers said it cooled their blood after their revels.

Sir Nicholas afterwards commanded the regiment in

Cork, and Ennis in Co. Clare, and brought the regiment home to be disbanded in Kilkenny in 1816, on which occasion he and Colonel Wemyss were carried shoulder-high in chairs round the old city.

Sir Nicholas died in 1832, and was succeeded by his brother, Francis. He was buried in the vault at Powerstown.

Sir Francis (Frank) then became 3rd Baronet. He was the youngest of the brothers, being born in 1777. At this time, he was an invalid and his sister, Elizabeth, and niece, Mary, came back to Mount Loftus to keep house for him.

He was a great reader and also very musical, and being so much of an invalid he would often pass the time sitting up in bed playing the violin. He was nonetheless a keen agriculturalist and made many improvements to the estate. Two of the medals won by his stock at Gowran Show are on loan to Rothe House museum. He also carried out a lot of tree-planting through his agent, Matthew Murphy, who was married to his niece, Mary, daughter of his brother Edward. Most of the oak timber was planted by Matthew Murphy, who was an authority on all things agricultural and horticultural.

Sir Francis had a great dislike for his sister, Mrs. Carey, and would on no account allow her to come near Mount Loftus.

I must now return to the second brother, Edward, who was his father's favourite and said to be the best-looking of the three. His portrait by Gilbert Stuart is also here (copy). He was in the regular army and was a Lieutenant in the 4th Royal Irish Dragoons. In 1789, when he was home on leave, he fell in love with a Catholic girl, a farmer's daughter, Mary Carroll, and he married her secretly. The following year his wife gave birth to a daughter, Mary, while he was quartered in Carlow. Her father was devoted to her, and when she was three years old he was ordered abroad to the wars. He rode through Goresbridge at the head of his troop with his little daughter seated on the saddle in front of him. Two years later, he returned invalided and landed in Dublin with his uncle, Col. Nicholas Loftus. They set out for Mount Loftus, but Edward died on the way and Col. Loftus brought his body home to be buried.

Col. Loftus then wanted to adopt Mary. He offered to settle £10,000 on her and have her educated abroad, on condition she would be brought up a Protestant, but her mother would not consent. The Colonel, however, insisted on Lady Loftus taking her to live with her and looking after her. Lady Loftus had always refused to

recognise the marriage, however she did so, and her aunt, Elizabeth, adored her niece. When she grew up she married Matthew Murphy, the agent, to the great annoyance of her grandmother which caused an estrangement, but Elizabeth never allowed anything to come between her and her niece.

Mary and her husband then went to Dublin, where they purchased a house, Diswellstown. They returned to Mount Loftus after Sir Nicholas' death to managh the place for Sir Francis. He wanted her to take the name Loftus again, but she never did so, saying that her eldest son could when he married. Lord Loftus in his Will in 1758 clearly laid it down that if the male issue died out the sons of the female issue were to take the name Loftus. This Will is among our papers. It remained eventually for my father and his brothers and sister to take the name again.

Mary, Mrs. Murphy, inherited the place under Sir Francis' Will when he died in 1864. She had three sons and two daughters living. When Sir Francis died, she buried him in the vault in Powerstown and there was the usual enormous funeral, and to it came the Rev. Mr. Carey, brother-in-law to Sir Francis. It is said that when he heard the Will read he was furious as he had expected his wife would inherit. He pulled away from the funeral cortege, pulled off his crepe band and threw it in a field and raced off home.

He and his wife took a Chancery suit and set aside Sir Francis' Will on the grounds that Mary was illegitimate as her mother was a Catholic and her father a Protestant according to the Penal Code. After a lengthy hearing, the case was decided in Mrs. Murphy's favour entirely and she returned to Mount Loftus.

When she arrived at Goresbridge Station, she was met by a crowd of people who took the horses out of her carriage and dragged the carriage with her weeping from emotion all the way to Mount Loftus House, a distance of two-and-a-half miles! That night all the surrounding hills were ablaze with bonfires in her honour, for her victory was a very popular one. She had been very charitable during the famine years and had saved many families from starvation.

Only once did she incur public hostility, when one of her neighbours persuaded her to take an action over her fishing right on the River Barrow. She did so, and won her case, which became a leading case in Irish fishery law — "Murphy v Ryan and Others," and the judgement was that she was entitled to a several fishery on the

Barrow at Mount Loftus and that no one else had the right to fish there.

She died in 1869 and by her Will she charged the estate heavily in favour of her younger children and also left them all her personal property.

My grandfather, John Murphy, came into the estate without a stick of furniture and had to buy in what his brothers and sisters did not want at the auction. This was the beginning of the break-up of the estate.

John was born in 1822 at Mount Loftus, and was educated almost entirely by Sir Francis himself, who was averse to his going to school. So well did Francis succeed that in later life my grandfather was known as the walking encyclopaedia ! He married in 1868 Belinda Creagh, daughter of Piers Creagh of Mount Elva and Bryan's Castle in Co. Clare. They came to reside in Mount Loftus in 1869, and during their twelve years of married life they had five children, three sons and two daughters. He was High Sheriff for Kilkenny in 1873 and High Sheriff for Wexford in 1878. His father, Matthew Murphy, died at Diswellstown in 1876.

In the early years of their married life, Mount Loftus was maintained just as in Sir Francis' day. John had a pack of Harriers, hunters and Setters, and my grandmother Belinda had her own horses — greys which she always drove in yellow carriages. Then the land troubles commenced, and at the death of my grandfather in 1881 — he had been an invalid for the last three years of his life — the estate was insolvent by reason of the great depreciation in land values. The whole of the estates both here and in Wexford were taken over by the Landed Estate Commission.

From 1881-1888, my grandmother lived here as a tenant under the Court, and worked the place so successfully that she succeeded in retaining Mount Loftus and Richfield. In 1888, she married again Mr. Maurice Lindsay Coates and went to live in England.

In 1889, her brother, Symon Creagh, and his wife, Helena, came to live at Mount Loftus as nominal tenants to my grandmother, and they remained here until Symon Creagh died in 1898. When he died, the furniture was sold for the greater part, and the house was left derelict and was put up for sale, but there were no buyers.

In 1899, my uncle, Frank Loftus, the eldest son, was killed at the Battle of Colenso in the Boer War. He was then a captain in the 27th Royal Inniskillen Fusiliers. His Colonel wrote of him: "Poor Frank was killed in the front rank of the Irish Brigade leading and cheering



on his men." He was tall, handsome, and a keen sportsman, and was devoted to Mount Loftus and Richfield. After his death, my father, Captain John Edward Blake Loftus, became head of the family.

In 1903, Richfield having been sold and all the out-farms at Mount Loftus, the demesne and Powerstown were put up for sale. Mrs. Coates bought in Powerstown under the Act. My father writes: "Mr. Coates (his step-father) was so kind as to put me in a position to make a bid for Mount Loftus. I went over to Dublin. There was another buyer who wished to buy the place for the timber and divide up the land. I went into Court and after some excitement the judge declared me the purchaser. I had the place but nothing more." When my father took over Mount Loftus in 1904, the old house was in a very bad state of repair. The architects he consulted condemned it.

In 1903, he had married my mother, Pauline May Lichtenstadt, only daughter of August Lichtenstadt of Seymour Street, London, and when he first brought her here Mount Loftus must have presented a very derelict appearance. There was a large crack in one of the walls of the old house, the roof was bad, most of the stable buildings were roofless. They had to stay in the Range, a long, low building used formerly as a granary and steward's house. Near it stood the old dairy, laundry and the blacksmith's shop.

The present house, commenced in 1906 and finished in 1909, now occupies the site of the Range, and some of the walls are incorporated in it.

My father has often been criticised for demolishing the old house, and he himself often regretted it, but my mother had taken a dislike to it, so the old house was pulled down and my parents then settled down permanently in their new home about 1910.

My father, following the family tradition, became High Sheriff for Kilkenny and Deputy Lieutenant in 1915. He was a Captain in the 4th Battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment — the Kilkenny regiment. During the 1914-18 War, he was gazetted Major in the Machine Gun Corps being invalided out of the army at the end of the war.

My father, Major Loftus, took a keen interest in Irish politics as well as in local affairs. He had been a strong supporter of Home Rule, and though he could take no active part in the Sinn Fein movement and War of Independence, he and his brother Piers Loftus were in touch with several of the leaders, notably Arthur Griffith. They met him through their cousin, Mary O'Nolan (Maire

de Buitleur), who was active in the Gaelic revival. It is said that it was she who gave the name Sinn Fein to Arthur Griffith. She was also a friend of Bean de Valera, and it was through her that my father was able to get in touch with Mr. de Valera early in 1921 and offer him the use of his house in London during the negotiation for a truce. This house, No. 5 West Halkin Street, off Belgrave Square, had been left to my father and his brother, Piersce, by their aunt, Henrietta Sankey, widow of Sir Richard Sankey, who died in 1920.

This offer was accepted by Mr. de Valera, but was kept a close secret to ensure his privacy. While on holidays from school in 1921, I was brought by my father to meet His Excellency, President de Valera, and I still have the photograph he kindly autographed for me. My father kept all the correspondence which passed between him and Mr. and Mrs. de Valera at the time. There are also two interesting letters regarding the breach that came after the signing of the Treaty in which Mr. de Valera sets out his views.

After the Civil War, Major Loftus, who was then a strong supporter of the Farmers' Party, also became a supporter and later a personal friend of Mr. William Cosgrave. In 1926, he was elected to the Kilkenny County Council, on which body he served until his death in 1936. He was a member of the Vocational and Agricultural Committees and the Mental Hospital Committee. He became a Member of the Royal Irish Academy, and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland in 1934. He was a founder member of Barrowvale Co-op. and Gowran Race Committee.

My uncle, Piersce Creagh Loftus, was M.P. for Lowestoft in Suffolk from 1934 to 1945, and was also a member of the Suffolk County Council. He wrote several books on politics, including "The Creed of a Tory." He wrote more with an eye to political theory than the actual political scene.

In 1929, my mother died at Mount Loftus and is buried in the churchyard of St. Canice's Cathedral. My father erected a memorial window to her in the Cathedral.

My only brother, Frank Loftus, died the following year of a rheumatic complaint. He had just taken a degree in Agriculture at Trinity College, Cambridge. He was a keen sportsman and very popular, and his untimely death at the age of twenty-two was a great blow to the family.

In 1934, a large portion of the present house was accidentally destroyed by fire, but fortunately most of the family portraits and heirlooms were saved. These had



all been left back to my father by his aunt, Maria Murphy, in her Will.

In 1936, after my father's death, I became heir to Mount Loftus, and my husband, Thomas Henry (Hal) Grattan-Bellew, great-great-grandson of Henry Grattan, and I came to live here, and that concludes my story.

A ROTARY QUERN STILL IN USE

THE EGANS of Poulacapple are a small part of our history, and for two very different reasons. All of them took part in the War of Independence and one member of the family, Jim, played with the Tipperary football team in Croke Park on Bloody Sunday.

Their second claim on our interest is less well-known.

On the farm at Poulacapple, three miles from Mullinahone, there was a rotary quern which was in constant use for making quern-meal. When Ned Egan moved to his present home, Barrscuab near Dunamaggin, he bought a quern at an auction at Mallardstown, and continued to use it regularly up to the time of his illness.

These small querns are still very plentiful in this area but went out of use a considerable time ago. John O'Loan, in "A History of Early Irish Farming,"¹ says that they "remained in use until quite recent times." We may now add that at least one rotary quern was in constant use until 1967. This quern is still kept in perfect working order and is used occasionally by Ned Egan's son, Paddy. It is exceptionally well-made, and is a very fine example of the type. If not the last it must be one of the last rotary querns still in use in western Europe.

Práipín, or quern-meal porridge, is prepared in this way: wheat is dried on a griddle over a gentle heat. It is then poured into the central hole of the quern and the top stone is rotated, the meal coming out at the side where there is a gap in the rim of the lower stone. The quern-meal is mixed with hot milk and is eaten as porridge.

Ned Egan is very fond of práipín, he says, he eats it with a spoon from a mug. Though now confined to bed, he still takes a keen interest in querns and their use, and in their adjustment to give fine or coarse meal, the drying of the corn before grinding and other details of this ancient skill.

In writing this article I had the enthusiastic co-operation of the Egan family of Barrscuab. I wish to thank them for their generous help.

1—Journal of the Dept. of Agriculture, Vols. LX, LXI, LXII, Passim.