

# THE ROTHES OF KILKENNY

BY MISS M. SPARKS

THE family of Rothe was one of the most remarkable of those ten families who had an almost exclusive enjoyment of municipal offices in the City of Kilkenny from the commencement of the 15th to the end of the 17th century, and whose names have been grouped together in the well-known lines :

“ Archdekin, Archer, Cowley, Langton, Lee,  
Knaresborough, Lawless, Raggett, Rothe and Shee.”

There are several manuscript pedigrees of the Rothes, but the two principal ones are those drawn up by Robert Rothe, Attorney, in the Exchequer, in the year 1600, and the other by the well-known Herald, John Lodge.

The Rothes figure in the lists of Chief Magistrates of Kilkenny from the year 1403 to 1690. Robert Rothe was the head of the family in the beginning of the 16th century. He was Sovereign of Kilkenny in 1505, 1509, 1510, 1514, 1523 and 1537. He died about 1543. By his wife Ellen, daughter of Walter Butler, of Paulstown, and first-cousin of Piers Butler, 8th Earl of Ormond, he had, with three daughters, the following sons: David, his heir. His son, Robert Rothe, born April 28th, 1550, a barrister by profession, and standing counsel and agent of Thomas, Earl of Ormond, M.P. for County Kilkenny in 1585, died December 18th, 1622, in his 73rd year, leaving with other issue, David Rothe, of Tullamaine, whose son and heir, Robert Rothe, of Tullamaine, knighted in 1648-9, forfeited under Cromwell in 1653. William John, who died in 1590, and is buried with his wife, Lettice Rothe, in St. Mary's Church. He was a burgess of Kilkenny, and possessed a considerable amount of property in both the town and county. He had issue five sons, viz.: William, his heir; Edward, Nicholas, Piers, and David (Bishop of Ossory, 1618-50), who was an outstanding member of the Rothe family. Born in the city of Kilkenny in the year 1573. His father, John Rothe FitzRobert, a citizen of wealth and distinction, was son of Robert Rothe FitzDavid, by his wife, Ellen Butler, of Paulstown, who was a first-cousin of Pierce the Red, eighth Earl of Ormond, and a lineal descendant of King Edward I. His mother was Lettice, only daughter of John Rothe FitzPeter of New Ross. Both his parents rest in St. Mary's Church, Kilkenny, where their monument, still remaining, but almost entirely concealed beneath the boarding of the floor of the north transept, has the inscription: “Here lie John Rothe FitzRobert,

formerly burgess of the town of Kilkenny, who died September 29th, 1590, and Lettice Rothe, his wife, who died March 26th, 1602." He received his early education in his native town and studied Classics and Philosophy in the Irish College of Douay. He read a brilliant course of Theology in the University of Salamanca, where he was ordained priest, after being promoted to the Degree of Doctor in Civil and Canon Law. In or before 1602 he went to Rome, as appears from an old volume in the library of the Irish College there, which bears the following on the title page: "David Rothe, his booke, Rome, 1602."

For the next seven or eight years he remained in Rome, discharging the duties of Professor of Theology, and, at the same time, of secretary to the exiled Archbishop of Armagh, Most Rev. Peter Lombard. Feeling that Ireland should be the scene of his labours, he resolved, as soon as circumstances permitted, to return to his native land to minister there to the spiritual needs of his co-religionists. Accordingly, having been raised by the Pope to the dignity of Prothonotary Apostolic, and received the permission and blessing of Archbishop Lombard, he at length set out on his homeward journey in the year 1609. Dr. Lombard, knowing well his great zeal, prudence and ability, imposed upon him, before his departure from Rome, the full charge of his Archdiocese of Armagh, in the capacity of Guardian and Vicar-General. Dr. Rothe returned to Ireland without much delay, and in the Government list of Kilkenny priests, in the year 1610 or 1611, he is mentioned as then resident, partly in Kilkenny City, with his brother, Edward, and partly at Balleen with (his cousin), Richard, 3rd Lord Viscount Mountgarret.

Dr. Rothe was the friend, encourager, or correspondent of many of his contemporary workers in the field of Irish history, and antiquities. Of Michael O'Clery, the chief of the Four Masters, he writes thus, in the year 1628: "I gave him the few lives (of the Irish Saints) I had collected, and I sent him to Ormond, part of my Diocese, to transcribe there for a while, from whence he promised to come to Thomond, where I undertook to get many things for him, but he came not since; soon I expect him to come again, and he shall be welcome truly to me."

But though ardently devoted to the study of Irish history and hagiology, Dr. Rothe never forgot the obligations of his high office, and never failed to discharge them. On his return from Paris to this country, most probably in 1623, he may with truth be said to have taken upon himself "the solicitude of the churches"; for, not only had he taken charge of Ossory, his own diocese, and Armagh, of which he was now become Vice-Primate, but being the only bishop in Ireland his pastoral vigilance

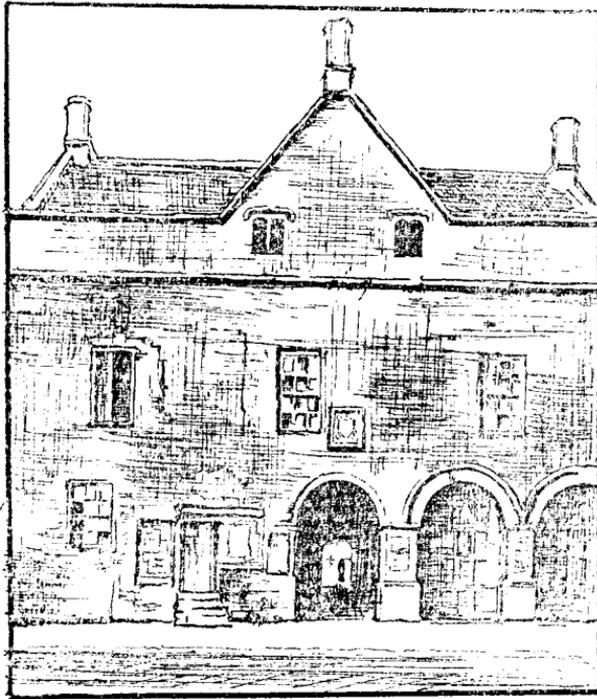
extended to every part of the country. Archdeacon Lynch pays special tribute to his zeal in administering the Sacrament of Confirmation, the grace of which was so much needed at this time by the sorely-trying children of the Gael. "As he lay concealed in the recesses of the woods or journeyed (which was mostly by night) along the highways or took refuge in the dwellings of the faithful, the children were brought to him, not only by one, but in crowds, from all the surrounding districts, in order that they might be strengthened by the Sacrament of Confirmation, so that he bore indeed the burden of the day and the heat."

Towards the close of this year, a great plague, which first made its appearance at Galway, swept over Ireland, half depopulating the cities and towns. To add to Dr. Rothe's many troubles, the plague spread to Kilkenny and began to work fearful havoc among the inhabitants. On learning this he arose from his bed of sickness and his feebleness notwithstanding, took measures for the spiritual and temporal consolation of his flock. "He caused himself to be carried in a litter from door to door, in order that he might have the satisfaction of ministering with his own hands relief to those who were victims of the plague."

Cromwell appeared before Kilkenny, March 22nd, and on the 27th of the same month the city was surrendered to him. According to the terms of the surrender, all the inhabitants, none excepted, were allowed to make their departure from the city, with their goods and go whether they would. Availing himself of this saving clause, Dr. Rothe left Kilkenny, with the remnant of the garrison, on the morning of March 28th. "He (Dr. Rothe) remained in the city with his flock to the last. When, at length, the city almost stripped by the plague, fell into the hands of the enemy, March 27th, 1650, it was stipulated that the citizens should have their lives and property, on payment of an indemnity, and that the soldiers should be allowed to march out with their arms and goods. Borne in his carriage, Dr. Rothe accompanied the retiring garrison which was allowed to march only about two miles from the city, when its rearguard was attacked and plundered by a detachment of the enemy. In the same attack a charge was made on the Bishop's carriage, during which he himself was robbed of £100, all that he then possessed. By Cromwell's permission he was allowed back into the city. He died there on the 20th of the following April, at the age of 82 years. He was buried in the tomb of his ancestors, which they had erected in St. Mary's Church, his obsequies being duly performed by his friends according to the Catholic rite, with torches burning around his bier throughout the whole night that preceded his interment.

Recently (through the courtesy of Rev. J. Clohosey) I had the privilege of inspecting the following at St. Kieran's College Museum :

A massive silver monstrance : This monstrance was preserved at Jenkinstown by the Bryan family, who presented it, with other relics of Bishop Rothe and his time, to St. Mary's Cathedral, about 1855. The Bishop's vestments, also presented to the Cathedral by



ROTHE'S ARCH BEFORE RENOVATION

the Bryan family, are likewise deposited in the College Museum. They are of richly wrought cloth of gold. On the front of the burse is a shield worked in thread, bearing the Rothe stag and surmounted by a Bishop's hat labelled, each label ending in three tassels. Rosary Beads. A black silk chalice veil, with the inscription: "Pray for the soul of Edward Roth FitzPierce; he died

November 2nd, 1664." Besides the inscription the veil has also a shield bearing the Rothe coat-of-arms, impaling the three chevrons of the Archdekins.

Most Rev. Dr. Phelan, in his will of July 1st, 1693, leaves to his successor several Episcopal articles which he got from Mrs. Catherine Archdekin Rothe, which belonged to his predecessor, Dr. Rothe. It is probable that it was in her husband's house that Dr. Rothe died. Her three sons, John, Michael and Mathew Rothe, were outlawed and attainted at Kilkenny, as Jacobites, April 21st, 1691. Her daughter, Rose Rothe, married James Bryan, of Jenkinstown, and from their union descends the present Jenkinstown family.

As the spot in which we are gathered to-day is so near the site of the old Parliament House. I think it is only fitting that I should quote for you the words of that distinguished Kilkennyman, the late Dr. Cane, about the Confederation of Kilkenny: "It was a stirring epoch. The heads of the land, the dignitaries of the Church—from the mitred Bishop to the cowled monk, the lord and the merchant, the Celtic Chief and the soldiers, the artisan and the peasant, had sworn and banded together for the Faith and the land. Their discreet counsel and martial bearing, the reputation of their leaders, the bravery of Owen Roe O'Neill, the prestige of such names as Mountgarrett, Castlehaven and Preston, with a long list of less prominent and yet as true men, drew upon the Confederation of Kilkenny the eyes of Europe, and brought to its aid money and arms from many a distant land.

"In the Parliament House assembled Mountgarrett and the leaders of 1642, there was elected the Supreme Council to which their authority was delegated and there it was ordered that money should be minted, and taxes levied, and armies raised, there they received the Ambassadors of Foreign Powers, and there was given the command of the Ulster Army to Owen Roe O'Neill, that of Leinster to Preston, of Munster to Barry, and of Connaught to Burke. In front of it paraded daily, with music and pomp and banners flying, the proudly caparisoned bodyguard of the rulers of the nation."

When the Nuncio, John Baptist Rinuccini, Prince Archbishop of Fermo, entered Kilkenny, and as the procession approached the site of the present Monster House, some students of Bishop Rothe's College, who stood at the Market Cross, saluted him, and as he himself said: "The first to present themselves were a band of fifty students on horseback, all armed with pistols, who, after caracoling for a time around me, conveyed their welcome through one of their number deputed for the purpose, he was crowned with a laurel wreath and richly robed, and he addressed some good verses to me."

Bishop Rothe's College, the Alma Mater of the above students, was situated in Rose-Inn Street, near where the bakery establishment of Mr. Patrick Crotty now stands. When Cromwell came to Kilkenny, the College, as such, came to an end.

As already stated, the Rothe family held many municipal offices from the 15th to the end of the 17th century. The principal trade the Rothés carried on was that of tanning; very many of them were tanners. They also held a considerable amount of land in the country. "Jenkin" Rothe gave Jenkinstown its name and the neighbouring townland is called Ruthstown. In the city, Jenkin's Lane is called after Jenkin Rothe. They were a very charitable family. When the funds of the Shee Alms House became very low, one of the Rothés (then in France), came to the rescue and arranged to send an annual sum of money towards its upkeep. His property was confiscated at the time of the French Revolution, and the Alms House thus received its death blow.

In the 16th century one of the Rothés founded an alms house in St. Kieran Street for poor widows.

Rothe House is certainly an imposing structure. This building, writes the late Rev. James Graves (in the year 1849), exhibits a most interesting and nearly perfect example of the urban architecture of the period, affording ample accommodation to the opulent merchant's family, his apprentices and servants, together with storage for his goods. The front elevation of the house presents a gable in the centre, crowned by an ornamental chimney, and flanked by a parapet running along the whole front at each side, with small pinnacles at the angles; a bay window corbeled out from the wall, formerly existed in the first floor; the other original windows have been removed. The plan consists of two courtyards surrounded by buildings. In front an archway gives access to the courtyard; and from this again, passage is obtained by a smaller archway to the inner court, also formerly enclosed by buildings, some of which are now removed.

In the internal arrangements of the house, there are no party walls used; each floor runs the whole extent of the building, and resting, as it does, on massive oak beams, is well calculated to support the several internal partitions, which are invariably of oak timber. In the principal rooms capacious chimney-pieces of polished Kilkenny marble canopy the ample hearths. The rooms were, and in some instances still are, wainscotted with panelled oak—indeed no other description of timber was originally used throughout the entire structure. The entire building consisted of the premises now occupied by Mr. Campion at one side and Mr. Brennan at the other, the three large rooms now used for Irish classes, a large courtyard in which is a well covered with a pedimented roof. On the pediment is an inscription to the memory of John Rothe and his wife, Rose Archer, and it bears date 1604.

The ancestors of Mr. Thomas DeLoughry (present Mayor of Kilkenny) resided in Rothe's Arch for a considerable period and carried on the business of iron moulders in the capacious out-offices attached to the building.

The Kilkenny Museum was housed in the upper room of the building for many years until it was removed to Dublin in or about 1900. The slab inserted in the front wall of this house has the Rothe Arms and underneath it the inscription: "1594. The Arms of John Rothe, son of John FitzPiers."

A religious processional banner of the Confederate period was discovered here about 1850. The tenant, while removing some of the wainscotting of the house, found concealed between it and the studding a green silk banner folded up and in excellent preservation. It measures 4ft. 10ins. long by 3ft. 4ins. wide, is bordered with variegated silk fringe, and has a list running across the top, whereby it was attached to the cross on which it was carried. On one side is painted the Coronation of the Blessed Virgin; on the other is a monstrance. This banner was carried in the Confederate processions.

The banner is now in the Dominican Church, Tallaght, County Dublin, and when the late lamented Nuncio, the Most Rev. Dr. Robinson, visited Kilkenny some years ago for the purpose of receiving the Freedom of the City, this banner was lent by the Dominican Community at Tallaght to the Kilkenny Corporation and was on view in the Town Hall. Mr. John G. Duggan was Mayor at the time.

It will be noted that Rothe's Arch is sometimes called "Wolf's Arch"—It got that temporary name from the fact that in the early part of the last century a teacher named Wolf conducted an academy in the portion of the upper out-offices attached to Rothe House.

In or about 1898 Mr. T. W. O'Hanrahan, Tenny Park, bought the premises from the late Mr. John Willoughby, The Parade, and others. He thoroughly renovated and enlarged the premises. On a slab in the courtyard is an inscription which reads as follows: "Taghtar a d'iarraidh bhun nguidhe ar son Thaidhg Uí h-Annrachain. Pe cu beo no marbh do. 'Se chuir athnuachaint ar an dtig seo agus meaduiheadh, sa bhliadhain d'aois Chríost. 1898."

Ni feidir dom níd do scri na do deigheadh i Stuagh an Ruitaig, gan tagairt a dheanamh do'n obair ata deanta agus ata a dheanamh ann chun teangan na tíre d'athbheodhchaint.

Ta moladh speisialta ag dul do Thaidhg O h-Annrachain a chuir an airead san speise san arus so, agus a thug secmraí saor o chíos do Chonnradh na Gaedhilge ar feadh tríocha bliadhán nach mor. Go mba fada buan e.

Tuilleann Comhaltas an Connartha ar mbuidheachas chomh maith mar gheall ar an suim a chuiridh san ait.