

Kilkenny Castle

By REV. T. J. CLOHOSEY

SOME few months ago the fifth Marquis of Ormonde died. He was the last of a long line of Ormondes to live in this castle. The Butlers first acquired the castle in 1391, but its history goes back 300 years earlier even than that early date. That the early Irish Kings of Ossory used the site as their residence is very probable, though we have no direct evidence of that. When the Normans came the advantages of such a remarkable position appealed to them, and Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke, or Strongbow, as we know him, erected here a moat and castle about 1170. A continuation of the Annals of Tigernach tells us that there was a hosting by Donnell O'Brien to attack the Castle of Kilkenny and the foreigners who dwelt therein. In anticipation of this attack the foreigners "evacuated the Castle of Kilkenny and came to Waterford. The town was breached, after the foreigners had left it, and the whole district was plundered. That reduction was a grief to the foreigners of Ireland."

Again, in 1192, after William Marshal had obtained seisin of the Lordship of Leinster, we hear that a castle was erected by the foreigners at Kilkenny. This may have been little more than a reconstruction of Strongbow's castle, but we may be pretty sure, at any rate, in 1207-13, when William Marshal, Strongbow's heir, came to live in Ireland and made Kilkenny his principal seat, a regular stone castle was built by him, if not already in existence. No trace of the original moat is now in existence, but it was still in existence in 1307, when an extent of the lands of Joan, Countess of Gloucester and Hertford, found that Joan held in the vill of Kilkenny "a castle in which there were a hall, four towers, a chapel, a mote, and divers other houses necessary to the castle."

The Canons of the Priory of St. John's received a grant of the tithes of the provisions of the castle, and about 1211 were appointed chaplains of the castle, and granted all oblatings and obventions there whenever the Earl Marshal and his heirs and successors should be absent elsewhere. Parts of this very ancient castle remain to this day incorporated in the present building. William Marshal, senr., Earl of Pembroke, the builder of the castle, died in 1219, and lies buried in Temple Church, London. On the death of his five sons without heirs the Kingdom of Leinster was divided among his five daughters. Of these, Isabel

received most of the County of Kilkenny and Upper Ossory. She married Gilbert de Clare, first Earl of Gloucester and fifth Earl of Hertford. The de Clares held the castle till 1314, when it passed by marriage to the Despencers. In 1391, Hugh, Baron le Despencer, sold the castle and his inherited interest in the County of Kilkenny to James Butler, third Earl of Ormonde.

The Butlers came to Ireland in 1185 with Prince John. Two brief quotations from Curtis's "History of Ireland" will suffice to indicate the powerful position the Butlers soon attained and their general policy: "In 1328 James Butler was rewarded with the Earldom of Ormond. As he had married Eleanor Bohun, a grand-daughter of Edward I, his heirs were regarded as 'cousins' of the Crown, having many rich manors in England. Henceforth they took up that leadership of the English interest in Ireland which became the tradition of their race." On the grant of 1391 Curtis makes this comment: "Thus did the Butlers complete their lordship in Ossory and make the noble Castle of Kilkenny the permanent home of their race and Kilkenny city the centre of an Anglo-Irish principality which was never lost to the English or their speech and culture."

Black Thomas, Earl of Ormond, who died in 1614, seems to have carried out some repairs, though he is usually associated with Carrick Castle, and he lived and died there. But James, the first Duke of Ormond, usually known as the Great Duke, who flourished in the 17th century, is responsible for a complete change in the appearance of the building. He fashioned (I quote the Rev. James Graves here) the old castle into a chateau in the French taste prevalent after the Restoration. At this period the large windows, high-pitched roofs and tall chimneys were inserted into and placed upon the old work. The ducal crowns upon the towers, one of which was extant in Graves's memory, were also of this date. But the present large gate of entrance in the classic style, opening on the Parade, had not then been erected. Dinely's sketch shows the original curtain wall which stretched between the south-west and north-west towers. That this wall is correctly given without a gate of entrance is proved by the discovery in the course of the spring and summer of 1861 of the foundations of the original Norman portal, with its two protecting towers or bastions, together with that of the curtain wall connecting the gateway with the south-western tower. This gateway faced the south and seems to have been of great strength. The sketches of Robertson give us a very good idea of the castle as the Great Duke built it.

John Dunton, the traveller, arrived in Kilkenny in 1698 and was shown over the castle by Dr. Wood, a Kilkenny physician



of some note. "I came to Kilkenny," he said, "on a Friday night in September, 1698, and the next morning the doctor carried me to view the castle, the noble seat of the Duke of Ormond. Indeed, the alcove chamber, the Duchess's closet, etc., well deserve a large description, but, leaving these noble apartments, I must say that adjoining is a great window that gave us a view of the private garden of pleasure, I think, finer than the Privy Garden at Whitehall, or any walk I had ever seen, being very much pleased with this prospect, the Doctor led me up one pair of stairs, where, on the left hand, was the room where the Duke of Ormond dines; it was high-roofed, extremely large, and hung all round with gilded leather: the table cloth was laid as we entered, and I think the curious foldings of the damask napkins, and pretty nick-nacks that adorned the table were worth a particular attention. The plate for the dinner was not less remarkable; there were three silver tankards embellished with curious figures, and so very large that, I believe, would his Grace have given me one of them, I could scarce have carried it to my lodgings. Leaving this noble dining room, we ascended two pair of stairs, which brought us into a gallery, which for length, variety of gilded chairs, and the curious pictures that adorn it, has no equal in the three Kingdoms, or, perhaps, not in Europe—so that this castle may properly be called the Elysium of Ireland. The first thing I saw remarkable in it, and, indeed, the top glory of all the rest, was the picture of the Duchess of Ormond; the face was finished, but the other parts wanted more of the painter's art—though very beautiful, it was much outdone by the original. There is also a design of drawing the Duke's picture, and when both are finished, Dr. Wood told me, they are intended to adorn the Tholsel (a sort of Exchange), to which will be added the pictures of all those that have been Mayors of Kilkenny. . . I next went to see the bowling green adjoining this princely seat—it is an exact square and fine enough for a Duke to bowl on; nay, Church and State were here to play, for, when the Doctor and I came to the green, the Duke was then flinging the first bowl, next bowled the Bishop of —; Col. R—; with about four inferior clergy . . . After making our devoirs to the Duke, the Doctor and I left the bowling green and went to see the garden adjoining the castle, which, though gone to decay, is now repairing by a young gardener from England."

On the other hand, Dr. Molyneux visited Kilkenny in 1709 and was not impressed by the castle. "It is finely situated to the River, but in no other respect answerable to the character it bears. There is not one handsome or noble apartment. The rooms are darke, and the stairs mighty ugly. In the Duchess's closet there are, indeed, some fine pictures, as also in the

gallery, which is grand enough. The gate house and new range of buildings belonging to the castle are mighty ugly, crooked and very expensive; though not yet finished, the gate house having already cost, as we are told, fifteen hundred pounds.' The gate house was constructed, Rev. J. Graves adds in a note, of Caen stone, unloaded from the ships in which it was imported, at Inistioge, and brought up the Nore in boats, and French artificers were employed on the work. The present entrance is part of the Duke's gate house.

In the last century considerable changes and improvements were carried out, especially about 1825 and 1861. The French chateau disappears and the castellated style made fashionable by its adoption at Windsor appears. James Robertson, in an article of the 1852 number of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society's Journal, gives some account of the circumstances leading up to the extensive renovations in 1825. In opening up some of the walls and floors a large number of features of the ancient castle were revealed. In the work of 1860 several details of stairways and corridors were simply covered over or blocked up. As we cannot see these now there is no point in going over them.

In conclusion, I quote from Mr. Leask's book on Irish castles relative to this building: "The first stirrings of the romantic movement, novels of the 'Castle of Udolpho' type, and the later more virile romanticism of Sir Walter Scott played a part in bringing about a revival of interest in medieval architecture and in the rise of the architectural Gothic revival. Among its early results were that strange anti-climax, the 'castle' of the 19th century. Anti-climax though it may be, this architectural phase cannot wholly be ignored if only for the reason that it affected some buildings of greater antiquity such as the Castle of Kilkenny, which had to be provided with doors and windows, battlements and the like in the new fashion. In this particular example the new work is of a higher quality of design than in many others of rather earlier date."