

## The Graces

By MAY SPARKS

IN the year 1566 James Grace, a member of the Courtstown family, gave up his castle in Kilkenny to the Crown, for the purposes of a gaol and he was appointed Constable of the said gaol and of the prisoners therein. His only daughter and heiress married Edward Rothe of Kilkenny (brother of Bishop Rothe) and there was issue of the marriage, Richard and Dean Thomas Rothe, who died in 1649.

Grace's Castle was formerly known as Talbot's Castle. This castle was founded by the Talbots, a family of great eminence in Kilkenny in the 15th century. The Talbots owned the castle long before it came into the possession of James Grace and the Rothés. Grace's Castle continued to be used as the County Gaol until the erection on the same site of its modern successor. The latter was first used as a courthouse in 1794. Since then all the Assizes and the Quarter Sessions of the city and county have been held there. Early in the 19th century the upper portion of the building was greatly remodelled and the balcony in front and the two stone stairways leading thereto were built.

The Graces of Courtstown sprang, not as has been stated by Mr. Sheffield Grace and others from the warrior, Raymond le Gras (the Fat), who died without issue, but from the Grace family of Sodbury in Gloucestershire. This is stated by Very Rev. Canon Carrigan. The origin of the Sodbury family is traced to Odo, Earl of Abbeville and Count of Champagne, who came with his brother-in-law, William the Conqueror, when the latter invaded England and gave the Earl the Manor of Sodbury. Odo died in 1096. By his wife Adeliza, sister of William the Conqueror, he had a son, Stephen. Stephen married and had three

sons. William was the heir. About 1217, the grandson of Stephen came to Ireland. They were great friends of the Earl of Marshall, founder of the Black Abbey, Kilkenny. In 1249, we find the Graces settled in Tullaroan. In 1470 Baron Oliver Grace of Tullaroan was Keeper of the Peace in the County Kilkenny. He died about 1500. From him onwards, the succession of the Barons of Tullaroan (afterwards "Grace's Court" and later still "Courtstown") can be traced without a breach till the overthrow of the family in 1691, according to Canon Carrigan.

Baron John Grace FitzOliver of Gracecorte was appointed Clerk of the Markets of Co. Kilkenny in 1516. He erected Grace's Chapel of Tullaroan in 1543. He was knighted soon after. Sir John's monument in St. Canice's Cathedral is dated 1552. By his wife Noreen Walsh of the Walsh mountains he had two sons, Robert and Oliver.

Oliver Grace of Inchmore (parish of Lisdowney), eldest son of Robert Grace of Courtstown, was born about 1602. He married Joan, daughter of Sir Cyprian Horsfall of Inisnag, only son of Dr. John Horsfall, Protestant Bishop of Ossory. Since his eldest son, John Grace, was a minor, on his father's death, he was given on wardship to his Protestant grandfather in 1638. He received in consequence a Protestant education and in the Book of Survey of about 1655 is referred to as an Irish Protestant.

John Grace was appointed MP for Kilkenny County in 1689. He was one of the first to receive a commission from the Earl of Tyrconnell, after that nobleman was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and he raised for King James' service a regiment of Foot, of which he was colonel and a troop of horse. One evening a delegation awaited on him with a proposal to bring over his men to King William's side, but he indignantly refused to do so and wrote back a message to that effect on the first thing he could lay hands upon—a playing card. From that circumstance the six of hearts in the Tullaroan district and

South Tipperary was always called "Grace's Card" up to about a century ago. He died in 1690.

Members of the Grace family from time to time settled in Laois and Kilkenny.

Robert Grace of Courtstown, elder son and successor of John Grace, who died in 1690, was colonel of his father's regiment. He fought at Aughrim where he was wounded and died at Limerick soon after.

Oliver Grace, a major in King James' arm, went to France for the benefit of his health. On his return to Ireland he died without issue nine days after his father's death.

John Grace, the younger son of John Grace, senior, married his cousin Lettice, daughter of his cousin Oliver Grace of Shanganagh, Laois. Their only son, Robert, died unmarried at Isleworth, England, in 1764, and with his death the direct line of the Barons of Courtstown became extinct.

---

## To Be Let

The house and demesne of Abbeyview, near Thomastown, lately inhabited by Anthony Graves, Esq. The house, gardens and grounds are in the highest order and fit for the immediate reception of a family, and contains about 50 acres. Mr. John Nugent, Thomastown, will send a person to show the premises.

—"Kilkenny Journal," March 25, 1807.