

SOME ANCESTRAL HOMES OF THE PRENDERGASTS

by

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and

Caroline Mattingly Prendergast

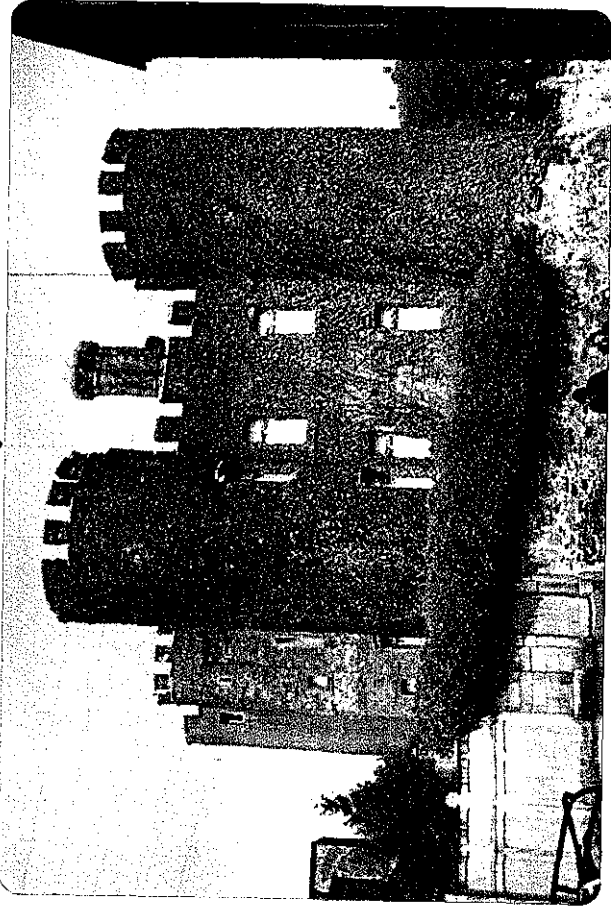
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FOREWORD

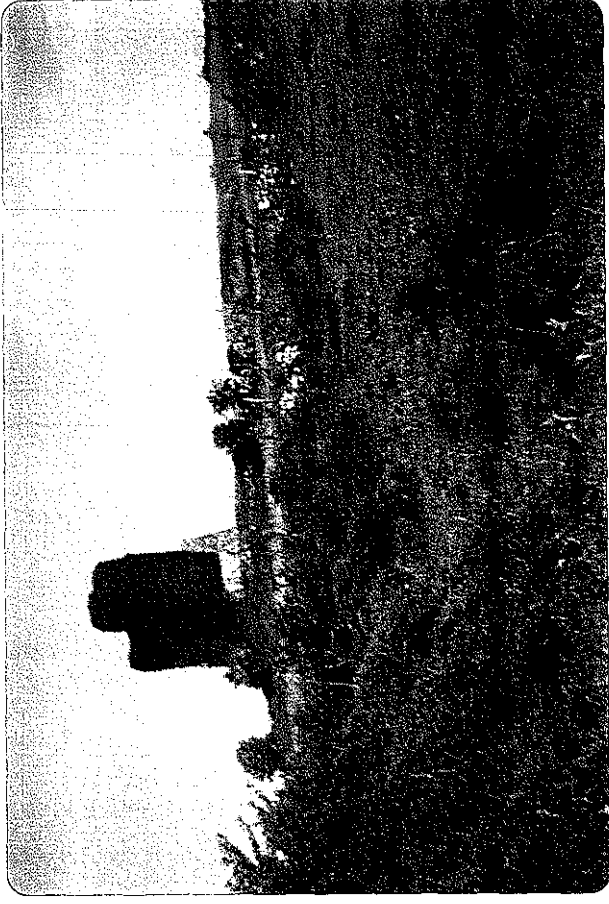
It is our desire in this little monograph to present a few 1960 pictures of Ireland, with a running comment on their place in the history of the Prendergasts and some related families. An earlier Christmas gift (1959) dealt somewhat with Ardress House, the ancestral home of the Clarkes and the Ensors near Armagh, where Caroline Ensor Prendergast was born and grew up and later spent many happy days with her small son, Francis Ensor Prendergast. Her letters to her husband record much of the life there. The two pictures of Ardress included in the 1959 paper were taken by Lucretia Prendergast Moore in 1904; the negatives are still fine and clear -- something we perhaps would not expect of our negatives fifty years later. Because of the earlier references to Ardress and the Ensors, they are omitted from this coverage.

Later study has brought in the names of many places which we did not visit; a later trip should bring in the remainder of these family-centered places. We hope you will enjoy this excursion into selected historic sites. We surely loved every minute of it!

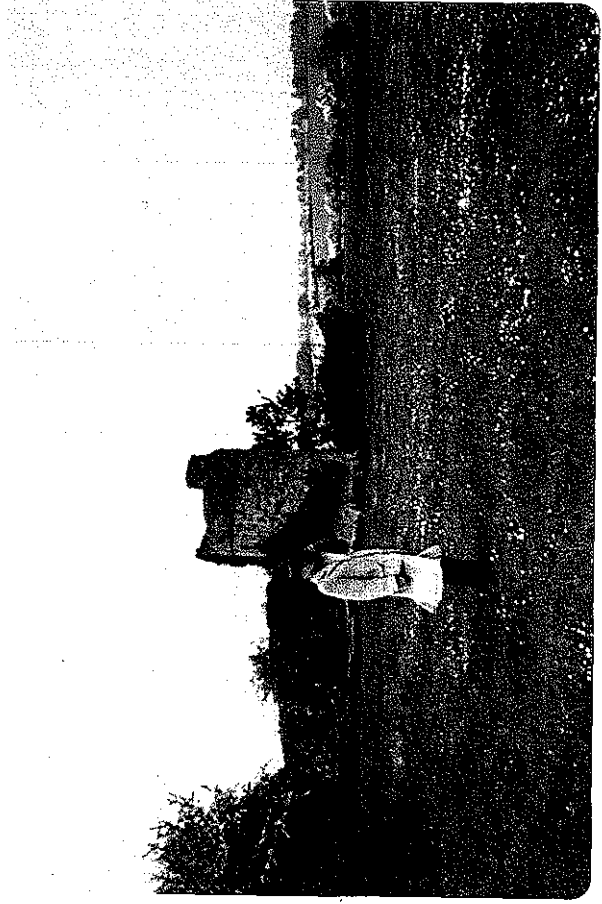
Enniscorthy



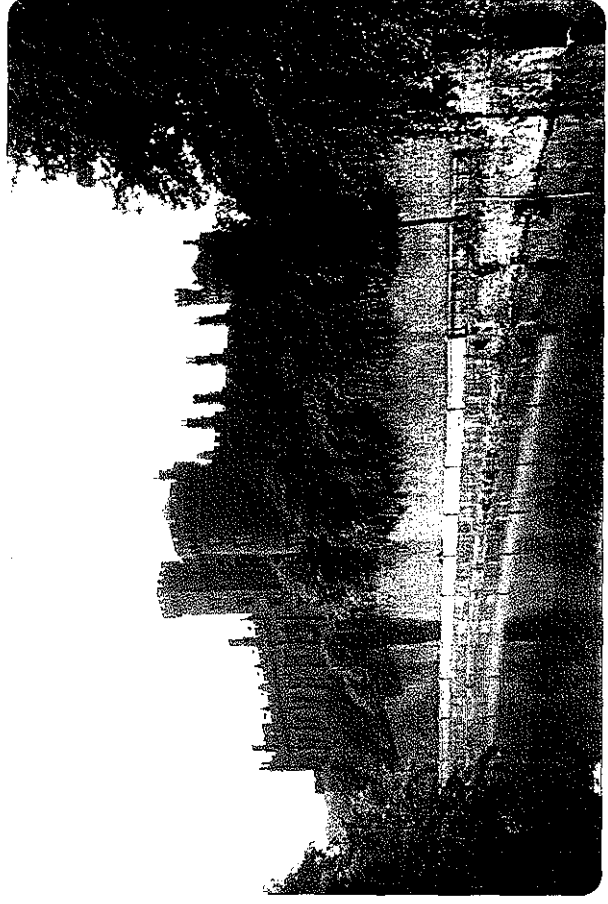
Kilcolman



Newcastle



Kilkenny



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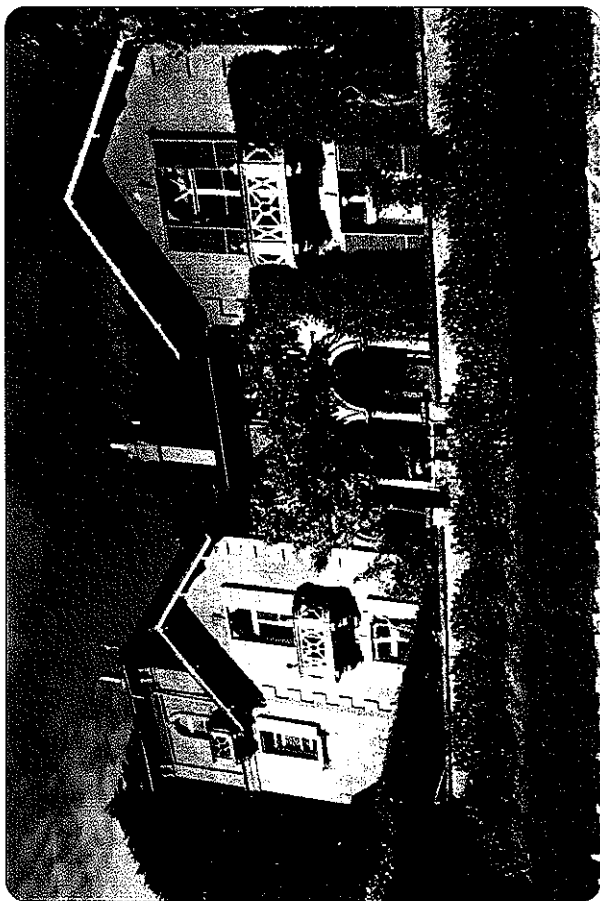
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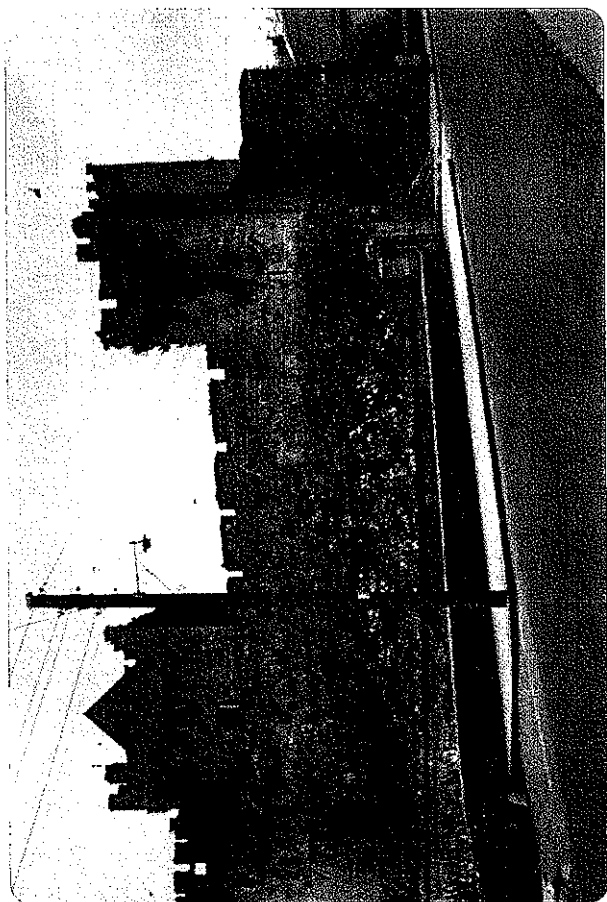
Adare



Bianca



Cahir



Blarney



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ENNISCORTHY CASTLE



A good place to begin thinking about the Prendergasts in Ireland is necessarily with property owned by the founder of the family, Maurice de Prendergast of Prendergast Castle near Haverfordwest in Wales. The name Prendergast indicates probably a Flemish origin, says always knowledgeable John Patrick Prendergast (father of Francis Ensor Prendergast); certainly great floods in Flanders in the early 12th century sent crowds of Flemish refugees to England, who must have chosen that country because of the Flemings who fought with William I in the great Conquest of England -- William's wife Matilda was a Flemish princess with plenty of character, not all of it good. (A later paper is expected to deal with some notable family ancestors, including Matilda.) Legend even connects Maurice's ancestor of a century earlier with the Conquest -- another Fleming. At any rate the accumulation of Flemings in England after the great floods became an embarrassment, so King Henry I shipped them wholesale to South Wales, where many of their descendants still remain in the Haverfordwest area.

Before Maurice de Prendergast became involved as one of the leaders in the so-called Norman Conquest of Ireland, 1169-1170, he had married, no doubt into the important Fitzgerald family (the Geraldines). For his efforts in that Conquest he received from Strongbow (another not too admirable ancestor of the family) Enniscorthy and the country around it, called the Duffrey, and he is said to have built the small neat symmetrical castle on Vinegar Hill in Enniscorthy. The other contender for the glory of having built the castle in 1199 was another leader in the Conquest of Ireland, Raymond le Gros, who gave his wholehearted help to Strongbow only for the prize of marrying Strongbow's widowed sister Basilia. Now Basilia had already had a daughter, Maude de Quincy, who married Maurice de Prendergast's son Philip. So the Prendergasts tie in with the castle one way or another.

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The family lost the castle and all that property when Queen Elizabeth, as a result of her Settlement of Ireland, took it from the Prendergasts and Fitzgeralds and gave it to one of her bully boys, Sir Henry Wallop, whose rough activities gave a common noun to our language. And so, ever since the 1590's the Wallops have been lords of the area; the head of that family today is the Duke of Portsmouth. The old castle had a very bad time of it all through the 19th century until about 1890 when a Mr. Roche from one of the Conquest families bought it for the traditional song and lived in it happily the rest of his life. Said his daughter-in-law: "Faith, and Father done a lot for the old place; he even put in partitions so there was at least two rooms on every floor. But no, I never liked it and made me husband bring me here to this flat as soon as Father was in his grave." So now it is up for sale again, and patriotic townsmen, like our friend Father Ransome of the Cathedral, hope the town will buy it for a museum.

KILCOLMAN CASTLE



Kilcolman Castle, between Buttevant and Clonmel, almost due north of Cork, was long a Prendergast property until it fell into the hands of an heiress who of course took it to her husband, a Fitzgerald of the Desmond branch. Since the Desmonds did not get along with Elizabeth I, she seized the castle along with plenty of others, and gave it to a famous English poet, Edmund Spenser, who was an administrator for the governor of the area, Sir Walter Raleigh. Spenser wrote much of The Faerie Queene at Kilcolman; many of the charming descriptions are of that countryside. But the dispossessed Irish one night burned the castle over his head, and one of his small children died in the fire. The poet soon returned to London where he died much discouraged. ("What? So much for a mere song?" one of her annoyed ministers said when Elizabeth thought to give Spenser a few pounds sterling for the great poem in which she is the central character. So Elizabeth gave him nothing.)

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After having seen so many pictures of Kilcolman in standard histories of English literature, it was a surprise that it proved difficult to locate. But at last after several inquiries, our driver brought us within sight of the single remaining tower propped up by an ample growth of ivy. It stands on a hill perhaps a half mile back from the road. Jeffry, to whom English literature is of course not quite so important as it is to a onetime professor thereof, announced he had now seen it, and that was enough for him, but the driver took us down a lane to the entrance to a very wet farmyard, where we left his lordship while we struggled through the muck, under a wire fence, and up the hill to the final victory of this picture.

NEWCASTLE



Newcastle, a few miles below Clonmel in County Tipperary, was from the 13th century one of the great Prendergast properties. It came to the family by one of those correct marriages to a de Bermingham heiress (another Conquest family), and all goes to confirm Jeffry's theory -- inspired by a discussion of Great Uncle Jeffry's perspicacity -- that no Prendergast has money sense, and can obtain money only by marrying it, and often fails to be able to hold on to what has been thus acquired. Many a Jeffry de Prendergast* lived at Newcastle from the early 13th century; one of the last to be denominated "of Newcastle" -- the equivalent of a viscounty -- was the one who died in 1615. (More of him later on page 6.) Lord Gort calculated that if the Newcastle domain had been kept together, it would, by the year 1870, have been worth an annual income of £24,000. The Prendergasts lost their importance as a great landholding family when Oliver Cromwell seized Newcastle from the 18th Lord, Edmond Prendergast, in 1656, despite promises of immunity. After the Restoration of 1660 some of the

*The other most frequently found name is Thomas.

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Irish had their properties returned to them, but not the Prendergasts -- some supporters of Cromwell still had enough political power to be able to hold on to their illgotten gains. So that was an end of the wide Prendergast lands and the grand Prendergast marriages.

Today the castle is a ruin on the River Suir and there is just a crossroads nearby with a shop or so and a blacksmith shop. The abbey, once financed by the family's gifts, is now used as a cowbarn (see picture above). The monks' stalls hold hay and farm implements, but the fine vaulted stone ceiling of the refectory is still lovely and perfect. Nearby is the greenest of green churchyards, with grass at least three feet tall in May. Here the old-line members of the family were buried over a long period; in the 1840's John Patrick Prendergast and his close friend and cousin Viscount Gort visited the place and were able to find some disintegrating gravestones. We were not so lucky, though the blacksmith assured us they had once been there. How did he know? The old folks told him when he was a boy; "Sure," they said, "Them's the same Prendergasts from Clogheen that burned the church." Apparently the family has once had some really lively members.

After Newcastle ceased to be a family property, the Prendergasts made Clonmel their center; in the 18th century they owned a place called Johnston Park; it was there that Thomas, the grandfather of John Patrick and Jeffry and Dr. Joseph Samuel, was born and grew up. Lord Gort says that Jeffry, the owner of Johnston Park in the late 18th century, was then the rightful head of the Prendergast clan. (No, we did not see it, but the next trip should surely include it.) The only evidences we saw in Clonmel of the survival of the family name were in the sign of a very ordinary looking pub, and over the door of the Ford agency and repair shop. One wonders whether the publican and the Ford man have ever heard of the glories of Newcastle, or would care about them. At any rate, the cycle from shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves is considerably longer there than it is with us.

THE VISCOUNTS GORT

This may be as good a place as any to give a few details about the Lords Gort, already mentioned. One Thomas Prendergast, a grandson of Edmond, the dispossessed 18th lord, was of course no lover of Restoration policies -- how could he be when Newcastle remained in the hands of Cromwellian strangers? -- but he was loyal to William III (William the Dutchman) who had succeeded the Stuarts. When in 1696 he was asked to join in a plot to assassinate William, he warned the King, who at once picked up the conspirators and dealt with them summarily. To Thomas Prendergast he gave a title, the sum of £3,000, and some of the confiscated lands of distant relatives, the Barrymores of Buttevant (only the foundation of their castle now remains). Sir Thomas went on to become a Brigadier General and to die in glory at Malplaquet in 1709. As a Baronet he had become a Protestant and married the daughter of a newly created Earl; his son Sir Thomas of Gort (Gort is one of the properties they received in County Galway) wasted the portions of the old Newcastle Estate that his father had repurchased, and died just before he was to receive the proper family title of Viscount of Clonmel. That title then went to the Scotts -- in that day a rather rough family -- who still hold it; a son of Sir Thomas II's sister Elizabeth in time became the first Viscount Gort. One of his descen-

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dants, the 4th Viscount, (their family name is Prendergast Vereker) was a close friend of John Patrick Prendergast; they collaborated on the big book which is our pride: The Prendergasts of Newcastle, 1169-1760. (It has always been Jeffry's wish that he could continue it to the present day.) A later descendant was the 6th Viscount Gort who was one of the heroes of World War II. His son recently bought Bunratty Castle (an O'Brien property) near Limerick, which he is restoring in order to create there Ireland's finest medieval museum. So apparently the family is in the money again; in the 1840's the Viscount Gort of that day (the 3rd Lord) sold all his Irish property in an attempt to help the sufferers from the potato famine. Two of the daughters of the line have married into the Shelley-Sidney family of Penhurst Castle, Kent -- relatives of Sir Philip Sidney and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

KILKENNY CASTLE



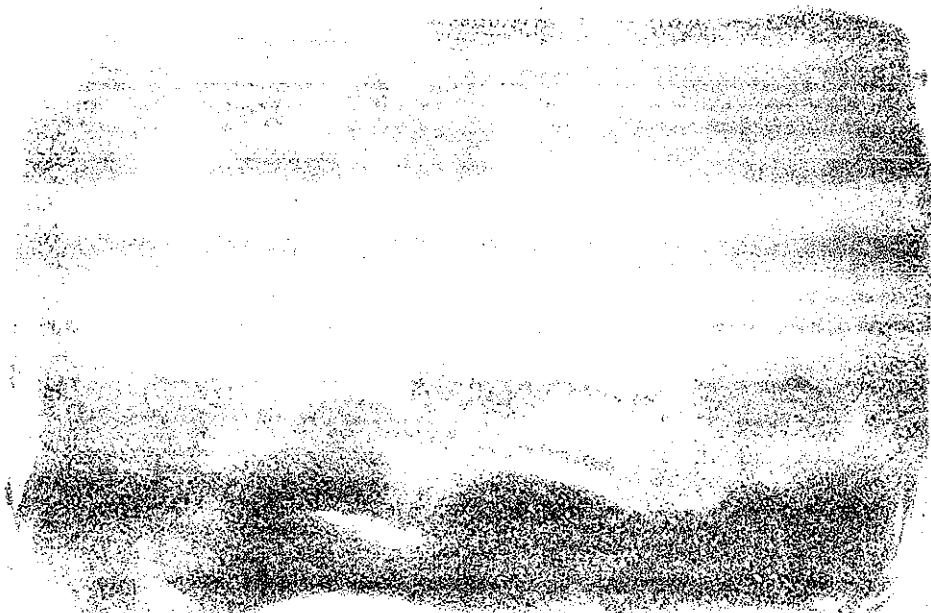
Someone has said that the history of Ireland is really just the history of the Fitzgeralds and the Butlers. What with the many Prendergast marriages into these lines, one may safely add the Prendergast name to that list.

Let us go back to the early 14th century when one of our ancestors, Eleanor de Bohun of Llanthony Castle, Wales, (a daughter of the great Humphrey de Bohun VIII and a granddaughter of King Edward I and his first wife, Eleanor of Castile) married James Butler, 1st Earl of Ormonde. (CMP's descent goes back to the same source, her line coming from Eleanor's sister Margaret, who married the 2nd Earl of Devon, Hugh Courtenay of Powderham Castle.) The newly created Earl was given large properties, and in order to provide him with proper dignities, Jeffry Prendergast, who was hereditary Sheriff of Kilkenny, was deprived of his position. There is a

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fine complex of family background in the Kilkenny neighborhood, dominated by St. Canice Cathedral where many of the ancestors are buried, and Kilkenny Castle, which the Butlers purchased in the 14th century. Here lived as a girl Eleanor Butler, (granddaughter of Eleanor de Bohun) who married Gerald the Poet, 4th Earl of Desmond (see page 7) -- Prendergast ancestors. This great castle of William Marshall (one of the authentic heroes behind the de Bohun line) is the finest of Irish castles -- in fact too fine for the present heir, the Earl of Ormonde, who now lives in England and finances the place partly by throwing it open to the public on certain afternoons each week.

CAHIR CASTLE



Cahir Castle at Cahir, west of Kilkenny, is another Butler Castle, a gloomy wide forbidding pile, once the strongest fortified place in all Ireland, which was subject to three famous sieges, including one by Cromwell. Our concern with Cahir is because it was the early home and then the property of a young girl named Joan Butler, daughter of Thomas Butler, first Baron Cahir and from the great Butler family. He left all of course to his son-and-heir Edmond, only child by his first wife. When in a few months Edmond was murdered by an unloving relative, his young half-sisters Joan and Eleanor were the co-heirs. Eleanor, who married twice, had no children; Joan, by her marriage about 1575 to Jeffry Prendergast of Newcastle (see above on page 3) had several children, of whom the son and heir was Thomas. She died in 1583, whereupon an ambitious relative, Theobald Butler, petitioned Queen Elizabeth for the castle and property. Owing him some favors, she paid willingly by giving him someone else's possessions; Joan's heir, young Thomas Prendergast, was forced to sign away his rights. (I have a copy of his formal revocation.) The descendants of Cousin Theobald hold the Cahir property to this day, although

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Lord Gort says that by law the chief male descendant of Thomas is the rightful Baron of Cahir. (Want to know who that is?) Thomas, son of Jeffry Prendergast and Joan Butler, was the father of the Edmond Prendergast dispossessed of Newcastle by Cromwell (page 4).

ADARE CASTLE



Travelling south by car from Limerick toward Cork, we stopped in one of Ireland's prettiest villages, Adare, to see the romantic ruins of the castle and chapel of the Desmond branch of the Fitzgeralds. If Strongbow, back in the 12th century, had been a better and stronger man, no doubt a Fitzgerald would have been made king of Ireland after the Conquest, greatly to Ireland's benefit (in other words, just about anything would have been better than what Ireland got.) The two great branches of the Geraldines are the Kildares, today represented by the Dukes of Leinster, and the Desmonds, who unwisely opposed Elizabeth and died out in the male line in the early 17th century. The Prendergasts tie in with the Desmond line, whose tombs are in the burial plots of the demesne of Adare. A few miles away, also on the River Maigue, are the starkest ruins of all, at Askeaton. Here too Elizabeth's men defeated the Desmonds, who seem to have had a genius for betting on the wrong horse. Gay, dashing, spirited, careless, they flit across the pages to a bad end all too fast. Eleanor Butler, granddaughter of Eleanor de Bohun and the first Earl of Ormonde (see page 6) an ancestor of the Prendergasts, married in 1359 Gerald the Poet, 4th Earl of Desmond, a brilliant man who opposed the evils of his day fearlessly. So far as I can learn, they lived at Adare, which was built in the 12th century. His poetry in the forbidden Irish language was famous in its day. Here is appended a translation of one of his best known works:

AGAINST BLAME OF WOMEN*

By Gerald, Earl of Desmond

Speak not ill of womankind,
'Tis no wisdom if you do.
You that fault in women find,
I would not be praised of you.

Sweetly speaking, witty, clear,
Tribe most lovely to my mind,
Blame of such I hate to hear.
Speak not ill of womankind.

Bloody treason, murderous act,
Not by women were designed,
Bells o'erthrown nor churches sacked.
Speak not ill of womankind.

Bishop, King upon his throne,
Primate skilled to loose and bind,
Sprung of women every one!
Speak not ill of womankind.

For a brave young fellow long
Hearts of women oft have pined.
Who would dare their love to wrong?
Speak not ill of womankind.

Paunchy greybeards never more
Hope to please a woman's mind.
Poor young chieftains they adore!
Speak not ill of womankind.

* From Poems From the Irish, by the Earl of Longford. (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis and Co, Ltd. Oxford: B. H. Blackwell, Ltd. 1945.)

BLARNEY CASTLE

Blarney Castle, a few miles north of Cork, is just a ruin, but because of the mysterious powers of its Blarney Stone, it is Ireland's most famous castle. "Me lady, do ye plan to kiss the Blarney Stone?" asked our driver as we approached the castle grounds. "No," said I, "to tell the truth, I don't think I need to." "Ah, me lady," he informed me sadly, "ye don't kiss the Blarney Stone to tell the truth."

The castle was built in 1466 by Lord Muskerry; one of his descendants, Gyles, daughter of Cormac MacCarty, 9th Lord Muskerry, went from Blarney as a bride about 1485. From her and her husband, Thomas, 12th Earl of Desmond, Joan Butler, wife of the 16th century Jeffry Prendergast of Newcastle (see page 6) is derived. Thus Blarney is one of the family's ancestral homes. The present head of the MacCartys of Cork is Lord Clancarty.

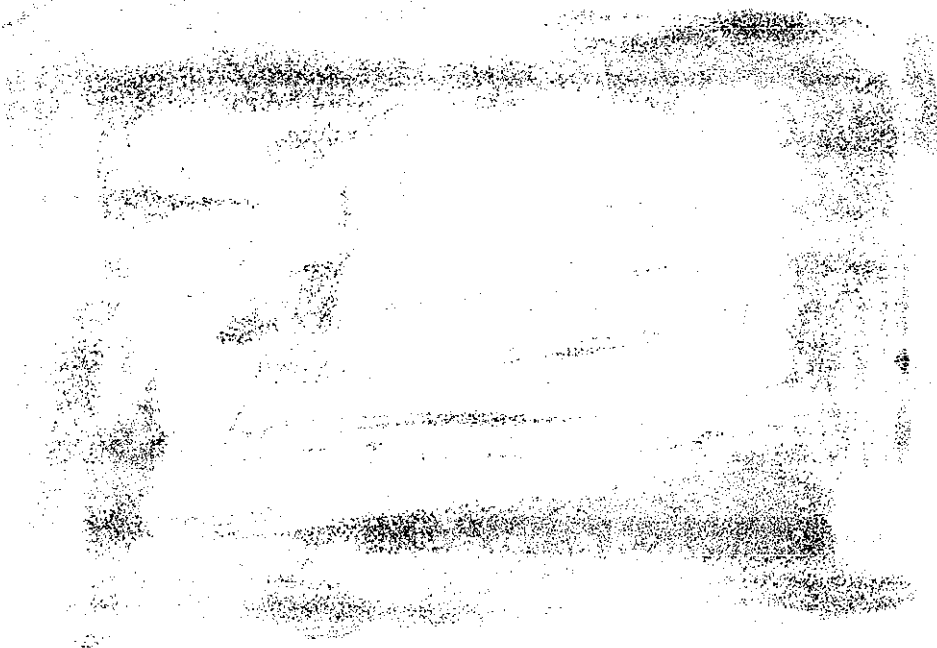
The place has a second interest for the members of this branch of the Prendergasts who are descended from John Patrick Prendergast of Dublin and Caroline Ensor of Ardress. Caroline was the second daughter of George Ensor (well-known writer on political matters and extensive landholder in County Armagh -- £3,000 would still be an acceptable income, and that is what George Ensor had) and Esther Weld (a cousin of John Patrick Prendergast and the sister of two well-known writers, Isaac Weld and Charles Richard Weld, both of whom specialized in travel books.**) Charles Richard Weld married Anne Sellwood, a sister of the wife of Lord Alfred Tennyson. The poet's younger son, now in his nineties, Sir Charles Tennyson,

** The Welds were great grandchildren of the Reverend Thomas Weld, from a prominent Roman Catholic family but a Cambridge graduate, who went out

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has written me some very gracious letters in answer to queries about the idiosyncracies of Charles Richard Weld's career.

VILLA BIANCA



The last ancestral home on our list is Villa Bianca at Bath, England. Sometime after Jeffry Francis Prendergast lost his rich childless German wife, Margaretta Sophia Wehrtmann, in 1865, he decided to settle in Bath. He selected an early 19th century Italianate house about halfway up Bathwick Hill, a region opened about 1800. The street runs practically parallel to Fosse Way, an old Roman road. All the houses are impressive and dignified, set in the usual English background of green grass, bright flowers, and stately trees. In those days the place was called Villa Bianca; now the carved stone at the entrance carries the words Casa Bianca. Bianca certainly does not apply now -- the place is a yellowish brown rather than white; it is set on a rise above the street. Across the way is Claverton Lodge, once the home of Liliash Ashworth Hallett, who had some romantic connection with Francis Ensor Prendergast. It would be interesting to learn that long lost story, now obtainable only from the Divine Information Please at some unascertainable future date. In later years it was the home of Herbert Asquith and his wife, Lady Cynthia, well-known beauty and writer of forty years ago.

to Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630's -- a very good and difficult man. (See Anya Seton: That Winthrop Woman) His son Edmund, one of the early Harvard graduates, returned home to join Cromwell's army in Ireland, but tiring of the fighting, spent his last years as chaplain at Blarney Castle. So all his descendants were British born until young Francis Ensor Prendergast migrated to the United States in 1866 and in time acquired an American wife and an American family. One cannot help wondering what circumstances led the Rev. Thomas not only from Catholicism but into the harsh ranks of the Puritans.

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When Jeffry Francis Prendergast moved in, he brought his many pieces of big handsome furniture, and plenty of other items like books, linens, silver, china, pictures, from his big apartment in Dresden, and found the right places for all of them in Bath. Jeffry Joseph Prendergast attended a big family reunion there with his father in 1883, and was made almost ill by all the attention from his admiring elders. JJP is a wonderful man, but I am sure he never seemed so marvellous as he did to all the ^{great} uncles and great aunts and the famous grandfather, for his father was the only heir to the nine members of his father's generation, and here was the child who represented the new age and the new world. In the years before Jeffry Francis Prendergast died in 1879, Dr. Joseph Samuel Prendergast, his half-brother, joined him there and became his heir. Three unmarried sisters completed the household; they were all gone by the time Dr. Joseph Samuel died in 1899. Then the next year one young JJP from Redlands, California went again to Bath, this time to sell the house and settle the estate, for Francis Ensor Prendergast had died ~~two~~ years previously, and now Mary Abbie Childs Prendergast and her seven children were the heirs. So in the course of time many of the Villa Bianca possessions travelled around the Horn to San Diego and then by freight train to Redlands, where they still remain in the various family homes except for the pieces owned and treasured by Arthur Curtis Prendergast in San Francisco.

Villa Bianca and Claverton Lodge today are sharing a similar fate -- they are part of the complex of twelve homes for the aged provided by Bath in the new welfare state. Where once the Prendergasts lived out their years, thirteen old women now live; "The only two who are anything have never been married," the attendant explained sourly. Across the street in the larger Claverton Lodge are thirty-seven old men, mostly gay and lively and longing for conversation. We saw the clean nourishing food, and admired the way houses and grounds are being kept up. And that is something. At least it is a change from the ruinous castles of the earlier part of our journey.

CONCLUSION

This monograph was written this last summer, largely while sitting beside JJP's bed in Redlands Community Hospital; it was read and approved by him on one of his brief returns home. (He died on 14 August.) Since the paper is unchanged, as the planned 1962 Christmas gift to the family, present tense is used for him.

Later I hope to return to Europe and the British Isles to continue the research that Jeffry and I were unable to finish in 1960. There are at least three more chapters to be developed: collateral families, interesting ancestors, and family tombs. I trust that I shall have time to complete our project on The Prendergast Papers. Yes, I knew it would be interesting when I agreed in 1957 to take on the responsibility for Jeffry and his treasured collections, but neither one of us ever dreamed of the expansion of the work and the time necessary for it. Perhaps my long training as what Coleridge called a "library cormorant" may yet have some value for a family which I admire so much.

SOME OF THE SOURCES

Books: Sir Bernard Burke: Peerage
Brian Fitzgerald: The Geraldines
Dictionary of National Biography
Joseph Foster: Our Noble and Gentle Families of Royal Descent
Lord Gort: The Prendergasts of Newcastle, 1169-1760

Libraries consulted: Heraldic Library in Dublin
Huntington at San Marino
Public at Los Angeles
Smiley at Redlands
State of California at Sacramento
Sutro at San Francisco