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# Notes on Irish words in Spenser's *Viewe of Ireland*

By PAULINE HENLEY, M.A.

The Irish words used by Spenser were written by him as he heard them. They must have been reasonably correct as he had a sensitive ear and had been resident in the country for some sixteen years when he produced his *Viewe*. Many of these words had passed into current use though in some cases in a corrupt form. These are mainly connected with manners and customs. Words that he has taken directly from the Irish have presented a difficulty to transcribers and have in many cases been incorrectly read. As the *Viewe* existed in manuscript for several years before being published by Ware in 1633 several copies of it are still preserved and many have been collated by different editors. None of these is in Spenser's hand, so it is not possible to tell how he wrote the words. As a matter of interest, as well as for the sake of helping commentators collating different MSS of the *Viewe*, it would be advisable that an attempt be made to indicate the pronunciation that Spenser actually heard and which he was trying to reproduce in English sounds.

At this period forms were becoming simplified ; there was, for instance, a tendency in the native speech to drop guttural endings as is shown in such place names as *Arlo* and *Carlow*, Irish *-lach* becoming *-low* or *-lo*. English scribes dealing with place-names containing unfamiliar sounds of great difficulty produce problems in interpretation for future generations. Most of the place and personal names in the *Viewe* present little difficulty. They are however nearer to the Irish than most of the modern forms, and the tendency was always to simplify even the anglicised form, e.g., short *e* usually fell off. Syllables were often eliminated, thus shortening an unwieldy word. *Dingellechooishe* appears also as *Dinglecushe* or *Dinglecush* before it ended simply as *Dingle*. *Kells* was probably still heard as two syllables, for it is also spelt *Kelles* and official documents produce such variants as *Kenles* and *Kellys*. (Ir. *Ceann lios*). The Bog of Allen had not yet lost the Irish *o* as it is written *Allone*. (Ir. *Almhoin*). The general name of Carrickfergus at this period was apparently *Knockfergus* or *-fargus* as it appears in all collated MSS in that form.

There is little variation of any importance in the spelling of names, personal or geographical, and where there is any serious discrepancy the Lambeth reading is usually less correct than the others.

*Muintir Eolais*, a barony of Leitrim adjoining the mountains, seems to have presented great difficulty as it is omitted by the British Museum copy (Additional MS 22022) from which the Globe edition is taken. Other copies have forms such as *Montroo*, *Moneroo*, *Moneroe*. What Spenser wrote it would be hard to tell, but Ware, who may have made corrections in his MS, printed *Mointerolis*.

*Briskelagh* appears as *Briskelah*, *Briskagh*, *Brisbagh*, *Brislagh*, while Ware prints the name as *Bracknah* and *Brackenah*, which is not the same place. The *Briskelagh* extended over part of Carlow and into Co. Wicklow. Here again the guttural ending was dropping off. (Ir. *Brislach*, broken or uneven land).

*Polmonte* is not in the British Museum MS. In the Globe edition it is supplied from Ware. It is the name of a pass in the mountains near St Mullins, Co. Carlow. Lambeth has *Poulmont* but the *e* must have been pronounced as it marks the plural, and survives as *y* in modern form. (Ir. *Poll in mointigh*).

*Culuers* or *Culvers* (*u* printed as *v*) is a form of the name of the Curlew mountains, but this range has nothing to do with curlews. As *w* was sometimes written *v*, *slew* represents the Irish word *sliabh*, a mountain, a sound somewhat like *sleeiv*. The Irish name of the Curlews is *Coirrshliabh* where the *s* is aspirated giving a name sounding like *Cur-hleeiv*, which English writers wrote as Curlev or Curlew. We have the same Irish word *sliabh* in *Slewloghir*, but this time without initial aspiration. (Ir. *Sliabhluachra*).

*Ballinecorih*, *Ballinecore*, *Ballinecor* are all close to the Irish name but the forms *Ballenecan* and *Ballinocros* copied by Grosart from the Lambeth MS are not correct. (Ir. *Baile na corra*).

The name *Belturbut* had apparently not yet become fixed, as besides this form there is also found the Irish *Beltarbert* and some variations such as *Bellalbot*.

Most of the Irish words used by Spenser had passed into the English speech used at the time and were as already noted in a somewhat corrupt form. Where he takes words directly from the Irish these are sometimes either incorrect in the original or copied incorrectly by transcribers who knew no Irish, e.g., we get *laun* instead of *lawv*, and Mac William Enter instead of Mac William Euter (Ir. *Uachtar*).

In speaking of the old Anglo-Irish, Spenser says that they refer to the newcomers contemptuously as 'Sassona that is English with as greate reproach as they would rate a dogg' (Bodleian MS, Rawlinson B 478). Harl. MS 1932, British Museum, has the same reading except for the spelling *Sacona*. Whether it is intended to be offensive or not the word used in Irish for an Englishman is *Sasanach*. The Lambeth MS used by Grosart has *la sa bona* which if the scribe has read it correctly makes no sense, and must be a mistake for *Sassona*. Add. MS 22022, British Museum, has *Alloonagh* instead of *Sassona*. This is without any doubt a term of disparagement. The Irish word *allmhurach* was probably known to Spenser and may well have been the word he used, using *n* instead of *r* as was sometimes done. In the Carew MSS at Lambeth there is a spurious prophecy, quoted by O'Curry in his *Manuscript Materials of History*, p. 434, in which the word is used for a foreigner from overseas.

Another word or combination which appears under different forms is *mona shul* or *beantooilh*. In this instance we have simply the plural form in the first case and the singular in the second. The Irish word *bean* (pronounced like English *ban*) is a word of irregular declension. The plural is *mná*. An epenthetic vowel had developed before the *n* in the spoken language and the scribes are trying to indicate the pronunciation of a word sounding like *mnaw*, and the epenthetic vowel is indicated by short *o* and so *mona*. The adjective *siubhail* (pr. *shooil*) would have its initial eclipsed in the feminine singular and become *tsiubhaile*; hence

*beantooilh* in the MS. This singular form is found only in the MS 22022. As Spenser is referring to a class of wandering women, the plural would be the correct form.

Another interesting word is *farrih*, a battle cry. Spenser says that besides calling on the name of their captain or of his ancestors they cry 'Faire! Faire!' This word he asserts comes from Fargus, Fergus or Ferragus, the name of a king of Scotland; he adds that there are in the north part of Ireland many men with this name, which he writes phonetically as *Farreehs*; this is pretty near the sound *Fauree-s*, which would have been how the Irish name Fergus was pronounced in his time. His derivation, however, is wrong. The word *farrih* used as a battle-cry is the Irish word *faire*, meaning 'Look out!' or something similar to 'On guard!' The word was originally *aire* and has no connection with any personal name. Thus Spenser, presuming to correct Stanihurst's even more absurd derivation from the name Pharoah, falls into another blunder.

In ascribing an English derivation to the word *galloglas* the poet is again in error. In their origin these mercenaries are Scoto-Norse and not English. The derivation is from *gall óglach*, a foreign mercenary. The loss of the final guttural gave *ógla*, and the Irish plural *óglaig* disappeared altogether in English and was replaced by *oglas*. Gallowglasses is a double plural and was used certainly as early as 1535, when Ap Parry in his report to Cromwell speaks of 'galoglasys.' On the other hand Perrot in 1590 uses 'galliglas' as the plural. Quite correctly Spenser regards the light-armed *kern* as the true native soldier.

In dealing with the words *Coygne* and *Liverye* Spenser is at a loss to know whether *coygne* is English or Irish, but inclines to the belief that it is Irish. His assumption is correct. The Irish word is *coinnmhíde* or *coinnmheadh*, and it is evident from the various readings that the pronunciation in his time would have been like the English word *coin* and the termination *ee*. Its meaning was the keep of a certain number of men and their horses.

Though the Globe edition of the *Viewe* follows mainly the British Museum Add. MS 22022, in the section dealing with battle-cries the editor substitutes *Landargabowe* for the reading *La-yarrigabowe*, which would be more correct, the battle-cry of the O'Neills being *lámh dhearg abú* (pr. *law-v yarrug aboo*). *Abú* is a shortened form of an Irish interjection *obobú* which is Spenser's *hubbabowe* or *hubbub*. The battle-cry of the O'Briens, *lámh láidir*, is left blank in all MSS, but Ware supplies it as *launlaidir* (*n* and *v* being confused).

It is not necessary to waste time over Spenser's contention that certain Irish surnames such as Byrne and Toole are of British origin, relics of an ancient British colony on the east coast of Ireland. He asserts as further proof of this contention that the Irish word *comairighe* a cry for help or protection, is also British, for they call their own language Cummeraig. He means Cymraeg, i.e. Welsh. The MS spellings of this word, *cummurreeih*, *cummurreeighe*, *comericke*, *comiree*, are fair attempts, the first being nearest.

As the exactions due to the Irish chiefs had been largely adopted by the Anglo-Irish lords all such words have an English form, or an attempt at such.

*Cuddy* (written more correctly in 22022 as *cuddeehih*), is the Irish *cuidoidhche*, supper.

*Cossherie*, *cosserie*, or *cosshirh* is the Irish *coisri*, an exaction of lodging and victuals for the lord and his retinue.

*Bonaught*, *bonnagh*, or *bonnaght* is the Irish *buannacht*, an exaction for the lord's horsemen, gallowglasses or kerns.

*Sorehon*, *sorehim*, or *sorehin* represents the Irish *sorthan* or *soirthean*, a charge set upon the freeholder's lands for a number of gallowglasses for certain days in a quarter.

*Shrah*, *shragh*, or *sragh* is Irish *sreath*, which was a yearly contribution in money for the lord's expense in attending parliaments and councils.

The Irish word *caoraigneacht* was anglicized *creete*, which signifies the moveable herds of cattle with their caretakers. With this may be associated the Irish word *buaille*, anglicized as *bolyes*, *bollies*, or *bollied* and denoting the system prevailing among the Irish of wandering with their flocks in search of new pastures.

For the Irish law system the MS 22022 has *Brehoone*, which is a passable pronunciation of the Irish word *Breitheamhain*. The word has become in English Brehon, which is the reading of the other MSS. The Globe edition has *breaqhe* for the fine or payment. This is probably a misprint or misreading for *ereaghe*. Ware prints *ereaghe*, and the other MSS have *iriach*, which is now anglicized as *eric*.

Another word to which the poet gives a fanciful derivation is *kincogish*. He says it is a compound of an Irish and an English word, and he supposes *kin* to mean kindred. He is mistaken. Both words are Irish. *Kin* is Ir. *cin*, a crime, and *comhguis* means kindred.

The other Irish words present no difficulty and call for no special comment. *Kearroogh* or *Carrowe* (Ir. *cearrbhach*, pr. *carook* or *caroo*) is another example of the disappearance of the final guttural. *Cuille* (Ir. *giolla*) shows an existing tendency among English speakers to interchange Irish *g* and *c*.