CHAPTER III.

THE GREAT PLANTATION IN ULSTER.

IT is beyond measure refreshing, after toiling through tiresome volumes in which a narrow streamlet of text finds its way through a perfect quagmire of notes, and which are so full of facts that they conceal the truth, to turn from them and let the eye wander through some chapters of 'The Fortunes of Nigel.' It is like a draught of sparkling ale after a long and dusty tramp: life comes dancing back again through the veins; the eye once more has power to enjoy the glare of heaven's light. The weary mind is in touch with something human; it realises the fact that the men who made history in James I.'s time were made of flesh and blood; that they did not act like machines, but were partly good and partly bad—certainly not the fiends that Irish patriots have painted, devouring the innocent chiefs of Ulster, who, it must be understood, need to be pictured like lambs in one of Caldecott's picture-

books, walking on their hind legs, with pink ribbons round their necks. Read 'The Fortunes of Nigel,' and you understand the part which the Scots took in the great plantation in Ulster; you comprehend, in a measure, the misshapen little king, although you probably undervalue his practical ability, when he chose to apply himself to business; and you see the poverty of the old land north of the Tweed, and the neediness of the flock of supplicants who followed James to London,—"wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together." As in a mirror, too, you see the baneful power of the royal favourites, who lived and had their being by reason of James's vanity and laziness. One sighs in vain for some similar guiding light to assist in the understanding of the men who made history in Ireland; for it is strange that in a country which is bubbling over with humour, the writers on history seem to divide themselves into the stupid people who try to write the truth, and do it stupidly, and the clever people, who do not much trouble to seek the draw-well in which truth takes refuge. And yet the men who played the great parts in this strange drama cannot have been dull uninteresting men. We know partly what the leaders of the English interest were,—Chichester, Carew, Davies,—and they have in them that mixture of good and bad parts which tempts the pencil of the historical painter. Even after kneeling in alabaster in the little church of Carrickfergus for two centuries and a half, with no company but his

wife and baby, Chichester looks a capable, many-sided man, in whom there must have been the play of light and shade. But what the Irish chiefs were who made so strange an exit from their own land we know not, unless we are able to believe the theory that they were innocent lambs, who always wore pretty bows of pink ribbon. It is unfortunate that no Irishman has arisen with the deep historical knowledge, the strong sympathy with the past, the sunny humour, and the splendid imagination of Sir Walter Scott, to throw the clear noonday light of genius on the dark places of the path—to illumine the Ireland of Chichester, as Scott has made bright the England of James I. and Salisbury.

There is much material recently made available, by the publication of the Irish State Papers, for forming some conception of Ireland in the beginning of the seventeenth century. One thing is very evident—that the English and Scots of the time looked on the Irish just as the white settlers regard Kaffirs in Cape Colony. In the official documents they are invariably termed the "mere Irish." They were treated as an inferior and subject race, who would do a graceful act if they would only disappear from history. The official reports by Government servants made in the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century, also give clear and vivid pictures of the state of Ulster. They may be taken as essentially correct, as the writers had means of observing, and no reasons for writing anything that

was not true. Ulster is always spoken of as the most savage part of Ireland. At the beginning of James I.'s time, although Elizabeth had waged fierce and devastating wars against the Ulster chiefs during most of her long reign, English authority was scarcely recognised in the north of Ireland. It was represented by the commanders of the ten districts into which Ulster was divided; but their rule was little more than a military one, and scarce extended beyond the buildings which composed their military posts,[1] and by the bishops of the Episcopal Church, who had probably even fewer followers in spiritual things than the district governors had in temporal. The country still enjoyed its native laws and customs—still obeyed its native chiefs. There were no towns in Ireland to play the part which the English and Scottish burghs had done in the middle ages, to be the homes of free institutions, the centres from which civilisation might spread. Belfast scarcely existed even in name, and Derry and Carrickfergus consisted but of small collections of houses round the English forts. The whole country, like our Scottish Highlands, was inhabited by clansmen, obeying tribal laws and usages, and living in some measure on agriculture, but mainly on the produce of their herds and flocks. The land was held by the chiefs nominally for the clans, but really for their own benefit. The tillers of the soil had no sure hold over the lands which they worked, "no certain portion of land

[1] Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1608-10, p. xxiv.

being let to any tenant;"[1] so that "the more careful and industrious the tenant, the more liable to oppression of all kinds—the more likely to be turned out of his holding."[2] In fact, the chief might deprive the clansman of his holding, just as the clansman might pass from one chief to another.[3] Rent was paid to the chief mainly in kind—in oats, oatmeal, butter, hogs, and mutton; partly in money, the amount of cash paid depending on the number of cattle fed.[4] Nor was the civic rule more satisfactory than the land tenure. The different clans of Ulster recognised the chief of the great O'Neill family as King of Ulster, when "The O'Neill" of the time was strong enough to enforce his claims. The chiefs of all the clans and septs of clans seem to have been elected from the families of the chiefs—all the sons, legitimate and illegitimate, and the brothers of the deceased being eligible.[5] A vacancy was therefore the signal for fierce contention, which frequently ended in faction-fight, and almost certainly in one party intriguing with the English authorities, to whom he promised faithful allegiance—a promise surely broken when the end of the assistance was attained. In addition, as was the fact in our Scottish Highlands, clan hatred and war between the clans was common; for each chief had his body-guard of

[1] Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1608-10, p. 534.
[2] Ibid., Carew, 1603-24, p. xiv.
[3] Ibid., Ireland, 1608-10, p. 534.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., Carew, 1603-24, p. xx. Also Sir Henry Maine's Early Law and Custom, p. 136.

"swordsmen"—the cadets of the noble houses, who were far too noble to labour, and had therefore to be provided with fighting, and with plunder too, which it was preferable to take from men of another name rather than from the humble members of their own clan.[1] Readers are very much accustomed at present to be served with roseate pictures of the happiness of Irish pastoral life before the "black shadow" of English rule fell on it. To those who enjoy such imaginative writing, the summing up of the men who have laboured to calendar the Irish State Papers will sound cold and hard and unsympathetic. "In all the State Papers the system is represented as resulting, for the tenants, in the most painful uncertainty of tenure and great social insecurity and discontent. In a political point of view the result was most formidable to the English interest, as it rendered the Creaghts (the wandering herdsmen) entirely dependent on the heads of the sept and the inferior chiefs, and placed the whole power of the community unreservedly in their chief's hands for all purposes of war or of peace."[2] It is evident too, that, although the long wars of the sixteenth century had not tended to civilise Ulster, they had had the baneful effect of desolating it to a frightful extent; for both sides conducted the war with terrible cruelty, so that the accounts of the ruin of

[1] Calendar of State Papers, Carew, p. xl. Also, Curte's History, vol. i. p. 13.

[2] Ibid., Ireland, 1608-10, p. xxviii.

the country and the loss of population are most heartrending. All authorities agree that there were great tracts of country, once fruitful, now uncultivated and without population.

The plantations in County Down and County Antrim, thorough as they were as far as they went, were limited in scope in comparison with the "Great Plantation in Ulster," for which James I.'s reign will be for ever remembered in Ireland. It is extremely difficult to make out the circumstances which led up to this remarkable measure, or to understand the action of the Ulster chiefs, who, to all appearance, played so thoroughly into the hands of the Government. The agreement concluded in the end of 1602 between the Government and the Earl of Tyrone, as the head of the Ulster chiefs, may or may not have been made in good faith. It was one which could not, in the nature of things, last, for the rights which the chiefs claimed, and the system which their rule represented, were directly opposed to the authority of any civilised government, and rendered such government impossible. James had done good service to the cause of civilisation in Scotland when he broke the power of the Scottish nobles, put a stop to clan feuds, and instituted regular circuits for the administration of justice all over the country. It was his endeavour to carry out a similar policy in Ireland, which was, in some part at least, the reason for the discontent of the Ulster chiefs.[1] Which side

[1] Calendar of State Papers, Carew, p. xviii.

first was false to the peace, it is impossible now to say. One party declares that the chiefs began to conspire against the Government; the other, that the Government drove the chiefs to conspire in self-defence. This only is plain—that the Government was Protestant, the Ulster Irish, Catholic; that the two parties hated each other intensely; and that during these very years, all over Western Europe—in Holland, in France, and in Germany—Catholic was fighting against Protestant, or keeping truce only soon to be broken. Wherever the two religions came into contact, there was war. The Ulster chiefs began to correspond with Spain once more, as if in preparation for a new outbreak; the Government intercepted the letters, and O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, and Macdonnell, Earl of Tyrconnel, confessed, if not guilt, at least fear of punishment, by leaving their country, and sailing from Lough Swilly, along with a number of adherents, on the 3d September 1607. The Government at once took advantage of the opportunity. It had long been the dream of the English Government to make a great "settlement" in Ulster; the whole of the governing class in England and Ireland warmly advocated the idea, because they scented plunder; and King James possessed in Sir Arthur Chichester, the Lord-Deputy, a man with vigour, ability, and determination sufficient for the task. The plan of the Plantation in Ulster bears evident marks of being the conception in its main outline and in its details of able men.

The lawyers of Elizabeth's reign had for years been labouring in order to vest in the chiefs, as personal holdings, the lands which they had formerly held—at least nominally—for the benefit of the tribes; and even those Ulster chiefs who were most opposed to English rule had taken out royal grants for their lands, though they declined to acknowledge English authority in other ways.[1] They had now rebelled against the King and been proclaimed traitors, and their lands were therefore "escheated" to the Crown. Estates were constantly changing hands in this way in Scotland during the sixteenth century. The more important of the chiefs had gone into voluntary exile with Tyrone; against the rest it was not difficult for the Crown lawyers to find sufficient proof of treason.[2] Thus all Northern Ireland—Londonderry, Donegal, Tyrone, Cavan, Armagh, and Fermanagh—passed at one fell swoop into the hands of the Crown; while, as we have seen, Down and Antrim had been already, to a great extent, taken possession of and colonised by English and Lowland Scotch. The plan adopted by King James for the colonisation of the six "escheated" counties was to take possession of the finest portions of this great tract of country, amounting in all to nearly four millions of acres; to divide it into small estates, none larger than two thousand acres; and to grant these to men of known wealth and substance. Those who accepted grants were bound to live on

[1] Calendar of State Papers, Carew, p. xix.
[2] The Plantation in Ulster, by Rev. Geo. Hill, chap. ii.

their lands themselves, to bring with them English and Scottish settlers, and to build for themselves and for their tenants fortified places for defence, houses to live in, and churches in which to worship.[1] The native Irish were assigned to the poorer lands and less accessible districts; while the allotments to the English and Scots were kept together, so that they might form communities and not mix or intermarry with the Irish. The errors of former Irish "plantations" were to be avoided—the mistake of placing too much land in one hand, and of allowing non-resident proprietors. The purpose was not only to transfer the ownership of the land from Celt to Saxon, but to introduce a Saxon population in place of a Celtic; to bring about in Ulster exactly what has happened without design during the last half-century in New Zealand, the introduction of an English-speaking race, the natives being expected to disappear, as have perished the Maori.

In 1608, a Commission, consisting of the Lord-Deputy and other well-known civilians, made a survey of the counties to be "planted," and drew up a report regarding them, which they sent over to the English Council,[2] who then proceeded to ask for offerers for the land. The description given by the Privy Council of the fertility of Ulster is preserved.[3] It paints in tempting colours the great natural capabilities of the country. It is stated that the soil is

[1] Calendar of State Papers, Carew, p. 154. [2] Ibid., p. 13.
[3] Ibid., Ireland, 1608-10, p. 208.

suitable for the growth of all kinds of corn, of hops and madder; that it is well watered and well wooded, and its forests are accessible by water; that parts are very suitable for the breeding of horses, and for the feeding of sheep and cattle; and that it contains everything needed for shipbuilding save tar. Nor are the sporting propensities of Englishmen forgotten, for districts are pointed out which afford cover for red-deer, foxes, martens, squirrels, &c. The English Council requested the Scottish Privy Council to draw up a list of Scotsmen willing to settle in Ulster; and a proclamation, dated "Edinburgh, 28th March 1609,"[1] is preserved, as well as the list of the Scotsmen who had responded, each man stating the amount of land he is prepared to take up, and giving the name of a "cautioner," who becomes security for the "undertaker" fulfilling the conditions of settlement.[2] The list is a long one, and some of the entries amusing—Edinburgh burgesses, for instance, having a decided "hankering" after Irish estates. The names obtained by both English and Scottish Councils were held over, and inquiry made regarding the ability of the applicants to perform their contracts; eventually very few of these Scottish offerers were accepted. The King seems to have taken the duty of selecting the Scottish undertakers into his own hands, the men who got grants being of higher social standing and wider influence than those who

[1] Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, vol. viii. p. 267.
[2] Ibid., p. lxxxviii.

first offered. A second and more careful survey having been made in 1609, the Commission proceeded, in the summer of 1610, to divide up the land. This second survey may have been better than the first, but it was very inaccurate after all, as it mapped out for division only 500,000 acres of land suitable for "plantation," out of a total acreage of 3,800,000 contained in the six counties. What is now called Londonderry County was reserved for the city of London, whose different guilds undertook its colonisation. A broad tract of country was devoted to the Church and for schools, a considerable portion for Trinity College, and portions in each county were laid out for the foundation of boroughs. The rest was divided among the old proprietors, the Irish public servants, and the English and Scottish undertakers.[1] It is with the Scotsmen only that we are concerned. Fifty-nine Scotsmen were chosen, and to them 81,000 acres were allotted in estates scattered over the five counties, Londonderry, as has been said, being reserved for the city of London. A careful examination of the list of Scottish undertakers[2] enables us to see the plan which was finally adopted for securing proper colonists. There was, of course—as was always the case at this time—a certain number of the hangers-on about the Court who got grants, which they at once sold to raise money. But as a whole, the plan of distribution was thoroughly well con-

[1] Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1611-14, p. 202.
[2] Hill's Plantation, chap. vii.

ceived and well carried out. It must be remembered that James I. was a clear-headed man of business when he chose to apply himself; that he was so much in earnest with regard to the settlement of Ulster, that he really did apply himself to the arrangements connected with it; and that he was well acquainted with his "ancient kingdom" of Scotland, and with its people. James seems to have seen that the parts of Scotland nearest Ireland, and which had most intercourse with it, were most likely to yield proper colonists. He resolved, therefore, to enlist the assistance of the great families of the southwest, trusting that their feudal power would enable them to bring with them bodies of colonists. Thus grants were made to the Duke of Lennox, who had great power in Dumbartonshire; to the Earl of Abercorn and his brothers, who represented the power of the Hamiltons in Renfrewshire. North Ayrshire had been already largely drawn on by Hamilton and Montgomery, but one of the sons of Lord Kilmarnock, Sir Thomas Boyd, received a grant; while from South Ayrshire came the Cunninghams and Crawfords, and Lord Ochiltree and his son; the latter were known in Galloway as well as in the county from which their title was derived. But it was on Galloway men that the greatest grants were bestowed. Almost all the great houses of the time are represented,—Sir Robert Maclellan, Laird Bomby as he is called, who afterwards became Lord Kirkcudbright, and whose great castle stands to this

day; John Murray of Broughton, one of the Secretaries of State; Vans of Barnbarroch; Sir Patrick M'Kie of Laerg; Dunbar of Mochrum; one of the Stewarts of Garlies, from whom Newtown-Stewart in Tyrone takes its name. Some of these failed to implement their bargains, but the best of the undertakers proved to be men like the Earl of Abercorn and his brothers, and the Stewarts of Ochiltree and Garlies; for while their straitened means led them to seek fortune in Ireland, their social position enabled them without difficulty to draw good colonists from their own districts, and so fulfil the terms of the "plantation" contract, which bound them to "plant" their holdings with tenants. With the recipient of 2000 acres the agreement was that he was to bring "forty-eight able men of the age of eighteen or upwards, being born in England or the inward parts of Scotland."[1] He was further bound to grant farms to his tenants, the sizes of these being specified, and it being particularly required that these should be "feus," or on lease for twenty-one years or for life.[2] A stock of muskets and hand weapons to arm himself and his tenants was to be provided. The term used, "the inward parts of Scotland," refers to the old invasions of Ulster by the men of the Western Islands. No more of these Celts were wanted, there were plenty of that race already in North Antrim; it was the Lowland Scots, who were

[1] Calendar of State Papers, Carew, pp. 154, 269.

[2] Register of Scottish Privy Council, vol. ix. p. 693.

peace-loving and Protestants, whom the Government desired. The phrase, "the inward parts of Scotland," occurs again and again.

The progress of the colonies in the different counties is very accurately described in a series of reports by Government inspectors, and in the letters of Chichester himself. The Deputy believed that the "plantation" was to be the greatest blessing ever conferred on Ireland, and he did his best to make it successful. When he found that the scheme was to be thwarted in some respects, he writes very bitterly of the mistakes which the English Council was making. It had allowed far too little land to those "natives" who were willing to adopt English civilisation, and it was giving grants to men who were of no use as colonists.[1] Of the Scottish undertakers, and of the manner in which they were doing their work, there is a special report; and, on the whole, Chichester is favourably impressed with them.[2] "The Scottishmen come with greater port [show], and better accompanied and attended, but, it may be, with less money in their purses." A return is made of what work each undertaker has accomplished, and of the colonists he has brought with him. It is exceedingly interesting to note how some of the planters are proceeding vigorously to carry out the terms of their contract; others more slowly; while there are a certain number who evi-

[1] Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1608-10.

[2] Ibid., Carew, p. 75.

dently from the first intend to break all the conditions under which they hold their lands. The first class have come themselves, with their wives and families. They are accompanied by servants, and by colonists to whom they have already given lands on lease. They have begun to build stone houses, with fortified courts round them, called in the country "bawns," into which cattle can be driven in cases of alarm. Trees have been felled, too; and, in one or two cases, mills erected. The tenants have not been idle, for they have put up temporary houses, and broken ground, and already they have taken a crop from the ground, "and sowed oats and barley this last year upon his land, and reaped this harvest forty hogsheads of corn." The stock of cattle is given also—"70 cows brought out of Scotland, which belong to the tenants;" or "brought over a dozen horses and mares for work;" or "hath 8 mares and 8 cows with their calves, and 5 oxen, with swine and other small cattle." The record of other planters is not so satisfactory. They have crossed from Scotland, with one or two tenants, looked at the land, and gone home again; while in one or two cases there are entries—"has not appeared, and nothing done;" or, "sent an agent to take possession, who set the same to the Irish, returned into Scotland, and performed nothing."

The most interesting reports of all are those regarding undertakers who took possession in this year (1610), made up their minds to remain and to thrive

in Ulster, and who founded families, whose names were afterwards to be well known in Ireland. In Donegal, on Lough Swilly, will be found on the map the names of two villages, Manor Cunningham and Newtown Cunningham. The men who introduced so Scottish a name into so Irish a county are thus noticed in the report of 1611: "Sir James Cunningham, Knight, Laird Glangarnoth, 2000 acres, took possession, but returned into Scotland. Three families of British resident, preparing to build." "John Cunningham of Cranfield, 1000 acres, resident with one family of British." "Cuthbert Cunningham, 1000 acres, resident with two families of British; built an Irish house of coples, and prepared materials to re-edify the Castle of Coole-M'Etreen; hath a plow of garrons, and 80 head of cattle in stock." Here, too, is a delightful picture of the first settlement of one whose descendant is considered a model Irish landowner: "The Earl of Abercorne, chief undertaker in the precinct in the county of Tyrone, has taken possession, resident with lady and family, and built for the present near the town of Strabane some large timber houses, with a court 116 foot in length and 87 foot in breadth. Has built a great brewhouse without his court. His followers and tenants have since May last built 28 houses of fair coples, and before May by his tenants, who are all Scottish men, the number of 32 houses of like goodness. There are 120 cows in stock for his own use." Then here is the record of

what was most probably a colony of Galloway men: "The Lo. Uchelrie [Lord Ochiltree], 3000 acres in the county of Tyrone, being stayed by contrary winds in Scotland, arrived in Ireland at the time of our being in Armagh, upon our return home, accompanied with thirty-three followers, gent. of sort, a minister, some tenants, freeholders, and artificers. Hath built for his present use three houses of oak timber—one of 50 foot long and 22 foot wide, and two of 40 foot long, within an old fort, about which he is building a bawn. There are two ploughs going upon his demesne, with some fifty cows and three score young heifers landed at Island Magy, in Clandeboy, which are coming to his proportion, and some fifteen working mares, and he intends to begin residence upon his land next spring, as he informs us."

There were many Scotsmen who were not showing the same activity as Abercorn and Ochiltree; but, in the main, they must have been the right kind of colonists; for most of them at once proceeded to build houses and provide food for themselves and their families. On the whole, the Scottish settlers seem to have done best, and the London undertakers the worst. The enthusiasm for colonisation was in exact reverse to the home comfort. The Scottish undertakers were poor men, many of them with estates deeply burdened with debt, and they belonged to a poor country. They were the men whom Scott has painted in 'The Fortunes of Nigel' They had everything to gain by going to Ulster, and

so had their relatives and humbler neighbours. Besides, Ireland was only across a narrow channel, and it was a country which they could see on any clear day. If James had enlisted the men of the north-west of England to aid in the settlement of Ulster, as he did the people of the south-west of Scotland, the history of Ulster would have been materially altered. To London citizens, on the other hand, Ireland was a far-off savage country, for which they did not feel at all inclined to give up the comforts and the civilised activities of the metropolis. Thus the Londoners' colony was, for the first half-century at any rate, a failure, and the "Companies" let their lands to the "mere Irish," breaking the terms of their contract, and involving themselves in ever-recurring quarrels with the Irish authorities. One good thing the "Irish Society," which managed the London settlement, did for Ireland: it founded Londonderry and Coleraine, which in course of long years grew up to be two main bulwarks of Protestantism in Ireland.