THE SCOT IN ULSTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCOT GAINS A FOOTING IN COUNTY DOWN.

THIS is the story of the first great colony which went forth from the "land of brown heath and shaggy wood" in search of a country which would repay the emigrant's toil less grudgingly than did the bare hillsides round the old home. For centuries the Scot had been wont to wander forth over Europe in search of adventure. As a rule, he turned his steps where fighting was to be had, and the pay for killing was reasonably good; for the English wars, while they devastated the country and kept it poor, made the people a nation of soldiers. Others of the race sought fortune in trade instead of in war. The story of these wanderers is known from the history of the Scots Guard, formed from the sur-
vivors of that Scottish army which helped so much to win back for France the rich plains of Gascony and Poitou, which the English had held long and firmly; and in the annals of the Scots Brigade, who did such honest, hard fighting among the Dutch dykes against that splendid Spanish infantry which Parma and Spinola led. Often, too, in the chronicles of these centuries, one gets a peep at the Scottish emigrants who had sought their fortune in trade, at Middleburg or Campvere, at Amsterdam or Lubeck, or even among the Tartars in the far-off Baltic Sea. The emigrants who lived out the fighting and the toiling, and settled in these foreign lands, founded families, in whose names may still be traced some faint record of their Scottish origin.

This is, however, the story of a different kind of emigration. These Scots who had flocked from Leith, or Crail, or Berwick to seek fortune, in peace or war, on the continent of Europe, were mostly the young and adventurous, for whom the old home life had become too narrow. They took with them little save their own stout hearts and their national long heads. If they remained permanently in France, or the Low Countries, or Sweden, they married from the people of their adopted land, and the blood of their descendants became less and less Scottish as the generations followed each other. The time arrived at last, however, when war with England ceased, and internal strife became less bloody, and Scotland began to be too small for her rapidly grow-
ing population, for in those days food did not necessarily come where there were mouths to consume it. Then the Scots, true to the race from which they spring—for “Norman, and Saxon, and Dane are we”—began to go forth, like the northern hordes in days of yore, the women and the children along with the bread-winners, and crossed the seas, and settled in new lands, and were “fruitful, and multiplied and replenished the earth,” until the globe is circled round with colonies which are of our blood, and which love and cherish the old “land of the mountain and the flood.” It was in the beginning of the seventeenth century that the first of these swarms crossed the narrowest of the seas which surround Scotland; it went out from the Ayrshire and Galloway ports, and settled in the north of Ireland. The numbers which went were large. They left Scotland at a time when she was deeply moved by the great Puritan revival. They took with them their Scottish character and their Scottish Calvinism. They founded the Scottish colony in Ulster. Thus it comes to pass “that the foundation of Ulster society is Scottish. It is the solid granite on which it rests.”¹ The history of this Scottish colony seems worth telling, for it is a story of which any Scotsman at home or abroad may be proud. Its early history is quaint and interesting; there is much of suffering and oppression in the story of the succeeding years, but there are flashes of bright-

¹ See an article in ‘Fraser's Magazine’ on ‘Ulster,” July–December 1876, p. 220.
ness to relieve the gloom. The men which this race of Scotsmen has produced are worthy of the parent stock; the contribution which this branch of the Scottish nation has made to the progress of civilisation proves that it has not forgotten the old ideals; the portion of Ireland which these Scotsmen hold is so prosperous and contented that it permits our statesmen to forget that it is a part of that most "distressful" country.

Our story opens in the days when the world was young to the nations who had embraced the Reformation; for they to whom it had been given to see that new vision of God, conceived also a new ideal of life. Then all things seemed possible to men of daring, because the old limits in both the physical and the moral worlds had been found to be but the invention of man, and the universe was to be, for all time coming, limitless. It was the world in which Shakespeare and Bacon had grown up; in which Spenser had sung of love and purity; in which Sidney had acted his gallant part, and died his chivalrous death; in which William the Silent, and Knox, and Cecil had toiled that we might live in freedom and light. It was an age in which single men with strangely inadequate means dared great deeds, which read to us now like fables; when a young adventurer set sail from Plymouth in a ship little bigger than a big herring-boat, and waged war against the greatest monarch in the world, and plun-
dered all his colonies along the Pacific shore, and sailed round the world on his way home with a million sterling worth of plunder; and when another young skipper, in five of those queer old tubs which still float on the Zuyder Zee, went out into the wonder-haunted East, and conquered a New Holland greater than the old, in case it were necessary to break the dykes and leave the old land—to give Holland to the ocean rather than to the Spaniard. It was the age in which the individual was strong and the State weak; in which strong men trusted in their own strength, and did the work of the State.

And now Queen Elizabeth, who had been the strange, fickle, uncertain, and yet withal the luminous sun in that great English world, was dead, and the fashion of the time was to change. Still, for a while her methods were followed, for the spirit of the great Elizabethan age survived, although its sun had set—still it was left to the individual to do the work of the State. One of the enterprises which occupied the adventurous spirits of the kingdom during the early years of James I.'s reign was the colonisation of Ulster, and in this the Scots took their full share.

The last years of Elizabeth's reign had been disturbed by the rebellion of the great Earl of Tyrone, who, as The O'Neill, claimed to be King of Ulster. Tyrone fought a good fight—it is not here necessary to inquire why he rebelled. He defeated the first English commander who went against him; and
cajoled the Earl of Essex, who next opposed him, into making terms, which Elizabeth at once refused to ratify. He then obtained assistance from Spain, and a Spanish force actually landed at Kinsale. This small army, as well as Tyrone's larger following, was, however, defeated by Lord Mountjoy, who succeeded Essex as Deputy. The Spaniards gladly returned home, and Tyrone submitted. So in the end of 1602, a few weeks before Elizabeth's death, the war, which had lasted from 1596, came to an end. Tyrone promised to be for the future a faithful subject; he received pardon for his treason, and was reinstated in his land. There was peace in Ireland; but Tyrone had shown what "The O'Neill" could do, when he happened to be an able man: he had united the tribes of Ulster against the English, and had shaken the English Government in Ireland to its foundation.

About this time one of the cadets of the great O'Neill family, who rejoiced in the euphonious if somewhat cumbersome name of "Con McNeale Mc'Bryan Feartagh O'Neal," got into trouble, out of which he seemed to be likely to escape only with the loss of his head.\(^1\) He ruled the Upper Clannaboys, the north half of County Down, now the most Scottish part of Ireland, and he lived in the old house of Castlereagh, a name which has since be-

\(^1\) The account of the settlement of County Down is taken from 'The Montgomery MSS., Belfast, 1869,' and from 'The Hamilton MSS., Belfast, 1867.'
come well known in English history. In the end of 1602, when Queen Elizabeth lay dying, Con happened to be holding high state in his halls of Castlereagh with his brothers, and cousins, and relatives of near degree. They were all "proper" men—to use a Celtic term of respect—and quite naturally drank Con's cellar dry; whereupon the chief despatched retainers to Belfast, two miles distant, for a fresh supply of wine. How there was wine at Belfast we do not know, for it was then scarcely even a hamlet. There his servants had a quarrel with certain English soldiers, and came back to their master's castle without the "drink." This roused Con to fury, and he threatened dire vengeance on his clansmen if they did not return to the fight, punish the English, and recover the wine. The second encounter was more serious than the first; an English soldier was killed; and the Irish Government took the matter up. O'Neill's were not just at this time popular with the ruling powers; so Con's offence, which at another time might have been passed over as a most legitimate after-dinner frolic for an Irish gentleman of quality, was termed "levying war against the Queen." Con was thrown into Carrickfergus Castle, the strongest fort in Ulster; and Sir Arthur Chichester, who was the most powerful Englishman in the North, proposed in a letter still extant to hang Con, without troubling him with a trial or waiting for leave from the Lord-

1 History of Belfast, by George Benn, p. 76.
Deputy.\textsuperscript{1} In this desperate plight Con found a "ministering angel" in his wife, and Lady Con discovered a friend who, for a "consideration," was willing to lend his assistance, and who fortunately proved just the kind of ally that was needed. This "disinterested friend" was Hugh Montgomery, the laird of Braidstane, in Ayrshire. Montgomery was sprung from a collateral branch of the noble house of Eglinton, and like so many of the lesser Scottish gentry of the period, had sought his fortune on the Continent, and seen service under Prince Maurice of Orange, in Holland. He was a capable man, whose wits had been sharpened by being compelled to discover means of escape out of troubles into which his hot blood had led him; he had been looking out for an eligible "settlement" in the north of Ireland, and kept himself aware of what went on there through relatives who traded to Ireland from the port of Irvine. Montgomery arranged for Con's rescue from Carrickfergus Castle. The plan was on the same lines as that by which he himself had a few years before effected his escape from the Binnenhof, the old palace and fortress of The Hague, well known to all visitors to Holland. The laird of Braidstane had become too eminently respectable a personage to carry out the design himself; besides, he was married now, and his wife may have had some foolish feminine prejudices against her husband doing love-making. He therefore intrusted the carrying out of the enter-

\textsuperscript{1} Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1603-6, p. 156.
prise to a relative, Thomas Montgomery of Blackston, who was owner of a sloop which sometimes traded with Carrickfergus. The said Thomas proceeded to make love to the daughter of the keeper of Carrickfergus Castle, and became a great favourite with the household; and, like a generous fellow as he was, he at all times was ready to give the guard as much drink as they cared for. So it came to pass that love-making and wine somewhat discomposed the discipline of Carrickfergus Castle—even to this day the discipline of Irish jails is said to be somewhat loose. Con was furnished with a rope by which he let himself out of his window, found Thomas Montgomery's sloop waiting for him, and himself in the good house of Braidstane, within a few hours. To Thomas's honour it must be recorded that he did really marry the jailer's daughter, "called Annas Dobbin, whom I have often seen and spoken with, for she lived in Newtown till anno 1664."

Arrived at Braidstane, Con entered into an agreement by which he ceded half his lands in Clannaboye to Montgomery, on condition that the latter obtained a free pardon from King James for all his offences, and got him admitted to kiss the King's hand. This indenture was believed to have been "fully indorsed and registered in the Town Councill book of the royal burgh of Air or Irvine."¹ The entry, however, has never been discovered in the Town Council records of these burghs. Mont-

¹ Montgomery MSS., p. 28.
gomery set to work to fulfil his part of the agreement, with the help of his brother, who held position at Court; but his influence proving insufficient, he was compelled to have recourse to another Scot, whose word had more weight with the King. This “kindly brother Scot” was James Hamilton, who had settled in Dublin some years before the Union as a schoolmaster. He had been employed by James VI. as a political agent for various purposes, and especially to gain the adhesion of the Irish leaders to James’s claims to the crown of the United Kingdom. Hamilton’s influence proved sufficiently potent. Con was admitted to the royal presence, and kissed the King’s hand, received pardon for the offences of himself and his kinsmen, and returned in triumph to his ancestral halls of Castlereagh. Yes; but a new agreement had been found necessary, and poor Con’s lands had to be made broad enough to satisfy James Hamilton as well as Hugh Montgomery. So, on the 16th April 1605, letters-patent were issued under the Great Seal, “on the humble petition of Conn M’Neale M’Bryan Feartagh O’Neale, and of Hugh Montgomery, Esq., and of James Hamilton, Esq.,” granting to the said James Hamilton all the lands in the Upper Clannaboye and the Great Ards which had been possessed by Con or by his father, Bryan Feartagh O’Neale, in his lifetime. Hamilton became bound to “plant” the lands with English and Scottish colonists, and to grant them only to those of English and Scottish blood, “and not to any of the mere Irish (excepting the said Conn
O'Neale and his heirs)."1 Thus this great tract of land, the northern half of County Down, was handed over to Hamilton, who had before entered into agreement with Montgomery and O'Neill as to what portion he should retain, what share Hugh Montgomery should receive, and how much of his ancestral estate should be restored to Con O'Neill.

It is a strange story, but thoroughly characteristic of the time; for it was a period in which popular feeling was singularly inert, the Reformation fire having burned down, and the great Puritan revival not yet arrived. The affairs of the country were therefore "arranged" by King James, with the assistance of a knot of courtiers—shrewd, keen men, without any very high sense of the beauty of unselfishness. There is no doubt, too, that the main points in the story are strictly true, and the principal actors are real figures in history. James Hamilton became first Sir James and then Viscount Clannaboye, a title now borne by his descendant, the late Viceroy of India, Lord Dufferin and Clannaboye. Montgomery became Lord Montgomery of the Ards, and although the peerage has become extinct, the Montgomerys still hold a portion of the land which they acquired at this time, and still bury among the romantic ruins of Grey Abbey. Con soon managed to run through his property, and disappears from history: but his son Daniel fought for Charles I.; went into exile with Charles II.; returned with him; mar-

1 Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1603-6, p. 271; also see "Miscellany of the Abbotsford Club," p. 270.
ried the Countess of Chesterfield, and died at the English Court in 1663, wealthy and honoured.¹

It must be noted that the idea of planting colonies in Ireland from the neighbouring island was not a new one. Again and again, during Elizabeth's reign, schemes of colonisation had been drawn up, but these had as a rule failed because the men chosen to carry them out were of the wrong stamp. This was not even the first attempt to "plant" the southern shore of Belfast Lough, for it had been granted thirty years before to Sir Thomas Smith, but he had been driven out by the O'Neills. The grant to Smith in 1579, like those given thirty years later by James I., aimed at a thorough colonisation of the country, for he was bound "to enter in with a power of natural Englishmen," and "to divide the lands with such as hazard themselves, or aid with men and money."² The Earl of Essex next tried his fortune, and failed. The settlement succeeded now for two reasons: first, because King James's Government was so strong that it could keep the peace even in Ireland; and secondly, because Scotsmen had been for nearly a generation deprived of their wonted occupation of civil war, and therefore had taken the "itch" for emigration. As soon as County Down was opened up, colonists flocked across, until the district became Scottish.

¹ Benn's History of Belfast, p. 77.
² History of the County of Down, by Alexander Knox, M.D. Dublin, 1875.