

BALLINASMALE CARMELITE ABBEY

1288-1870

*Stephen Josten, O.Carm.
Ballinasmale Abbey Conservation Committee.
16 July 1984.*

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*"I am not an old wall
I am a milestone in the history of devotion
Once I was a Carmel
Now I am a souvenir of a great light
That will not fade."*¹

The ruins of St. Mary's Carmelite Abbey, Ballinasmale, Claremorris, are fragmentary. An altar still stands in what appears to have been an often reconstructed penal chapel. Professor Etienne Rynne of the Department of Archaeology, UCG, believes that the "Penal Church" with its 17th century Moore Chapel was originally a 16th century sacristy or Lady Chapel adjoining the earlier larger 13th century church some of which remains with the night stairs leading to what was the Carmelites' dormitory. A number of people in the Claremorris area testify that their parents or grandparents attended the last Mass offered by the Carmelites in that reconstructed thatched chapel of Our Lady about 1870.

It would seem that twenty five years after *The Great Famine* in Ireland (1845-47) the Carmelites left Ballinasmale for two reasons: firstly because of the newly built church in nearby Claremorris town and secondly because of the scarcity of priests at a time of great emigration, particularly from the West of Ireland and the urgent request of the bishops of America and Australia for priests to minister to the Irish who had come to those shores in their hundreds of thousands. It would appear that the last Carmelite to have remained at Ballinasmale was Father John Carr who went to Whitefriar Street Church in Dublin to succeed Father Spratt as chaplain of what is now St. James's Hospital, Dublin, and then as Provincial. In a sense the Irish Carmelite sacrifice of Ballinasmale and a few years later of the Priory of Toghergar gave birth to the Carmelite Provinces of St. Elias in America, to the Australian Province of Our Lady Help of Christians and shortly after that to the now restored Welsh-English Province of the Assumption of Our Lady.

*"How many a glorious name for us
How many a story of fame for us,
They left: Would it not be a blame for us
if their memories part
From our land and heart
And a wrong to them, and a shame for us?"*²

"WELCOME BACK CARMELITES!"

On the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, July 16th, in the Knock Centenary Year, 1979, Canon John Sweeney, the parish priest of Claremorris, Co. Mayo, invited the Carmelites of Whitefriar Street Church, Dublin, to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass again in their ancient monastic ruins of Ballinasmale after an interval of over 100 years. It was a nostalgic evening remembered by all. The Claremorris Convent of Mercy Band piped the "Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel," clad in their brown and white habits, back

to their ancient ruins. In front of the band a number of local children carried a large banner which read "WELCOME BACK CARMELITES!" A large number of local people came across the rolling hills to attend the open-air evening Mass which was concelebrated by six Carmelites and a number of other local priests. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass has been offered on the Feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in the Ballinasmale Abbey ruins almost every year since then.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass offered again in ancient monastic ruins where the same Sacrifice was offered almost continuously for 600 years stirs deep emotions. Every Mass is a communion with the living and the dead, a moment of eternity, the one redemptive sacrifice of Christ on the Cross actualized in a given time and age. "*Past is prologue to the future*" the poet wrote. "*Not to know what happened before one was born is always to be a child*" the Roman orator, Cicero, said. If only the stones of Ballinasmale could speak! The very ruins indicate much suffering, much destruction through the centuries and yet much faith and continuous "*coming back*" in hope and love.

The 1730 Ballinasmale Penal Chalice in the possession of the Carmelite community, Whitefriar Street, Dublin, was used in the 1979 Ballinasmale Mass and in successive years. It is described in J. J. Buckley's "*Some Irish Altar Plate*" as the "*Edmond Bourke*" chalice with a Crucifixion engraved on one of its facets and made by Joyes or Joyce of Galway. The inscription on the chalice reads: "Pray for Edmond Bourke Parish Priest of Killereran & Family who Bought Me for ye Honor of God and use of ye Convent of Ballinasmale Ano Do 1730."

The 1979 Knock Centenary Year Mass in the 13th Century Carmelite Abbey of St. Mary's, Ballinasmale, has resulted in renewed interest in the "THE CARMELITE ABBEY OF CLAREMORRIS" – now in danger of falling into dust. During the past year a "Ballinasmale Abbey Conservation Committee" has been formed. The people of Claremorris Parish have petitioned the Commissioners of Public Works to declare "St. Mary's Abbey" a National Monument and the local conservation committee has been successful in receiving grants from the Youth Employment Scheme to clean the Ballinasmale cemetery where new paths have been put in, graves have been levelled and cleaned and where the outside walls have been repaired. Much voluntary work has gone into making these schemes viable and substantial contributions have been received both from the people of Claremorris Parish and from former parishioners now living in America.

Gwynn & Haddock in their book "*Mediaeval Religious Houses – Ireland*" (p. 287) state that according to the Papal Letters (IPCf22) the Carmelite "Abbey" of Ballinasmale was founded in 1288/9. As we approach the 7th Centenary of the founding of St. Mary's Carmelite Abbey, Ballinasmale, in four years time (1988) this booklet is an attempt to preserve the memories of those from whom we have received the heritage of faith and ancestry least, in failing to do so, as the poet says, it be "*a blame for us... a wrong to them and a shame onus*." "This booklet is also written as a token of thanks to Canon John Sweeney of Claremorris, Prof. Etienne Rynne of University College, Galway, Fr. Peter O'Dwyer, O.Carm., archivist of the Irish Province, Mr. P. J. Morley, T.D., Senator Jim Higgins, Mr. Martin Finn,

Chairman of the Mayo County Council, Bernard Moran, the Goggins, the Egans, the D'Altons, the Waldrons, the Hegartys, the Mannions, the Lavelles, the Navins of Ballinasmale, all our generous friends in the USA, and in a very particular way to Mr. Sean Coakley formerly Postmaster of Castlebar, and all those without whose continual encouragement and help neither the present renovations in Ballinasmale nor this booklet would have been possible.

ST. MARY'S ABBEY, BALLINASMALE:

Its Relevance To Claremorris, To Knock & To The Carmelites

The preservation of the Carmelite Abbey of Ballinasmale is of importance for three reasons: firstly, it is the closest religious link to the town and barony of Claremorris through the centuries; secondly, as a monastery of friars uniquely dedicated to Our Lady it prefigures by six centuries the Apparition of Our Lady of Knock; and thirdly, as more historical documentation becomes available it is increasingly seen as a centre of reform and rebirth for the Irish Carmelite Province.

THE CARMELITE ABBEY OF CLAREMORRIS

As the only religious house founded and endowed by the Prendergast family of Brize Castle and as their burial place as well as that of their successors, the Catholic family, Moore, Ballinasmale is of particular significance to the barony and town of Claremorris. As well, until recent years when the "New Cemetery" for Kilcolman Parish was established, all of the older families of Claremorris were laid to rest in the cemetery adjoining Ballinasmale Abbey. The 1624 More Chapel with its remaining Latin inscription as well as the 1690 Prendergast tombstone recently discovered in the Abbey ruins gives concrete evidence of Ballinasmale's relation to the Prendergast and the More families. In the documents we find the "More" family of Brize Castle also spelled 'Moore.'

Lady Maria More's first husband, Sir Brian O'Rourke, a prominent Catholic, was beheaded in London on the 3rd of November, 1591 (J.G.A.H.S.) The Mayo branch of the More family seems to have been founded by John Moore, who was appointed Clerk of the Crown of the Province of Connaught and Thomond on the 13th of July, 1581, and there is some evidence that the family was connected with Henry VIII's martyred Lord Chancellor, St. Thomas More. The evidence of the apparent martyrdom of Lady More's first husband, Sir Brian O'Rourke, together with the documented evidence of the long sufferings in the dungeons of Dublin Castle of one of the Carmelite friars of Ballinasmale, the much maligned Bishop of Killaloe and later of Kilmacduagh, Malachy Malone, are indications of how much the faithful and the Carmelites associated with Ballinasmale Abbey suffered from the time of the Elizabethan Dissolution of the Monastery almost until Catholic Emancipation in 1829.³

The name "Ballinasmale," like so much else in history, is difficult to identify with certainty. Nollaig O Muraile of the Dublin Ordinance Survey Office offers the suggestion that the

diminutive of Smála, that is, Smalán, is said to mean “a torch and also a hillock.” The monastery is located amongst small hillocks and we notice that in mediaeval documents the names of Carmelite priories are often descriptive of the area in which they are located. A local tradition ascribes “smile” to refer to the wick or the last inch of a candle and when either the first Carmelites or earlier Irish monks sought a place to build their monastery the abbot or priest of Kilcolman told them that they could do so at the place where the wick of the candle in their lantern burnt out. Hence the name “the townland of the candle” or “the town of the hillocks.” “There is a tradition that the Carmelites established their monastery in 1288 in Ballinasmale on the site of a much earlier Irish monastic foundation, perhaps dating back beyond the 8th century, A.D. It is interesting that the local people still pronounce the name of the place as “Baillinasmále” and not “Ballinasmall.” Nollaig O Muraíle also suggests that Ballinasmall (*Baile an smálaigh*) may have been named after the Anglo-Norman *Small* family who possibly were camp-followers of the Prendergasts. William Bald’s Map of Co. Mayo (1812) shows clearly the unique topography of Ballinasmale – surrounded by low hills or eskers which substantiates the interpretation of “Ballinasmale” as meaning “The Town of the Hills.”

The Moores of Brize Castle near Balla do not appear to be directly related to the Moores of Moore Hall who had returned from Spain and who gave Connaught its first President, John Moore, at the time of the 1798 Rising as well as the author George Moore. However, because Moore Hall is relatively close to Brize it would seem possible that the two families are at least distantly connected.

Fr. Michael Lyons, P.P., former Rector of St. Colman’s College which adjoins Ballinasmale Abbey relates that one of the reasons why the candle on the St. Colman’s College crest was chosen was because of the “Smále” traditional interpretation as meaning the bottom inch of the candle. If there is reason to believe that Bailena-Smále refers to the wick of a candle it is significant that when the Carmelites left Ballinasmale about 1870 they left in the safe keeping of Mrs. Judy Hill-Doble an altar candlestick which is still used at the annual Ballinasmale Mass and which is presently in the keeping of her grandson, Liam Byrne, of Claremorris. Mrs. Judy Hill-Doble was the aunt of the young Knock visionary, Patrick Hill who, because of this family’s close association with the Ballinasmale Carmelites, must have been friendly with the Carmelites or at least Father Carr.

The remaining 13th century west wall of the church and the double cloister “night stairs” to the original church of Bailinasmale Abbey give archaeological confirmation of the documentary evidence given by the late Fr. Aubrey Gwynn, S.J. that “The Abbey of St. Mary’s, Ballinasmale” was established with Papal Approval in 1288/9 by the Prendergast family of Brees (Brize) Castle from which the barony and town of Claremorris takes its name. The antiquarian, Dr. Conor Maguire, M.D. wrote that Claremorris probably received its name from Maurice de Prendergast who came over with Strongbow in 1170. “CLÁR CLAINNE MUIRIS” probably means the plain (Clar) of the clan or family (Clainne) of Maurice (Muiris). The town of Claremorris does not appear to have existed, even as a village, much earlier than 1700. Mediaeval small towns were associated with the Prendergast castle at Brize near Balla as well as with the later castle of Ballyhowley near

Knock which is said to have been built with the stones of Ballinasmale Abbey after its Dissolution in 1585. Nollaig O Muraile writing in Bernard O'Hara's "MAYO—ASPECTS OF ITS HERITAGE" (1982) says MUIRIS SUSACH MAGGERAILT PRENDERGAST lived in the late 13th and early 14th centuries, that is, at the time of the founding of Ballinasmale Abbey, and it was from him that CLAINNE MUIRIS (Claremorris) received its name. Maurice Prendergast is also described as MacGerailt (son of Gerald) which is still found in the name of another nearby Prendergast stronghold, viz: CASTLEMAGGARRET. In the late mediaeval period the Prendergast family was known as CLANN MUIRIS NA MBRÍ from the stronghold of Brees or Brize. H. T. Knox in "THE HISTORY OF THE COUNTY MAYO" (p. 265) gives an account of Red Hugh O'Donnell spending Christmas, 1595, with the Prendergasts at Brize Castle. The Prendergasts seem to have come to Ireland from Wales. The name "MacMuiris" was anglicised MacMorris and at a later period became Fitzmaurice. By 1607 the Prendergast castles of Brize and Murneen came into the possession of John Moore. Richard and Myler MacMorris lost possession of Castlemacgarret about 1603 to Dominic Lynch while Ballyhowley Castle was acquired by Edward Dillon before 1627. (cf. the yet unpublished 1968 notes "History of Claremorris" of John Coakley.)

Court tombs at Shinganagh and Ballynastangford Lower near Claremorris town indicate the area was inhabited by Neolithic Man as early as 3,500 B.C. The parish of Kilcolman originally belonged to the Diocese of Mayo and the area was in the early Christian era called "TIR NECHTAN" because it was settled by descendants of Nechtain and Enna, sons of Brian Orbsen who was king of Connacht about 480 A.D. In the 5th century A.D. a tribe from Munster, called the CIARRAIGHE, descendents of Ciar, the son of Fergus MacRoigh and Maeve, became dominant in the area. The area around Claremorris became known as "Ciarraighe Uachtair."

Monsignor D'Alton of Ballinrobe, the uncle of Cardinal D'Alton, in his book "HISTORY OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF TUAM (1928) while writing of the parish of Claremorris (Kilcolman) says:

"There were Christians in the parish as early as the days of St. Patrick. There was a Bishop Colman, who gave to St. Patrick his church of Cluain Cain, and this would probably be the present church of the parish, and from the saint the parish took its name. This Colman was obviously not St. Colman of Boffin and Mayo, and we therefore must conclude that he was simply a bishop of St. Patrick's time, and that he laboured in the modern parish of Claremorris."

Although Kilcolman Parish is mentioned in a few 14th and 15th century tax evaluations most of the mediaeval and Penal Days documented ecclesiastical history of Kilcolman Parish is to be found in relation to the Carmelite Abbey of Ballinasmale.

The remaining 13th century Ballinasmale Carmelite ruins would indicate that from 1288 for 300 years until its dispossession by Queen Elizabeth in 1585 the Priory (or "Abbey") was relatively large, similar to the Dominican Priory of Urlar outside of Ballyhaunis in design and structure, housing fifteen or more friars. When the Carmelites were established at Ballinasmale, only 62 years after the approval of their Rule by Pope Honorius III in 1226,

they undoubtedly lived a strict monastic life, observing the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and giving much of their lives to celebrating Holy Mass, chanting the Divine Office and silent prayer as prescribed by the Rule. Because the Carmelite life in its beginnings was contemplative we find that a number of its early houses were in isolated places but as the needs of the apostolate increased through the years we see them increasingly established throughout the towns and cities of Europe.

Father Peter O'Dwyer, O.Carm., the Irish Provincial archivist and writer in his 1969 "CARMELUS" article observes that the Ballinasmale Monastery of the Order located in the midst of surrounding hills near a small river with a number of cells "*suggests something like the situation on Mount Carmel but on a smaller scale.*"⁴ Even during this 300 years of relative peace there was need of renewal and reform within the Order and the Irish Provincial Chapter of 1871 records a visit of Blessed John Soreth, who was General from 1452–1471, and who was the main instrument in promoting reform within the Order at that time. He is also attributed to be the founder of the convents of contemplative Carmelite nuns. It is possible that Ballinasmale Abbey was founded while "the Saint of the Scapular," the English General, St. Simon Stock, was alive. If this should be so Ballinasmale Abbey would have a particular relationship to the now re-acquired pilgrimage centre of Aylesford Priory, Kent.

Fr. Doohan, quoting the State Papers of 1574-85 says that "*Queen Elizabeth took ownership of the Abbey of St. Mary's and a quarter of land (approximately 120 acres) attached to it in 1585.*"⁵ Donatus O'Gormley was Prior of the monastery at the time and there was a mill attached to the Priory. Lodge in the Record of Rolls states that in 1605 "*the site and precinct of St. Mary's Abbey of Ballinasmall*" was granted by King James I to John King of Dublin, son of the notorious Archbishop King.

Father O'Gormley, the Prior of Ballinasmale, appears to have remained in the area at least 30 years after dissolution because in the Inquisition of the 27th of August, 1616, we read "*Donogh Boy O'Gormley, late Prior of the Priory of Ballinasmall of the Order of Carmelites in Co. Mayo was seized of a quarter of land.*"

Throughout the 17th century we read in the Carmelite archives in Rome of Carmelites holding on in Ballinasmale in spite of the severity of the persecutions which, except for one priest, Fr. Shea, almost decimated the Irish Province in 1640. Yet the light of Ballinasmale, though faltering, seems never to have been fully extinguished. Mr. J. F. Quinn in an article entitled "The End of Denis Browne" which appeared in THE WESTERN PEOPLE a number of years ago says: "THE ABBEY OF BALLINASMALA, ADJACENT TO CLAREMORRIS, WAS NEVER SUPPRESSED."

BALLINASMALE: HERALD OF KNOCK

As the closest mediaeval monastery to Our Lady's Shrine at Knock the Carmelite Abbey of Ballinasmale takes on a particular significance.

The late Fr. Thomas Doohan, O.Carm. in the 1955 Terenure College Annual records that on the occasion of the 18th Annual Carmelite Pilgrimage to Knock Shrine in August, 1953, Dr. Joseph Walsh, Archbishop of Tuam, in a gracious tribute to the Carmelites, reminded the Irish and American pilgrims of the long, self-sacrificing, and fruitful service given by the Carmelite Friars through the ages to the church and to the people of Ireland. Then the Archbishop pointed across the hills a few short miles to the south of Knock's gable wall, to the ancient Carmelite Priory of Ballinasmale, as proof that "The Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel" had laboured in that district for centuries. This concrete link between Ballinasmale and Our Lady's Shrine in Knock is vividly portrayed in Harry Clarke's beautiful stained glass window of our Lady presenting her "garment of grace," the Brown Scapular, to St. Simon Stock which remains today in the old Parish or Apparition Church of Knock. The window was given by the Irish and American Carmelites in 1961 in memory of the late Fr. J. S. Rabbitte, O.Carm. and in the left-hand corner of the Scapular Apparition window there is a facsimile of the nearby Ballinasmale Carmelite Abbey ruins.

In the graveyard at Knock in which a number of the visionaries are buried there remains today a wall of a 14th or 15th century "pre-Reformation" church around which, according to the 1825 manuscript of Daniel Campbell, the "*People used to perform Stations*" in the late 1700s.

In a letter written about 1645, probably by Fr. William of St. Patrick, O.Carm., to the Papal Nuncio to Ireland, Archbishop John Baptist Rinuccini, shortly after the Elizabethan persecution, the Carmelites explain to the Nuncio: "*Our Fathers in Ireland have been either expelled or slain*" and the same letter says the Carmelite houses "of the ancient observance" "*known to us*" in the Province of Connaught are: *Ballinasmale; Loughrea; CALLARENSE; Galway;* (shown on a 1599 map of Galway City, cf. Hardiman) *Dakaccense* (as yet unidentified) and *Montanense* (which probably is either Knockmore near Gurteen in Co. Sligo or Eglis in the parish of Ahascragh, Co. Galway.)⁶

Fr. McCaffrey in his book "THE WHITE FRIARS" says "*Callarense is Calry, a parish in Sligo.*" (p. 429). Other than Knockmore (later Mt. Irwin) in the parish of Gurteen there is no evidence of any other mediaeval Carmelite Priory in Co. Sligo. However, Nollaig O Muraille in Bernard O'Hara's recently published "MAYO" writing of the parish of Knock, Co. Mayo, observes that the parish of Knock in the Annates of 1492 is known as *CNOC DROMA CHALRAIGHE* or simply *DROIM CALRIGI* in the Tax of 1302. "Knock" means "hill," "drom" means a ridge – leaving the basic early name of Knock as "CALRY" after an early Irish tribe. "Callarense" of the Rinuccini list of 1625 Fr. McCaffrey identifies as "CALRY" (the early name of Knock.) Certainly a similar situation occurred in the case of the 1320 Carmelite foundation of Caltra-na-Pallice in Co. Galway because we find documented

evidence of other nearby mediaeval Carmelite Priors at Eglis (Montanense?) with its cell at Bellaneny as well as the early (1332) Carmelite Priory of Crevaghbane in the parish of Killererin near Tuam. All four of these mediaeval Carmelite Priors as well as the later Carmelite Priory of Toghergar near Ballygar were within 20 miles of one another. It would seem that it would be more logical to suggest that the CALRY of the 1625 Rinuccini List refers to a mediaeval Carmelite cell or Priory in Knock (Calry) Co. Mayo, – four miles from Ballinasmale rather than suggesting that it refers to Cairry in Co. Sligo where there is no other indication of a mediaeval Carmelite foundation. Prof Rynne identified the remaining wall of the mediaeval church in the old Knock cemetery as being “pre-Reformation,” i.e. 15th or 16th century. Further evidence of Carmelite “cells” or Priors associated with Ballinasmale and close to it has been supplied by Fr. Patrick Costello, parish priest of Ballyhaunis, who relates that the late Tuam Diocesan antiquarian, Father Michael Malone of Ballinlough, told him, that a Carmelite church or cell associated with Ballinasmale was located in KILBEG (formerly “KILBEG MALONE” and perhaps referring to the persecuted Bishop Malachy Malone of Ballinasmale) which existed in the 17th century. This KILBEG is located about 1 mile from Claremorris on the Ballyhuanis road near to the present house of John Byrne.

Although Knock church is in the barony of Costello both the baronies of Costello and Clanmorris are part of the parish of Knock and the proximity of the Prendergast and later Dillon Castle of Ballyhowley a mile from the present Knock church on the Claremorris Road would indicate that Knock looked to Claremorris rather than Ballyhaunis in terms of administration through the middle ages. Knock parish even today is in the Deanery of Claremorris.

The particular spiritual relevance of St. Mary’s Abbey, Ballinasmale, with Our Lady’s Shrine of Knock might be seen in the fact that the “Order of the Brothers of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel” is the oldest Order in the Church specifically dedicated to Mary, the Virgin Mother of God. “*The Carmelite vocation*” the 15th century Carmelite theologian Arnold Bostius said “is basically VACARE DEO, to be at rest with God,” and, adding the Marian orientation of the Order, he said it is “to be caught up daily in the praises of Mary.”

On the 24th of September last year, 1983, at the end of a Mass celebrated with members of the 1983 General Chapter of the Carmelite Order, the Father General, newly-elected Fr. John Malley, asked the Holy Father to say a few words to those present. Pope John Paul II said the following:

“You are the oldest Order in the world, because you descend from no one less than the Prophet Elias. Yes, I understand that when the Discalced came into being, you had already existed for many centuries...”

You are a great and very old family. You are linked to St. Simon Stock, the saint of the Scapular. He was General of the Order and came from England. I hope you, and all religious, will remain loyal to your charism: the charism of your religious family which takes its inspiring roots in the Old Testament and is linked to the splendid figure of the Prophet Elias, the Prophet

of Mount Carmel. As a man of God he is a teacher and a witness to prayer. As a man of the people he teaches us to take up the burden of our neighbour's needs. I remind you that you must be men of God, witnesses of divine transcendence, apostles of God's plan of salvation. On the other hand, you must insert yourselves into the world as bearers of God and of his love.

There is in your Order, and powerfully so, a deep Christological and Marian tradition: to follow Christ by imitating Mary. I hope you keep these treasures: be loyal to them, deepen and update them, because they are indestructable treasures that the world and humanity have great need of. I desire for you an even more fruitful apostolate, always within the dimension of your fundamental vocation, which is, I would say, contemplative in the full sense."

*Continue with all this by fostering a new life and a dynamic commitment to your communities and to your brotherhood. The Church needs to be ever more Church in all its components, and among these you are a very important, fundamental part because you come directly from the Gospel, from the Gospel message."*⁷

(Pope John Paul II Address to Carmel: 24.IX.84)

It is interesting to note that the same 1983 General Chapter of the Carmelites elected as its 87th Prior General, and successor of St. Simon Stock, Father John Malley, whose parents are natives of Louisburgh, Co. Mayo.

"The Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel" were originally contemplative hermits, ex-soldiers of the Crusades, who like Carmel's hermits for centuries before them lived in limestone caves in the WADI-ES-SIAH on the slopes of Mount Carmel overlooking the Mediterranean near the "Well of Elias." At the time of their canonical foundation at the end of the 12th century they lived around a small church whose ruins remain today, the Church of "St. Mary of Mt. Carmel." Almost every other monastery they were to found throughout Europe in the middle ages was to bear the same name: "St. Mary's of Mount Carmel." From the "Place Qf Sacrifice," EL MUHRAQA, the early Carmelites could easily look over the plain of Esdrelon and see nestling in the hill country NAZARETH, the home of the Holy Family, Mary's home, whose life they vowed to imitate. Between 1206 and 1214 St. Brocard and the first Carmelites of Palestine received their Rule of Life from St. Albert, the Patriarch of Jerusalem and their rule was approved by Pope Honorius III on the 30th of January, 1226. "TOTUS MARIANUS EST CARMELUS," "Carmel is wholly Mary's" was an adage early adopted and in 1282 the Prior General stated that the Order had been founded for the purpose of preaching devotion to the Mother of God. (*Speculum Carmelitanum*). Through the centuries the Order has given to the church besides the two Doctors of Prayer, St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross and the Patroness of the Missions, "The Little Flower," St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus; bishops like St. Peter Thomas, legate to the East, and St. Andrew Corsini; priests like St. Simon Stock and St. Albert of Drepani; mystics like St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi, saintly Brothers like Blessed Nuno Alvares, the Liberator of Portugal, and martyrs like Blessed Dionysius and Redemptus and the Martyred beatified Carmelite nuns of Compiègne. In 1983 the whole Order rejoiced when the Holy Father declared two Disalced Carmelites "Blessed," raising them to the altars: Bl. Raphiel Kalinowski, a Polish patriot, a prisoner of Siberia who found sanctity in Carmel and in the confessional and Bl. Mary of Jesus Crucified, a mystic who died in the Carmel of Bethlehem at the age of 33 and who was the first Arab woman to be beatified since

apostolic times.

This year, 1984, Carmel looks forward to the Beatification of another of her daughters on the Feast of Christ the King, Ven. Elizabeth of the Trinity, the contemporary of “The Little Flower” and another cloistered Carmelite nun who reached sanctity in her short life in the Carmel of Dijon, France. In the “ancient observance” the Order rejoices that the cause of the Dutch Carmelite and “Martyr of Dachau,” Ven. Titus Brandsma who spent some time in Ireland and who was Rector of the Dutch Catholic University of Nijmegen, has recently successfully been completed as we look forward to his early Beatification as “Patron of Journalists” and Carmel’s mystical theologian and Martyr of Dachau.

Several early Irish historians maintain the first Irish Carmelite foundation was made in Clare Island in Clew Bay in 1224 (Archdall, Ware Mon & Knox) but this date according to Carmelite sources appears to be very early. Because of the Saracens persecutions of the Christians in the Holy Land at the beginning of the 13th century some of the Carmelites began to migrate to Europe about 1238 although others remained and, according to tradition, were martyred by the Saracens while chanting the SALVE REGINA in their little chapel of “St. Mary’s.” According to Fr. Joachim Smet, the Order’s archivist, in his recently published five volume work “THE CARMELITES” the Carmelites migrated to Europe about 1238 and their first foundations were in Cyprus, Sicily, Aylesford and Hulne in England and Les Aygalades near Marseilles in France.⁸ Nevertheless there is a Carmelite tradition on Clare Island but perhaps the Tuam tradition that the Carmelites of Crevaghbane sought refuge on Clare Island during the Irish Elizabethan, Cromwellian and Penal Law persecutions partly explains that.

The early English Carmelite theologian, John Baconthorpe wrote in 1340 that the Carmelite Order “*was born to continue the veneration of the Blessed Virgin*” and as late as 1965 Pope Paul VI wrote: “*The Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel must bear living witness to the Marian spirit of their Order, and encourage among her devotees that of the Scapular.*”

That the Carmelites in their mediaeval Connaught friaries of Ballinasmale; Loughrea; Caltra-na-Pallice; Knockmore in Gurteen, Sligo; Ballinahinch; Eglishe in Ahascragh; Crevaghbane near Tuam; Burriscarra, and Galway were faithful to their vocation of being witnesses “*to the Marian spirit of their Order*” and to encouraging devotion to Our Lady and to her Brown Scapular in Ireland’s darkest hour is evidenced by the writings of Richard Musgrave, a Protestant, who while dealing with the Irish 1798 Rising and “*The Races of Castlebar*” said: “*Another circumstance which contributed to promote the rebellion in these two counties (Mayo & Sligo) . . . was the propagation of the mysteries of the Carmelites among Roman Catholics. This (Scapular) became the signal by which those of the true faith were to know each other... a shop was opened after the landing of the French where all the sons of Erin, with their pikes in their hands, were supplied with scapulars at regular prices.... These were intended to protect them from danger in their hour of trial.*”⁹

During the same rising Fr. Farrell, a Kildare Carmelite, was murdered in the massacre of Gibbet Rath in the Curragh.

When one looks at the Knock Apparition and its proximity to the nearby ancient Carmelite Abbey of Ballinasmale another question comes to mind. Could there be a spiritual significance for Carmelites and the world between Our Lady's Apparition at Lourdes, Knock and Fatima? Is it really stretching the imagination too far to see a protective Scapular relationship between these three apparitions? At Lourdes Our Lady appeared to St. Bernadette for the 18th and last time on the 16th of July, 1858, the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and at Lourdes dates seem to have been important for Our Lady for it was there on March 25th, the Feast of the Annunciation, that she chose to announce her name: "QUE SOY ERA IMMACULADE CONCEPTION," "I AM THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION." Our Lady of Mt. Carmel is always associated with the last things.

At Lourdes Mary appeared for the last time on July 16th, Bernadette was wearing her first Communion Scapular, on the Feast of Our Lady of the Scapular and though the grotto was boarded up still Bernadette said "I have never seen her so beautiful!"

At Knock Our Lady appeared with St. Joseph and St. John next to the altar surrounded by angels and on the altar stood the triumphant Lamb in front of the sign of salvation, the Cross. The date was the evening of the 21st of August, 1879, within the Octave of her Assumption and she appeared close to where her brother Carmelites had prayed and worked and sang her praises for almost six centuries. If the Rinuccini indication that the pre-Reformation church in the Knock graveyard was, in fact, a 15th century Carmelite cell called "CALRY" then Our Lady appeared at Knock at an ancient Carmelite site.

At Fatima the "Mother of Carmel" symbolism is more obvious. During the 13th of September, 1917, Apparition in the Cova da Iria, Sister Lucy (now a cloistered Carmelite nun in Coimbra, Portugal) testifies Our Lady said: "In October Our Lord will come, as well as Our Lady of Dolours and Our Lady of Mount Carmel... In October I will perform a miracle so that all will believe."¹⁰

On the 13th of October some seventy thousand people came to the Cova from all over Portugal. Believers and scoffers, the devout and the curious. It was raining, the Cova was a sea of mud. When Lucia recognised the looked-for signs she called out to the people "Close your umbrellas. Kneel down. The Lady is coming." As the children knelt others did the same. In a mighty surge of sound the Rosary began, then faded, as it became evident that the Lady had manifested herself again to the three children.

During the Apparition Lucia cried: "Look at the sun!" The clouds had parted, the rains ceased. The crowd could look at the sun without eye-strain. Suddenly, in a terrifying manner, the sun began to rotate on its axis and throw off multi-coloured shafts of light in all directions. Then it began to fall from its place in the sky and hurl itself towards the earth. Suddenly, as though halted by the explosion of terror that burst from the crowd, it stopped its downward plunge and returned to its usual place – "THE MIRACLE OF THE SUN" witnessed by tens of thousands, reported in the newspapers of the world!¹¹

During the *MIRACLE OF THE SUN* Sister Lucy writes “We beheld St. Joseph with the Child Jesus and Our Lady robed in white with a blue mantle, beside the sun. . . . When, a little later, this apparition disappeared, I saw Our Lord and Our Lady; it seemed to me that it was Our Lady of Dolours. Our Lord appeared to bless the world in the same manner as St. Joseph had done. This apparition also vanished, and I saw Our Lady once more, *THIS TIME RESEMBLING OUR LADY OF CARMEL.*”¹²

At the official investigation made on the 8th of July, 1924, Sister Lucy added the interesting detail that Our Lady held the Scapular in her hand: “It seemed to me that there followed another figure which appeared to be Our Lady of Carmel for she held something hanging from her right hand.”¹³

When the Provincial of the American Province of St. Elias, the late Very Rev. Fr. Donald O’Callaghan, O.Carm. on the 13th of September, 1949, interviewed Sister Lucy he asked her if she thought the Scapular was part of the Fatima Message. She answered, “Most definitely, the Scapular and the Rosary are inseparable. The Scapular is a sign of Consecration to Our Lady.”¹⁴

Pope Pius XII on the 7th century of the Scapular promise in 1951 called the Brown Scapular of Carmel the “*Sign of Consecration to the most Sacred Heart of the Immaculate Virgin.*” St. Teresa of Avila in her “*Life*” (36:16) calls the Carmelite Habit “The Habit of the Lord’s Glorious Mother.”

In all three cases of Lourdes, Knock and Fatima we are dealing with visions about which belief is dependant on human evidence but, nevertheless, in all three cases of Lourdes, Knock and Fatima, the Church has declared the witnesses to be trustworthy and worthy of belief. All three visions are messages of penance and of sacrifice but they are also visions of hope and of triumph and all are related to the Rosary and to the Brown Scapular of Carmel. “*IN THE END, MY IMMACULATE HEART WILL TRIUMPH!*” Knock, of course, is uniquely eucharistic and uniquely apocalyptic.

BALLINASMALE: A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

“*Ecclesia semper reformanda est*’ is an ancient statement: “*The church is always reforming itself.*” For the people of Claremorris the Carmelite Priory of Ballinasmale is a sign of continual renewal and reform for six centuries. The 12th and 13th centuries saw a new era of *aggiornamento* in the Mediaeval Irish Church, brought about in no small part by the Council of Cashel in 1101. Lay princes had acquired church titles and lands and public morality was seriously affected. At the beginning of the 12th century the great friend of St. Malachy of Armagh, St. Bernard of Clairvaux writes of the Irish as being “*Christian in name, in fact they were pagans.... They did not enter into lawful marriage; they made no confessions. In the churches was heard neither the voice of a preacher nor a singer.*”¹⁵

Although in need of reform the Church in Ireland at that time does not appear to have been quite as bad as St. Bernard described.

With the advent of the Normans a new reform was brought to the Church in Ireland by the four mendicant Orders: the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Carmelites and the Augustinians. Many of the Norman families endowed the foundations of the friars much as the earlier Irish kings had endowed and protected such earlier Con-naught Irish monasteries as Cong and Ballintubber. Jordan de Exeter established the Franciscans at Straide about 1240 but it was soon transferred to the Dominicans. Archdall, Ware and others state that a monastery for the Carmelites was established on Clare Island by the O’Malleys about 1224 but there is very serious doubt about this. At the time of the dissolution of the monasteries we know of a Cistercian Cell on Clare Island being affiliated with Abbeyknockmoy. Burriscarra, another Carmelite Priory in Co. Mayo, was founded about 1298 by the Stauntons but probably because of its proximity to Ballintubber Pope John XXIII approved its transfer to the Augustinian friars in 1412. The Costelloes established the Augustinians in Ballyhaunis at the beginning of the 15th century. The Berminghams established the Carmelites at Caltra-na-Pallice about 1320; the O’Flahertys founded the Carmelite Priory of Ballinahinch in 1356, the De Burgos founded the Carmelite Priory of Loughrea about 1300 and the same Earls of Clanrickard were to found another Priory of Carmelites at Crevaghbane near Tuam in 1332 which also was to play a great role in the re-establishment of the Irish Province in the 1700s.

The friars were to lead observant lives in their monasteries and, like St. Francis, they were to have little land, in contrast to the Cistercians and Benedictines. They were to be itinerant mendicant preachers, like St. Francis, re-building Christ’s Church which had fallen into ruin. On the eve of the dissolution of the monasteries in Ireland by Henry VIII & Elizabeth there were very few “*Parishes*” as we know them but in Ireland there were between four and five hundred religious houses. The most numerous of these were the Canon Regulars who had formed several independent groups amongst themselves. There were about 34 Cistercian abbeys and about thirty convents of nuns and a small number of Benedictine houses. As regards the mendicant friars the Franciscans had over sixty houses, the Dominicans had thirty-eight, the Carmelites had about twenty-five and the Augustinians had twenty-two.¹⁶

The advent of Protestantism and the dissolution of the religious houses and monasteries by King Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth in the late 16th century changed all that. Archbishop Dermot O’Hurley of Cashel was hanged at Dublin in 1584. With the advent of Protestantism in Ireland under Elizabeth a Carmelite, Eugene MacBrehan, was appointed by Pope Paul III on the 21st of November, 1541, Bishop of Mayo. Obviously Bishop MacBrehan was associated with the nearby Carmelite Priory of Ballinasmale and was a confrère of Donatus O’Gormley, the Prior of Ballinasmale at the time of its suppression. Although there are indications that Bishop MacBrehan was expelled from his Diocese of Mayo by “*the Blind Abbot,*” MacWilliam Burke, other sources indicate that Bishop MacBrehan enjoyed unbroken succession in his diocese of Mayo from 1541 until his death in 1571.¹⁷

Increasingly through the 17th century the priests, monks and friars were hunted and murdered. The worst of the Irish persecutions started in 1649 with Cromwell’s capture of Drogheda and the martyrdom there of a number of Discalced Carmelites at the ancient Carmelite Abbey of St. Mary’s. Yet in 1625, only 40 years after the Elizabethan dissolution of the Abbey of Ballinasmale, we read of the Carmelite Father General, Straccio, writing about his concern for Ballinasmale.¹⁸ Within the Carmelite Order itself from the 15th to the 19th centuries there was a number of reform movements and reformed Provinces in addition to the Discalced Spanish reform which unfortunately separated itself canonically from the parent Order in 1593, two years after the death of St. John of the Cross and eleven years after the death of St. Teresa of Avila. The poet and Prior General of the Order, Blessed Baptist of Mantua, belonged to the reformed Carmelite Congregation of Mantua in Italy which began about 1442 and continued until 1783. The Congregation of Albi in France was another reform of the Ancient Observance as was the Genoese Reform of Monte Oliveto.¹⁹ What is of particular interest in regards to the Carmelite Priors of Ballinasmale and Crevaghbane is their relationship and dependence for survival on the French Carmelite Reform of Touraine. Certainly Fr. Peter Hughes, O.Carm. who returned to Ireland in 1702 and regained Ballinasmale and started a small novitiate there had studied theology at the Carmelite house of Dol in the Reformed Province of Touraine and would have been influenced by the spirit of Philip Thibault, John of St. Samson, the blind Brother, and by the Flemish Provincial and Marian writer, Ven. Michael of St. Augustine who in his writings preceded and may well have influenced St. Louis Grignon de Montfort. It is not only possible but it is also very probable that the Carmelites living in Ballinasmale during the 18th century, like Fr. Peter Hughes and Fr. John Burke, as products of the Reform of Touraine felt and lived and preached the distinctive Marian emphasis which the Reform took as it spread through the Low Countries. As the Marian charism of the Order was increasingly emphasised by Our Lady’s Friars at Ballinasmale through the 18th century might we not see in this a particular prefigurement of what was to happen only four miles from Ballinasmale at Knock in 1879 when Our Lady showed herself to be in a very particular way Mother and Queen of Ireland itself?

The “*Martyr of Dachau*” and former Rector of the Dutch Catholic University of Nijmegen, the *Venerable Titus Brandsma*, O.Carm., whom it seems the Holy See will soon declare

“BLESSED,” in his July, 1935, lectures at the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. said:

“We ought to let Mary live in us. Mary should not stand outside the Carmelite, but he should live a life so similar to Mary that he should live with, in, through, and for Mary.

Even in the Middle Ages, in the first period of the Order’s history, the idea was propagated that we should be serfs of Mary; in those days, even a stronger term, “slave,” was used. In the 18th century St. Grignion de Montfort drew attention again to this most vigorous Marian devotion. He wrote a work on TRUE DEVOTION TO MARY but it remained hidden during his lifetime and even for years after his death. It was not until 1842 that it was discovered, published and spread to all countries. It is a glorious utterance of Marian life. However, it is not new. Not only did the idea exist in the Middle Ages, but also in later times it was brilliantly elaborated in the mystic school of Carmel. The admirers of the True Devotion to Mary by Saint Grignion de Montfort admit willingly that the Saint had a remarkable prototype in the mystic writings of one of the dominant figures of later Carmelite mysticism, the provincial of the Dutch Calced Carmelites, Michael of St. Augustine (Ballaert), in the middle of the 17th century. His treatise on Devotion to Mary was printed two years before Saint Grignion de Montfort was born and was reprinted during the latter’s life in Latin and Dutch.”²⁰

The 18th century Marian characteristic of the Reform of Touraine mirrored in the Priory of Ballinasmale was, in fact, only a re-statement of the continual Marian charism of Carmel as typified by the 15th century Belgian Carmelite theologian, Arnold Bostius, when he wrote of Mary: *“Behold your mother, venerable family of Carmel. Though she is mother of everyone on many counts, still, she is your mother in a unique way.”*

The concrete 18th century Marian orientation of the Carmelite Friars of St. Mary’s, Ballinasmale, is shown by Dr. Conor Maguire in his *“Local History of Claremorris, Co. Mayo”* when he writes of the processions the Carmelites used to hold from the Abbey to TOBAR MUIRE. Dr. Maguire wrote: *“The Carmelites in their peaceful times used to hold a procession from the abbey to the Blessed Well at KNOCKA TUBBER and on a mound near the road at CARTOWNACROSS (CARTUN NA CROISE) they had a large crucifix erected on the day of the procession to TOBAR MUIRE (Mary’s Well.)”* There is still a fine well at Knockatubber which supplies the area with piped water and water from the well is used at the Ballinasmale Abbey Mass each year. One wonders if the Carmelites’ procession from the abbey to Mary’s Well in former years was held on the 16th of July, the patronal feast of Ballinasmale, the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and so the pattern” day of the monastery or was it held on the great summer feast of Our Lady’s Assumption, August 15th.

During the worst of the persecutions in Ireland it was the Province of Touraine which was to prevent the old Carmelite Province from completely dying although in 1684 the Father General, Angelus Monsignani, wrote that Fr. Shea was the sole survivor of the Order in Ireland.

Whether Fr. Shea was active at this time (1684) in Ballinasmale or not we do not know but we do know that Fr. Shea was able to receive a number of young men into the Order and send them to France for training. We also read that amongst the priests sent secretly on a

mission to England in 1688 by the Reformed Province of Touraine were Father Finn and Fathers Thomas and James Fitzmorris while in 1703 we read of a Fr. Malachy 'Stanton being a chaplain to the Irish soldiers in the bodyguard of the Duke of Parma. All of these names: Finn, Fitzmorris and Stanton are names frequently found in Mayo.

In 1641 we note the presence of a few Belgian Carmelites of the Ancient Observance in the country and from that time there is evidence that all of the Irish Carmelites who were able to remain in the country had accepted the Reform of Touraine. About 1643 Mark of the Nativity who was prominent in the Touraine Reform, wrote to Bernard of St. Magdalen. reiterating his offer to go to Ireland and interestingly adds that a certain *LORD LESPUI* (possibly Sir Richard Blake, a Catholic, who seems to have held Ballinasmale for the Carmelites at that time) "*had offered the convent next to his castle at Ballinasmale*" thus making two convents (or monasteries) ready to receive communities.²¹ From Mark of the Nativity's letter it further appears that Bernard of St. Magdalen had agreed to accept four Irish postulants including Patrick of St. William's brother. Another source tells us that Fr. William's "*name in Ireland is William Hoban.*" This Fr. William Hoban (Patrick of St. William) had visited Ireland in 1643 and had inspired Mark of the Nativity with his missionary zeal. He had attended the Confederation of Kilkenny in 1642 and had defended the rights of the Order to the Nuncio, Rinucini, there.

The Stafford Inquisition of Mayo (1625-1635) states:

"Said Sir Richard Blake did in January 1633(4), purchase of Everlin Moore, alias Richards, and her husband Robert Moore the late dissolved Abbey or Monastery of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Ballinasmally; and 1 qr. thereunto belonging called Carrowdronmyne for the consideration of £84 st. and of a lease for 3 lives unto them made of the qr. of Lissenricken, and the qr. of Ballinasmall for the yearly rent of £3 st."

Fr. Doohan, O.Carm., quoting the Order's Roman archives (Arch. Hib., 11,293) writes that after the Cromwellian persecution Sir Richard Blake lost his title to the Abbey lands which passed to Gerald Dillon in 1660. The Moores of Brize Castle were buried in Ballinasmale Abbey between 1624 and 1660 as the inscription in their chapel indicates. Sir Richard Blake would appear to be the "*Lord Lespuis*" we find Mark of the Nativity in France writing about in 1643, promising protection for the Carmelites of Ballinasmale. In its worst hour the "*Smdle*" or torch of "*Ballinasmale*" never failed to be a light of hope for Our Lady's Order in persecuted Ireland. The unique archaeological remains of the 17th century reconstructed "*Lady*" chapel and the southerly "*Garth*" Cell dating from this period testify to the Carmelites continued ministry in the area through the 17th century while the Order's documentation testifies to a continued Carmelite presence in Ballinasmale through the 18th and most of the 19th centuries. The following dates gives us an indication of Ireland's sufferings during the 17th century:

1681 The Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All-Ireland, *St. Oliver Plunkett* was hanged at Tyburn, London, on the 1st of July. Cardinal Tomás O Fiach, his successor, writes that there were at least three priests near the gallows to give the Archbishop a final absolution: Fr. Edward Peter, a Jesuit, Fr. Gaspar, a Belgian Carmelite attached to the Spanish Embassy

and Fr. Lucian Travers, an English Carmelite, who assisted in recovering the dismembered body of the martyred Archbishop for burial.

1691 On July 12th the fateful BATTLE OF AUGHRIM took place and Ireland was lost. The defeated Jacobite army retreated via Loughrea and the remains of the French general, St. Ruth, were buried in the Loughrea Carmelite Abbey cemetery. Tradition has it that five members of the community were present at the burial.²²

1695 Saw the Williamite Penal Legislation enacted against the clergy and Catholics of Ireland. Amongst the laws was the provision in Sec. 1 of 9 William III.Cap26 which read:

“All popish archbishops, bishops, vicars-general, deans, jesuits, monks, friars and all other regular popish clergy, and all papists exercising any ecclesiastical jurisdiction, shall depart out of this kingdom before the 1st of May, 1698; If any of the said ecclesiastical persons shall be at any time after the said 1st of May, 1698 within the kingdom, they and every of them shall suffer imprisonment until he or they shall be transported beyond seas; and if any person so transported shall return again into this kingdom, they and every of them shall be guilty of high treason and suffer forfeit (of life) as in the case of high treason.”²³

One of the worst periods of religious persecution in Ireland was between 1670 and 1740. The previous persecutions of Cromwell and Elizabeth had disrupted monastic and religious life, records were lost, priests and friars just held on. The extent of the 16th, 17th and 18th century persecutions is noteworthy by the small amount of written records ‘of the church in Ireland from these times. Particularly in the late 17th and early 18th centuries we have to depend on written reports from France and Spain and Rome to tell us of conditions in Ireland at that time. The Carmelite Order’s archivist in Rome, Fr. Joachim Smet, O.Carm., writing in Vol.111 (I) p.277 of “THE CARMELITES” says:

Little is known about the lives and deeds of the Irish Carmelites in Penal times. They lived not in stately monastic edifices like their brothers on the continent but in modest “residences,” rarely able to accommodate more than two or three persons, to which were attached primitive chapels. All outward evidence of monastic observance was to be avoided. The priests were often on the road, ministering to the spiritual needs of people in other localities, sometimes settling in a place for years and dying there alone. In bad time they lived constantly under threat of imprisonment and exile. Their chapels, built at the cost of great sacrifice on the part of their impoverished flocks, might be destroyed by the authorities or by Protestant mobs. Apparently the Irish Carmelites did not consider their heroic lives worth chronicling. Often only oral tradition attests their presence, their sufferings and their accomplishments.”

For Ireland it was the era of the Rosary, the Penal Cross and the Mass Rock. At Knock Our Lady seems to remind us of that era of great suffering and of martyrdom as she appeared next to the altar, the Mass Rock, on which stood her Risen Son, the Lamb of God. Pope Pius XI in his 1932 message to the Dublin International Eucharistic Congress commemorating the coming of St. Patrick to Ireland in 432 caught something of the suffering and faith of the Irish in the Penal Days, when addressing the bishops and priests of Ireland, he said: “Exhort them to be faithful to the example of their forefathers. Stir up their spirit that never forgetful of the Mass Rock They may nourish a real and true devotion to the Blessed

Eucharist.”

Religious Orders, as with all human institutions, are subject to the limitations and frailties of human nature. In the family of Carmel what began as an internal reform movement by St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross in 16th century Spain later became an independent branch of the old vine of Carmel. Yet through the centuries the two streams of Carmel, the “ancient observance” and the “discalced”, intermingled and influenced one another. It is interesting to note the influence the “Teresian” or “Discalced” Carmelites had on the Reform of Touraine within the “ancient observance”. From its beginning the Reform of Touraine was influenced by Madame Barbe Acarie (later Blessed Mary of the Incarnation) and, as Fr. Smet observes, the Discalced themselves persuaded Fr. Philip Thibault and his early companions to remain within the ancient branch of the Order and reform it from within. (Smet. III, I, 39). It was this same Reform of Touraine of Fr. Thibault and Brother John of St. Samson (the “St. John of the Cross” of France) which was to supply Ballinasmale Abbey with Carmelites and re-invigorated the old vine of Carmel.

The Carmelites seem never to have left their ancient ruins of Ballinasmale for long from its founding in 1288 until 1870 and even since then have often visited and referred to the old ruins. There is a tradition substantiated by a newspaper article that the Carmelites of Crevaghbane near Tuam sought refuge on Clare Island off Louisburgh, Co. Mayo, during the worst persecutions and from there secretly ministered to the faithful of Westport and Louisburgh. Their brother Carmelites of Ballinasmale may well have joined them. Carmelite ruins distinct from those of the Cistercian Church are still pointed out by the people of Clare Island. The tradition of Carmelites living on Clare Island during the Penal Days is corroborated by an article written by J. F. Quinn in “THE WESTERN PEOPLE” some years ago entitled: “The Brownes of Westport.” While discussing “The Religion of the Brownes” Mr. Quinn gives an account of a stone “*still standing on Carrowhalurgan Hill near Westport*” which was “*set on the centre of an altar in a Penal-day church of those days... it was a large barn or store at the back of a Protestant named Simmons.*” The author of the article goes on to quote an earlier West Mayo newspaper report which said: “*In those days the priests who came to minister in that penal-day chapel came from the sea – in all probability THEY WERE CARMELITES FROM CLARE ISLAND.*” The Reformed Province of Touraine and later, during the time of the French Revolution and the French anti-clerical regimes, the Spanish Carmelite Provinces and especially Andalusia supported and educated their struggling Irish brethren through the worst of the Penal Days so that we can say that the Irish Province never ceased to exist from the time of its foundation about 1300.

BALLINASMALE: CRADLE OF CARMELITE RENEWAL: 1790 – 1870

“A lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts.”

(2 Pet. 1:19)

In the Order’s Roman archives we read of one of Fr. Shea’s vocations, Father Peter Hughes, who had been driven back to the continent, returned to Ireland after the death of King William III (1702) and “RECOVERED BALLINASMALE WHERE HE PROFESSED CANDIDATES TO THE ORDER AND SENT THEM TO FRANCE AND SPAIN TO STUDY.” (Arch. Ord. II Hibernia II, 1, p.47).

That the Carmelites probably were able to remain on in Ballinasmale from 1700 is indicated by a letter of 1737 of Louis Benzoni, the Father General, in which he thanked the bishops of Cork, Dublin and Tuam (in whose diocese Ballinasmale and Crevaghbane are situated) for their kindness to the Order.

Pope Clement XII in his brief “PASTORALIS OFFICII” of the 10th of October, 1737, canonically re-established the Irish Carmelite Province under the patronage of the Immaculate Conception and St. Patrick.

In 1715 we find the Carmelite Friars (called the “White Friars” in mediaeval times because of their white cloak) occupying a cabin among the Ballinasmale ruins where, under difficulties easily imagined, the Carmelite life was lived as it had been before the ravages of persecution destroyed the sacred buildings of the Priory.

In 1730 Father Edmond Burke, PP of Killereran in which parish the mediaeval Carmelite Priory of Crevaghbane is located, donated a fine silver chalice engraved with the words “FOR THE USE OF THE CONVENT OF BALLINASMALE, ANNO DOMINO, 1730.”

In 1737 when Pope Clement XII restored the ancient Irish Province “under the Stricter Observance” the Holy Father appointed the first Provincial in the person of Fr. Matthew of St. Eliseus Lyons, as well as four definitors or councillors: respectively Frs. Simon of St. Simon Stock BURKE, Patrick of St. Mary Magdalen MAHONEY (Moans), James of the Nativity BARNES and James of St. Teresa PRENDERGAST. We again notice the surnames of the restored Provincial, Fr. LYONS, and the names of two of his councillors: Frs. Simon BURKE and James PRENDERGAST –common Mayo names. At the same time the Holy Father appointed Fr. William Fleirr Vicar of Scotland and Prior of Edinburgh and another Prendergast, Fr. PETER PRENDERGAST was appointed Fr. Fleirr’s socius and secretary and was later elected Irish delegate to the General Chapter. The Holy Father noted that the erection of the Carmelite province had been requested by several Irish bishops. From later correspondence between the Archbishop of Tuam and the Holy See on behalf of the Carmelites it would seem that the Archbishop of Tuam was among them.

In 1741 the Provincial archives show that *Fr. John Burke* was appointed Prior of

Ballinasmale. We notice that a “JOHN BURKE” was also appointed by the 1741 Provincial Chapter first “definitor” or Councillor of the Irish Province and probably Prior of Crevaghbane as well.

For the other Carmelite Priors in Connaught we notice that the same 1741 Irish Provincial Chapter appointed Fr. Bernard Feely Prior of Caltra-na-Pallice; Fr. Ambrose Corkery Prior of Ballynahinch; Fr. Henry Prendergast Prior of Knockmore (Mt. Irwin) near Gurteen, Sligo. This is the fourth Prendergast Carmelite priest we notice in the 18th century documents of the restored Province: namely Frs. Peter, James, Henry and Anthony Prendergast. Fr. Patrick Fitzmaurice (another form of the Prendergast name) was given permission to become an army chaplain in 1758 (possibly with the Spanish army).

Throughout the 18th century the Church in Ireland struggled for survival and revival. It was the age of Swift, of Henry Flood, of Henry Grattan. In 1780 the Sacramental test was abolished; 1791 saw Wolfe Tone’s “*Argument on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*”. At the time of the American Revolution in 1776 it was a time of increased religious toleration, which reversed itself in 1798 with the death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, the “Risings” especially in Wexford and the West and “The Landing of the French” at Killala. It was the era of landlordism and throughout this time Ireland was owned and governed by the Protestant English ascendancy. Nevertheless, in 1793, as “the age of enlightenment” spread we see St. Patrick’s College, Carlow, the first Catholic college for higher studies in Ireland being founded and Maynooth College being founded in 1795 for the education of diocesan priests.

Fr. Hugh Fenning, O.P., shows in his doctoral thesis: “*THE UNDOING OF THE FRIARS OF IRELAND – A Study of the Novitiate Question in the Eighteenth Century*” (Louvain, 1972) that both the diocesan clergy and the members of the religious orders were completely dependent on “Catholic Europe” (France, Spain, Belgium, Austria and Italy) for their education until the second half of the 18th century.

As the effects of “the Protestant Reform” and Freemasonry spread by 1800 there was hardly a country in Europe in which the property of the Church had not been confiscated, her privileges denied, her religious orders suppressed, and her doctrines denied. At the close of the century the Pope had just died a prisoner, the foreign missions were in eclipse and the monarchs of Europe had begun to fall victim of the ideas which they had sponsored through the century. Much of the attack against the Church in these two centuries had been directed against the Religious Orders. The four great statues of St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Augustine and St. Elias (inscribed “the founder” of the entire Carmelite Order) which dominate the nave of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome symbolize the unique place of the religious orders in the Church and underlines the continuous support given by the religious orders to the Holy See. As Fr. Fleming says:

“The religious orders were the mainstay of the foreign missions, the school-masters of the Catholic world, an enormous army of priests and brothers free from parochial work, at the complete disposal of their superiors general and of the Holy See. For those who sought the destruction or subjection of the Church, the religious orders were logically the first and most obvious target. The

attack was so successful that by 1800 they had been banished from all but a few corners of western Europe."²⁴

Unwittingly, the hierarchy of Ireland in the middle of the 18th century co-operated in the destruction of the Church in Ireland by pressing for greater control over the religious and eventually asking, in effect, for their extinction. There were some notable exceptions amongst the hierarchy of Ireland at the time, fortunately. At the instigation of the Irish hierarchy, the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith in 1751 decreed that "*in the future the regular superiors are to admit no one to the religious habit within the kingdom of Ireland.*" The decree affected only five religious Orders in Ireland: the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, Carmelites, and Discalced Carmelites. At that time except for the Jesuits there were no other religious orders represented in Ireland of any number. Between the four great orders in 1751 they totalled about 800 priests or half the clergy in the country. Monks had long since vanished from the Irish scenes; the Jesuits and Capuchins never received novices on the mission and the Propagation of the Faith had already cared for the demise of the Canons Regular from Ireland in 1742. The Orders themselves, like the diocesan clergy, were struggling in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century to exist. As we have seen earlier in the case of Ballinasmale their "convents" or "Priories" were often nothing more than a farmhouse, sometimes just a cave in the woods. The religious habit could not be worn – for fear of death. Rarely was there the cloister, the solemn silence. They were fortunate if they could chant the Office together. As the Penal Laws became relaxed the Orders needed help to re-establish themselves. When they needed help, they were threatened with extinction from the period of 1751 until 1800. Yet, through the good offices of certain bishops, they were able to continue. Ballinasmale, like Loughrea, Crevaghbane and Caltra-na-Pallice in Co. Galway are of pivotal importance for both branches of the Carmelites during this period.

In the 1760s we read of the Carmelite Provincial of the old observance, Fr. Peter Bermingham, writing to Rome regarding these laws. Unfortunately Father Bermingham's letter seems to have been lost *en route*. It did, however, contain the promise that the Archbishop of Tuam would permit a novitiate in the Convent of Crevaghbane and probably also the request that the age limit of admission be raised above twenty. Through this period of great crisis for the Carmelites in Ireland, Our Lady's Order must be forever grateful to Archbishop Mark Skerrett of Tuam and Bishop James O'Fallon of Elphin for their support and protection and for allowing them to continue with their novitiates in their respective dioceses. The Carmelite Provincial, Father Berminham, in a second letter to Cardinal Castelli of the Propaganda in May 1770 includes an attestation in the hand of Archbishop Skerrett of Tuam agreeing to the erection of the Crevaghbane novitiate where, the Archbishop says, "*REGULAR OBSERVANCE AND COMMON TABLE ARE MAINTAINED, AND IN WHICH WE MAY EXPECT THE LIFE OF THE NOVICES TO CONFORM TO THE PRAISE WORTH CONDUCT OF THE PREISTS WHO WILL INSTRUCT THEM.*"²⁵ One would presume that the community had continued to exist at this time in Ballinasmale although the novitiate had apparently been moved from Ballinasmale to Crevaghbane which was close to Tuam and less than 20 miles from Ballinasmale.

Rome was slow in answering the request of the two Connaught bishops and the Irish Provincial of the ancient observance for the re-establishment of Carmelite novitiates in Ireland. The Carmelite Provincial, Patrick O'Mahony, wrote from Dublin on the 2nd of October, 1773, enclosing the permission of the Archbishop of Tuam for Crevaghbane and that of Elphin for a second novitiate at Caltra-na-Pallice (in the present parish of Ahascragh near Ballinasloe.) The Provincial refrained from comment but the bishops did not hide their exasperation at the way in which Propaganda was handling the affair: Tuam urged that the grant be delayed no longer, while Elphin "*vehemently wished*" the age of candidates be left to the provincial's judgement.²⁶

The first and only report on the two Carmelite novitiates in Ireland was written at Dublin on the 15th of June, 1784, ten years after permission was first given to open them. The provincial, Fr. Peter Bermingham, asserted in a letter of that date to his Carmelite superiors in Rome that during his term of office (1768-1784) four candidates had received Our Lady's habit in the Priory of Crevaghbane and four at Caltra-na-Pallice. Of these eight, three had been studying in Spain since the preceding October, three others (already professed) were soon to be sent there, while the remaining two were still under probation, one in each of the two novitiates.²⁷ It is interesting to note that there is still cherished in the Tuam Diocesan Museum of St. Jarlath's College a Carmelite Penal Chalice and vestments which had belonged to the Carmelite Priory of Crevaghbane during this time.

The seed sown in the Ballinasmale, Crevaghbane and Caltra-na-Pallice novitiates during these difficult days bore fruit for in a return dated January, 1801, it is recorded that at that time in the old observance of the Carmelites in Ireland there were ten Carmelite monasteries which were occupied by twenty-eight priests.²⁸

During the Provincialate of Fr. Myles Prendergast about 1818 the Irish students went to the ancient Carmelite monastery of TRANSPONTINA adjoining St. Peter's Square for their novitiate and studies. In 1819 we find two Irish novices, John Colgan (later Provincial) and Elias Costello there. The Provincial, Fr. Myles Prendergast, was later appointed Bishop of Malabar. The Irish Provincial Chapter of 1822 appointed Fr. John Lavin as Prior of Ballinasmale and Fathers Michael Geoghegan, Patrick Burke and Martin Fitzpatrick were also appointed as members of the Ballinasmale community. The present Provincial archivist and historian, Fr. Peter O'Dwyer, observes regarding these appointments to Ballinasmale:

*"the fact that three more Carmelites, Frs. Michael Geoghegan, Patrick Burke and Martin Fitzpatrick were appointed to help him (Fr. Lavin, the Prior) in the work shows that it (i.e. BALLINASMALE) was an important monastery as no other house of the Province, except Dublin, had four men at the time. This indicates that there was a healthy apostolate and a fair population in the neighbourhood. Fr. Lavin continued to be the main figure in the monastery over the next thirty years."*²⁹

It is said that because of THE GREAT FAMINE (1845-1847) brought about by the potato blight and the failure of the crop, the population of Ireland fell from eight and a half million in 1845 to six and a half million in 1851 with more than a million emigrating to America and another million dying from disease and starvation.³⁰

In 1846, during the famine, Samuel Lewis in his *TOPOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF IRELAND* records that a small group of Carmelites at Ballinasmale “*carried out the community exercises regularly.*” During the same time we know of Fr. James Hughes, parish priest of Claremorris, and of his efforts to relieve the suffering of the dying poor, especially in the Claremorris Workhouse.

In 1842 the first meeting of the committee of the Catholic College for Foreign Missions (All Hallows) was held with the Carmelite, Fr. R. J. Colgan acting as chairman. In 1843 a Carmelite who had studied at Louvain, Fr. T. A. Bennett, was appointed professor of Scripture and Church History in the College and in 1862 he was named president of All Hallows. Fr. O’Dwyer observes that “*by 1854 practically all monasteries had a school attached.*” The evidence is that the Carmelites ran some type of a school in Ballinasmale at this time. In 1860 Terenure College was opened and in 1955 the Carmelites opened a college in Moate, Co. Westmeath.

In the mid 19th century the town of Claremorris began to grow. There had been a previous church in the parish of Kilcolman in Barnycarroll which was later moved to Mace. We have already shown a picture of the ruins of the mediaeval church in Kilcolman. Because of its proximity to Ballinasmale it would seem possible that the early church in Barnycarroll (on the site of the present statue of Our Lady, on the Knock Road) was served by the Carmelites. A 1690 holy water font from that church is now in the vestibule of the present Barnycarroll church. As Claremorris town began to grow a new church was built in 1822 by Fr. P. Heverin, P.P., in the town itself on the site of what is now the Town Hall. In the Claremorris (Kilcolman) Parish Baptismal Register we see entries of baptisms performed by Fr. John Carr (Simon), a Ballinasmale Carmelite, in the years 1840 and 1841. Fr. John Carr, according to local tradition, remained at Ballinasmale until almost 1870, just ten years before Our Lady appeared approximately four miles away at Knock.

In later years, according to local tradition, the Carmelites lived near their Ballinasmale ruins in a small house on the Knock road now occupied by Mr. Michael Clarke. In 1840 the Provincial, Fr. J. Colgan, in his account of the province, writes: “*there were two priests there then*” and adds “*the convent of Ballinasmale is a private house in a ruinous state, and the church seems to be a stable. The Prior (Fr. Lavin), who is advanced in years, seems to be able to do nothing towards improving the state of things.*” The West of Ireland was notably poor and THE GREAT FAMINE decimated the West. Fr. Lavin died in Ballinasmale in 1852 in his eighty-first year. It is presumed that he is buried in the Ballinasmale cemetery.

A strong local tradition testifies that the last Mass was offered about 1870 in the thatch-covered “Lady” Chapel the Carmelites reconstructed from the ruins. Fr. Patrick Costelio of Ballyhaunis as well as Paddy Navin, the Egans and the Waldrons and the Goggins of the area all testify that their relatives attended the last Carmelite Mass in the ancient Priory about 1870. Dr. Conor Maguire, M.D., in his notes on Claremorris says that Michael Noone (father of Peter Noone) who died only a few years previous in 1938 told him that he often attended Mass in Ballinasmale.

There is evidence that at the beginning of the 19th century the Ballinasmale Carmelites, although they were very poor, ran a hedge-school of sorts in the area. The grandmother of Martin Waldron of Cartonacross said her grandfather went to church and to school in the Abbey of Ballinasmale but because of the poverty of the Friars he had to sit on the floor to attend the classes.

Apparently when the Carmelites left Ballinasmale they entrusted their altar candlestick with the aunt of the Knock visionary, Patrick Hill, and they left their chalice and Mass vestments with the Prendergasts (Patrick?) who were landlords near the Holy Well in Caraun. While rebuilding the sides of the fireplace in Caraun some of the Prendergasts came across the Ballinasmale chalice and vestments and are said to have given them to the late Archdeacon Kilkenny, parish priest of Claremorris, who returned them to the Carmelites of Whitefriar Street, Dublin. The last known priest to have resided in Ballinasmale, according to Dr. Maguire, Fr. John Carr, succeeded Fr. John Spratt as provincial in 1871. Fr. Carr died in Whitefriar Street, Dublin, on the 24th of July, 1893, and is buried in the old Carmelite plot of Glasnevin Cemetery.

There remains a living tradition in the Claremorris area of the Carmelites of Ballinasmale and their power in prayer, particularly in obtaining dry weather at hay-making time. Another local tradition tells of how a Carmelite of Ballinasmale was called on a frosty night to attend a dying woman in Kilcolman a number of miles away but when he and his lay companion came to the crossroads leading to the present Barnycarroll church the priest noticed two gold sovereigns glistening in the moonlight. As there was a sheebeen across the road the priest's companion suggested that they might fortify themselves with their new found wealth against the cold of the night with a drink. The priest replied that he understood that the woman he was called to attend was dying and since there was some urgency he suggested that they put a stone over the sovereigns and when they returned from the sick call his companion could have two drinks with the two sovereigns. The Carmelite and his companion continued on their journey arriving just before the woman died. Having fulfilled his obligation they arrived back at the Knock-Barnycarroll crossroad and when they lifted the stone to find the sovereigns in their place they found two dead cockroches instead. The moral of the story, of course, is that a priest should not be diverted from his duty when going to attend the sick.

Another local tradition relates that the early Carmelites on horseback during the Penal Days while returning to their monastery of Ballinasmale were seen by the "Red Coats" near what is now Guilfoyle's Garage on the Knock-Claremorris road. According to the tradition the Carmelites 'knew of the shallow pass or ford in the middle of Lough Nanannagh and they crossed the lake at that point. With the drainage schemes in the West in recent times the lake has receded considerably and the shallow ford in the middle of the lake is now quite visible. The Red Coats, however, knew nothing of the ford through the lake and presuming the lake to be shallow they hastened in pursuit, like the Egyptians, plunging into the deep holes of the lake on either side of the ford.

On the 15th October, 1981, the new church and monastery of the cloistered Carmelite nuns of Tranquilla in Knock was dedicated by Archbishop Joseph Cunnane, Archbishop of Tuam, thus making a modern link with their brother Carmelites who had lived and worked in the same area of Knock and Claremorris for six centuries before them.

“The conflict of the present and the past,
The ideal and the actual in our life,
As on a field of battle held me fast,
Where this world and the next world were at strife.”³¹

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Peter O'Dwyer, O.Carm., *The Irish Carmelites – Seventh Centenary Souvenir*. 1971.
- ² P.R. McCaffrey, O.Carm., *The White Friars (With Special Reference to the English Speaking Provinces)*. 1926. Dublin: Gill & Son. p.381.
- ³ *ibid.*, p.409ff.
- ⁴ Peter O'Dwyer, O.Carm., *The Carmelite Order in Pre-Reformation Ireland in Carmelus*. Commentarii ab Instituto Carmelitano Editi, 1969, Vol 16, Fas 2.
- ⁵ T.F. Doohan, O.Carm., *Ballinsmale in the Terenure College Annual*. 1955. pp.7-9.
- ⁶ McCaffrey, *The White Friars*, p.428. A translation from *The Rinuccini Papers*, Florence, 1645.
- ⁷ *Pope John Paul II Addresses Carmel in the quarterly Carmel in the World*. 1984. Rome: Institutum Carmelitanum. Vol XXIII, pp.5-6.
- ⁸ Joachim Smet, O.Carm., *The Carmelites – A History of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel*. Rome: Institutum Carmelitanum. Vol I.
- ⁹ Peter O'Dwyer, O.Carm., *Mary's Keepsake – The Scapular*. Dublin: Carmelite Publications.
- ¹⁰ Louis Kondor, SVD., *Fatima in Lucia's Own Words*. 1976. Fatima: Postulation Centre. p.168.
- ¹¹ G.D. Walton, *Everyman's Fatima*. 1959. Fatima: Casa Beato Nuno.
- ¹² Kondor, *op. cit.*, p.168.
- ¹³ Kilian Lynch, O.Carm., *Our Lady of Fatima and the Brown Scapular*. 1980. Faversham: Carmelite Press. p.15.
- ¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.170.
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- ¹⁶ Canice Mooney, OFM., *The first Impact of the Reformation in Patrick J. Corish (ed), A History of Irish Catholicism, Volume III*. 1967. Dublin: Gill & Sons. p.28.
- ¹⁷ Paul Graham, O.Carm., *Carmelite Bishops in Ireland in Zelo*, Volume IX, Number 2. 1957. Dublin: Gort Muire. p.101.
- ¹⁸ Smet, *op. cit.*, Vol III (I), p.266.
- ¹⁹ Hugh Clarke, O.Carm. & Bede Edwards, ODC., *The Rule of Saint Albert*. 1973. Aylesford: The Friars. pp.32-33.
- ²⁰ Titus Brandsma, O.Carm., *The Beauty of Carmel*. 1955. Dublin: Clonmore & Reynolds Ltd. p.65.
- ²¹ *Archives Departementales d'Ille et Vilaine*, 9H7B.
- ²² Philim Monahan, ODC., *The Carmelite Abbey – Loughrea, Co Galway: 1645-1983*. p.7.
- ²³ William P. Burke, *The Irish Priest in the Penal Times: 1660-1760*, compiled from State Papers in HM Record Office. 1914. Waterford: N. Harvey & Co. p.118.
- ²⁴ Hugh Fenning, O.P., *The Undoing of the Friars in Ireland – A Study of the Novitiate Question of the Eighteenth Century*. 1972. University of Louvain. p.6.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, p.317
- ²⁶ *ibid.*, p.317.
- ²⁷ *ibid.*, p.323.
- ²⁸ Peter O'Dwyer, O.Carm., *The Carmelite Order in Post-Reformation Ireland in Carmelus*, Vol XVII. 1970. p.228.
- ²⁹ Peter O'Dwyer, O.Carm., *Our Lady's Garden – Carmel of St Mary's, Ballinsmale in Carmelite Third Order Newsletter*. 1979. Dublin: Whitefriar Street. p.9.
- ³⁰ F.X. Martin, OSA. (ed), *The Course of Irish History*. 1967. Cork: Mercier Press. p.274.
- ³¹ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Monte Cassino*. 1874.