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978-0-521-08927-2 - The Irish Constitutional Revolution of the Sixteenth Century

Brendan Bradshaw

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Do bhíodar caoin sibhíalta tréitheach,
Ba mhaith a ndlithe, a gcreideamh is a mbéasa,
Gach duine d'umhlaigh, do bhí a chuid féin leis,
Do bhíodar ceannsa mar cheann cléire,
Do shíolraigh a bhfuil trí na chéile,
Do bhí an Gael Gallda 's an Gall Gaelach.

Seán Ó Conaill, *Tuireamh na hÉireann*, c. 1640

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Preface

Sixty-six years ago now, Philip Wilson, in his book *The beginnings of modern Ireland*, focused attention on the 1530s and the two succeeding decades as the period of crucial significance in early modern Irish history. This study originated in a hunch that Wilson was right in his conclusion but that his unionist sympathies had led his argument astray, and that the theme was worth reworking. It was worth reworking, I felt, not for the satisfaction of revising Wilson – that was entirely incidental – but in order to attempt afresh what he had attempted and what no one had attempted since, to my knowledge. That was to provide a conceptual framework for the discussion of the political and constitutional history of early modern Ireland. I was and remain convinced that such a framework must exist before the themes with which political historians have come to occupy themselves recently – the social and economic dynamics of political history, and the like – may usefully be taken up in the context of early modern Ireland. If, therefore, this study is old-fashioned in its preoccupations and in its methodology, those who are kind enough to give it a second glance may find that it is not, for all that, irrelevant.

It is usual in the preface to a work of this kind to discuss in a general way the sources on which it is based. So let me be general. The list of sources set out in the Bibliography contains little with which any serious scholar of sixteenth-century Ireland will not be familiar. It would serve small purpose to work through the list here. However, a word about the literary material in the Irish language may be in order. I have relied on published works, most of them in print for some time. I mention them only because it may be proper to draw attention to an element of novelty about the way I have handled them as historical sources and about the conclusions I have drawn from them. Their interest for me was

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not the hard historical facts which could be prised from them but the way in which they reflected a political ethos, and the way in which, by comparative analysis, they could be used to chart changing political mentalities. In theory I am alive to the limitations and the pitfalls attaching to the use of literary material for such purposes. Others will, no doubt, judge how I coped in practice. In any case the exercise was immense fun, and has formed in me the conviction that late medieval and early modern literature in the Irish language is too happy a hunting ground to be left as the exclusive preserve of philologists and grammarians.

The pleasurable task remains of acknowledging the chief debts incurred in the writing of the book. It began as a Ph.D. dissertation at Cambridge, supervised by Professor G. R. Elton. What the book owes to his intellectual inspiration, wise counsel and warm encouragement could not be told without lapsing into an eulogy which I am sure he would feel the better thanked for being spared. The eulogy, therefore, may be taken as read, except to say that had it been delivered it should have concluded, according to the custom of Irish praise-poetry, with a paean to Sheila, his wife.

I want to put on record also my gratitude to Steven Ellis of University College, Galway, who read the original version of the work with a lynx's eye for errors of detail and who helped to broaden my knowledge of the late medieval background; to Ciarán Brady of Carysfort College of Education, Dublin, whose delicately but persistently expressed misgivings about fundamental aspects of my thesis helped enormously in clarifying my thought; to Dr Katharine Simms, who was characteristically patient and generous in placing her expertise as a Celtic scholar at my disposal; to Professor David Quinn and Professor John Bossy, who examined the dissertation and offered helpful advice, not all of which, I acknowledge with regret, was accepted at the time in the spirit in which it was offered; to Dr Nicholas Canny of University College, Galway, for cordial interest at all times. My special thanks are due to the Master and Fellows of St John's College, Cambridge. By offering me the benefits of fellowship in their society without any of the major attendant duties, they made the research project possible. At the stage of publication I had the good fortune to have my typescript seen through the press by an old friend, Mr Eric Van Tassel, and by a new one, Mrs Elizabeth Wetton.

The book is dedicated to 'my folks', the nearest approximation

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in modern English usage to the Irish term used. The dedication embraces a numerous, ramified and far-flung tribe. But I had especially in mind my mother and my father (*requiescat in pace*). These gave me as a child a sense of the vital continuity between past and present which not all the tedium of school and undergraduate education managed to destroy. I also wonder if they did not contribute something more specific to this book. For from their example I learned that fundamentally different political attitudes, as passionately adhered to as among the Irish they can be, do not preclude the possibility of people living together not merely in mutual toleration but even in love.

Queens' College,
Cambridge
July 1978

Brendan Bradshaw, S.M.

Abbreviations

Add. MSS	Additional Manuscripts (British Library)
A.F.M.	O'Donovan (ed.), <i>Annals of the Four Masters</i> *
B.L.	British Library
Cal. Car. MSS	<i>Calendar of Carew Manuscripts</i> *
Cal. Orm. Deeds	Curtis (ed.), <i>Calendar of Ormond deeds</i> *
D.N.B.	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
E.H.R.	<i>English Historical Review</i>
Fiants, Henry VIII	<i>Calendar of fiants (Ireland)</i> *
I.E.R.	<i>Irish Ecclesiastical Record</i>
I.H.S.	<i>Irish Historical Studies</i>
J.E.H.	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
Jour.R.S.A.I.	<i>Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland</i>
L.P.	<i>Calendar of letters and papers, foreign and domestic, Henry VIII</i> *
Loch Cé	Hennessey (ed.), <i>Annals of Loch Cé</i> *
P.R.O.	Public Record Office, London
T.R.H.S.	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
S.P.	<i>Public Record Office, State Papers (MSS)</i> *
S.P. Henry VIII	<i>State Papers of Henry VIII</i> , i–iii*
T.C.D.	Trinity College, Dublin

* For details, see the Bibliography, pp. 289 ff.

