

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-51139-2 - Leinster: East and West
Edited by George Fletcher
Excerpt
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EAST LEINSTER

ANCIENT GEOGRAPHY

THE oldest source of information that we possess regarding the ancient geography of Ireland is contained in the work of the second-century Alexandrian Ptolemy.

The following are the geographical names in Leinster which he preserves for us. The *Okeanos Ivernikos* or Irish Ocean washing the eastern shore of the island. In this were two islands, *Edros* and *Limnos*. *Edros* was most probably the promontory of Howth (Irish *Beann Edair*); but what *Limnos* was is uncertain. It cannot be Lambay, both on account of its position and because the name Lambay is not older than the Scandinavian settlers; the old name of this island is *Rachra* (the same as Rathlin, off the Antrim coast). The following river-mouths are enumerated by Ptolemy, proceeding from north to south; *Bowinda*, doubtless the Boyne: *Oboka*, not certainly identified; its position agrees with the river now called *Ovoca*, but this name has been adapted from Ptolemy and has no traditional authority: and *Modonnos*, which, from its position, must be the Slaney, though there is no other evidence of a similar name being applied to this river. At the south-east corner was *Hieron Akron*, the Sacred Promontory, now *Carnsore Point*. Ptolemy enumerates as the tribes occupying the region now called Leinster, the *Eblanioi* with their town *Eblana*; the *Kaukoi* with their town *Laberos*;

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the *Manapioi*, with two towns *Manapia* and *Dounion*; the *Koriondoi*; the *Ousdiai*; and the *Brigantes*. These names are all highly problematical. That Eblana is Dublin is generally accepted, but the name cannot be explained. Dounion has been plausibly identified with the great fortress called *Ráith Gall*, near Tullow, Co. Carlow. If the *Brigantes* are to be connected with the great tribe of northern England that bore the same name, we are confronted with racial problems that are not easy of solution; the same may be said of the *Kaukoi*, which bore a name identical with a tribe established in the coast of Friesland. The *Ousdiai* may be the *Ossorians* (Irish *Osraighe*), though we may have to assume a copyist's blunder before we can accept this identification with any feeling of security.

The ancient territorial divisions of the modern province of Leinster are highly complex, and we cannot do more than touch on the subject here. In the first place we must notice that the province was originally two, *Laighean* and *Midhe*, or Leinster (the *-ster* is a Scandinavian suffix), and Meath—the latter comprising the two modern counties of Meath and West Meath, and part of King's Co. The king of Meath in the third century A.D. made himself as nearly master of the whole of Ireland as any one chieftain can be said to have been, and thenceforth the royal seat of *Teamhair* (now Tara) was at least in theory the palace of the kings of Ireland. The boundary between the two provinces varied from time to time, and it would be necessary to write a history of the whole region if we wished to trace the course of the variations. But it may be said that at the time of maximum extent Meath was divided from Leinster by the river now called the Liffey (properly the *Ruirthech*).

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In Laighean, from which the hybrid name Leinster is derived, we may name, among other territories, *Ui Ceinnsealaigh* in Wexford, and parts of Wicklow and Carlow; the *Osraighe*, descendants of Connla, a grandson of Cathaoir Mór, king of Ireland according to the annalists from A.D. 120 to 122.¹ These dominated the diocese of Ossory, which derives its name from them; the *Ui Failghe* (whence Offaly, the old name of their district) in parts of Kildare, King's and Queen's Counties, descended from Ross Failghe, a son of the same king; the district of *Laighis* (whence Leix, the old name of Queen's Co.), with several septs in it: the *Ui Faelain*, also deriving their descent from Cathaoir Mór, in part of Kildare; and the region of *Cualu*, the coast-line from Dublin south to Arklow.

In the rich pasture lands of Meath numerous families were settled. The royal fort of Teamhair stood in Magh Breagh, the maritime plain that also contained the royal cemetery of Brugh (probably also a place of worship that had descended from the Bronze Age). At the time of its greatest extent, Magh Breagh stretched down to Clontarf, near Dublin. Among the Meath territories we mention the *Galeanga* in the north of the county; the *Fir Cul* in the barony of Kells; the *Dealbhna*, a branch of the Dál gCais of Munster, who had lands both in Meath and in Connacht: and the *Fir Ceall*, who dominated a territory, in their time in Meath, but now in King's Co. In West Meath were the *Corcu Adhaim* and the *Fir Bili* (their land is now the barony of Farbill,

¹ This name means "Big Chair" which is improbable as the name of a king: there is probably some deep-rooted and very ancient error of transmission which has produced this strange corruption.

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Co. West Meath) ; in the district called *Tethbhe* were several ancient septs, such as the *Angaile*, *Calraighe*, etc.

Meath was a religious as well as a political centre. Within its boundaries were the chief assembly places—Teamhair (Tara), Tailltiu (Teltown), and Tlachtgha (the Hill of Ward near Athboy). The ancient gods, Oenghus and Daghdha, were reputed to have their dwelling in the *Brugh* on the Boyne, now represented by the great mounds of New Grange and its neighbours.

On the coming of the English, Leinster was granted to Strongbow as a *palatinate*, that is a territory the administrator of which had sovereign powers delegated to him. He was succeeded by the earl of Pembroke, and on the latter's death the province was divided into five palatinates among his five daughters. These were Catherlagh (Carlow), Kilkenny, Wexford, Kildare, and Leix. Though the city of Dublin was in English hands, the country surrounding it was occupied by the unconquered *Ui Tuathail* and other clans, and these formed a barrier to intercourse with the English colonists of the more southern counties. One of the oldest of these English colonies was the community that settled in the Wexford baronies of Forth and Bargy, and which preserved till the last generation its peculiar provincial dialect of English.

The province of Meath was granted as a palatinate to De Lacy, and again ultimately divided among his heiresses. In time, as the power of the crown increased, and facilities for intercourse became improved, by one means or another the sovereign power of the palatine reverted to the crown—in some cases by forfeiture, in others by inheritance.

The English occupation of Ireland had a chequered

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course, and it received a serious blow at the invasion of Edward Bruce in 1315. Indeed, the boundaries of English jurisdiction became more and more restricted, till at the beginning of the reign of Henry VIII. the English in Ireland were cooped into a narrow area called the *Pale*, extending along the eastern coast from Dundalk to Dalkey, a few miles south of Dublin, and not stretching farther inland than Kells in Co. Meath. That energetic monarch set himself to remedy this, to him, unsatisfactory state of things. In 1541 he assumed the title of King of Ireland—his predecessors had been content with the title of Lord of Ireland—and he gradually extended the limits of effective jurisdiction. In the reign of Elizabeth, the Pale was understood to mean the whole of Leinster, Meath, and Louth.

In Henry's VIII.'s time West Meath was divided from Meath for administrative purposes: this was the only addition made to the list of counties in his reign.

In the reign of Queen Mary, however, a rebellion in the ancient territories of Leix and Offaly (Laighis and Ui Failghe, the lands of the *Ui Mordha* and *Ui Conchobhair*) gave an excuse to the deputy, the earl of Sussex, to bring those regions more effectively under the English crown. They were accordingly grouped into two counties, called in compliment to Philip and Mary, King's and Queen's Counties, with their county towns Philipstown and Maryborough.

The last county to be formed in Leinster was Wicklow. The presence of the untamed clans in the Wicklow mountains was an offence to the citizens of Dublin, and accordingly to bring them more easily under English jurisdiction, the county of Wicklow was formed, on paper, in 1578. The division was not made effective,

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however, till the clans were reduced, which did not finally take place till 1606.

The delimitation of the provinces in their present form did not take place till the seventeenth century. Till then Leinster was divided into two, Leinster proper and Meath; Meath included part of Co. Longford, but lacked Louth, which was counted to Ulster; while Leinster lacked part of King's County.

POPULATION

The observations of Dr Beddoe on the physical characters of the people of Ireland still remain the chief source of information on this important subject. By observing the colours of hair and eye of the people whom he met in different parts of the country, he obtained statistics of the proportion of dark to fair persons in the country. The figures show that the Irish are, as a whole, considerably darker of hair, but considerably lighter of eye, than the population of England. Leinster, on the whole, has the lightest coloured population; the upper classes of Dublin indeed, being the fairest community in the whole country. Doubtless some English strangers were reckoned among the observations, for the lower classes of Dublin have a much greater proportion of dark individuals. These form the two extremes for Leinster; about midway between them come the people of Wexford (the Forth and Bargo people are slightly darker than the Wexford people themselves). No satisfactory statistics are available for the other criteria of race described in the *Ireland* volume; but, on the whole, it seems that the men of Eastern Ireland are somewhat shorter of stature than those of the Western part.

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The Irish language was spoken in Leinster as near to Dublin as Co. Wicklow up to the time of the great Famine of 1847. It quickly receded, but its decay in the province has been checked, thanks to the labours of those who are occupied in reviving its use. In 1891, according to the census returns of that year, there were 8 persons in the province who could speak Irish only; in 1901 the number had been reduced to 7, and in 1911 to 3. On the other hand, the number of bilinguals had increased from 13,669 in 1891 to 26,429 in 1901 and 40,222 in 1911; the total number of Irish speakers increasing from 1.2 per cent. of the whole population of the province to 3.5. Every county showed an increase in the number of Irish speakers except Kilkenny; in some cases the increase was considerable, as in Carlow, which rose from 123 in 1891 to 1007 in 1911.

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EAST LEINSTER, as defined for the purposes of this Part, includes seven out of the twelve counties into which the province has been divided, and comprises an area of 4258 square miles out of a total of 7619 for the whole of Leinster. The western boundary of the area is the line which separates Louth, Meath, Kildare, Carlow, and Wexford from Westmeath, King's County, Queen's County, and Kilkenny. While the northern half of the line is very sinuous and follows no striking natural feature, the southern half is tolerably straight and is mainly defined by the course of the River Barrow. On other sides the boundary is formed by the sea. East Leinster is a much more diversified and interesting area

than West Leinster ; this is due in the first place to its long and varied coast-line, and in the second to the greater variety of the rocks which compose it, which produce greater changes in the surface and scenery. The area is a fertile one ; the pastures of Meath and the tillage of Wexford are alike famous throughout the country ; on the other hand it includes, in the Wicklow mountains, the largest continuous area of high moorland in Ireland, and is also notable from the fact that the metropolis of Ireland is situated within its boundaries. It is the portion of Ireland which in soil, climate, and native plants and animals, most nearly approaches those of western England and Wales, which lie directly opposite across the Irish Sea ; and by colonisation its people also include a larger English element than those of any other part of Ireland. The coast-line is, on the whole, low, with few considerable indentations. North and south of Dublin there are bold promontories. The extensive shores of Wexford, on the other hand, are an almost unbroken stretch of sand and gravel. The coast is rather shelterless, and between Carlingford Lough and Waterford Haven, which both provide safe anchorage, the artificial harbour of Kingstown is the only place where shelter can be safely sought in an easterly blow.

CLIMATE

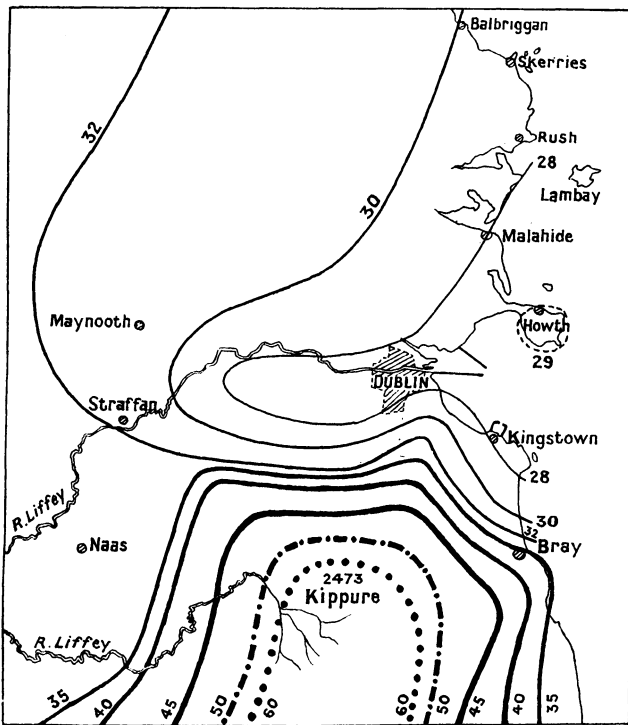
East Leinster shares the characteristics of climate which are prevalent in Ireland—an equable temperature throughout the year, a considerable rainfall, and a high degree of humidity ; but none of these characters find their most marked expression within the district. The average January temperature lies between 40° and 42° F. The July temperature is high for Ireland—about 60° ;

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this is the maximum which is found in any considerable area in the country. The rainfall, which is generally between 30 and 40 ins. within the district, shows



Rainfall Gradient (in inches) around Dublin
 (after Lyons)

interesting variations from Dublin southward. The district around Dublin—from Balbriggan to beyond Dalkey, and inland to Celbridge—is the only area in

Ireland where the precipitation falls below 30 ins. Inside a strip within this area, extending from Lucan to Dublin city, and thence to Malahide and Dalkey, it sinks as low as 28 ins. But as one approaches and ascends the Dublin mountains, the rainfall increases by such a steep gradient that when Kippure is reached it exceeds 60 ins., and continues as high as this southward to beyond Lugnaquilla.

The 40 in. line continues southward, the eastern side of it reaching the sea at Waterford, the western coming across Kilkenny and Tipperary, and round up the centre of Ireland.

The effects of the prevailing westerly winds are less noticeable in this area than anywhere else in Ireland, but nevertheless it will be observed that even quite close to the Irish Sea, the tree-tops are inclined to bend *towards* the east—towards the sea, that is, not away from it.

MOUNTAINS

In the extreme north, the picturesque group of the Carlingford mountains encloses Carlingford Lough on the southern side, as the Mourne mountains do on the northern. Carlingford mountain (1935 ft.) is a beautiful serrated ridge sloping steeply into the waters of Carlingford Lough. Hills of 1500 to 1600 ft. carry the upland N.W. to where a broad, peaty depression allows the Dublin-Belfast railway to pass the barrier. West of that line, Slieve Gullion (1893 ft.) rises, a broad isolated dome, with Camlough Mountain on the north-east, overlooking Newry.

Rising immediately south of the city of Dublin, and extending thence for a length of over 40 miles and a breadth of some 20 miles, the Wicklow mountains form