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978-1-107-66755-6 - The Early Life Correspondence and Writings of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke LL.D.: With a Transcript of the Minute Book of the Debating "Club" Founded by him in Trinity College Dublin

The Late Arthur P. I. Samuels

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I

PARENTAGE AND CHILDHOOD

EDMUND BURKE was the second son of Richard Burke, attorney-at-law, and Mary Nagle, daughter of Patrick Nagle of Ballyduff in the county of Cork. He was born in his father's house on Arran Quay, Dublin. No record of his birth or baptism has been discovered as yet. It is possible that he was privately baptised, as was not uncommon in Ireland at the period. He is described in the Matriculation Register of Trinity College, Dublin, as *natus Dublinii*, and this may be taken as an authentic statement that Dublin was the city of his birth, supported as it is by his own letter of 25th February, 1767, to the Lord Mayor of Dublin acknowledging the honour done to him by his "native city" in conferring its freedom upon him. Notwithstanding careful investigation and long discussion, the precise house on Arran Quay in which he was born cannot be satisfactorily identified. Sir Joseph Napier, after comparing an old survey of Dublin, dated 1750, which is in Trinity College Library, with the Municipal Applotment books, was convinced the house was that which was numbered 12, Arran Quay in 1862, but other evidence seems to preponderate in favour of the house numbered 33 in 1897, which was recently demolished to clear a site for a branch of the National Bank¹.

There can be no doubt that he was born on the 1st January, O.S. In a letter to Lord Rockingham, dated 12th January, 1775, he adds in a postscript, "My birthday—I need not say how long ago." The 12th January, after the change of the calendar, corresponded to 1st January, O.S. There has been, however, as great a controversy as to the exact year of his birth as exists in regard to the exact house in which he was born. Some fix 1st January, 1728, some 1st January, 1729, some 1st January, 1730, O.S. Prior states it was 1st January, 1730, O.S., adding, "Some have thought it to be 1728 from the entry in the Trinity College Matriculation Book; but as the former was stated by his family, and the age 68 is noted on the tablet to his memory, we perhaps have no right to disturb his own and their belief²." There is, however, no evidence to support this assumption of what Burke's

¹ See Sir Joseph Napier's lecture on Edmund Burke, Appendix (Dublin, 1862), and *The Irish Builder*, vol. 39, pp. 239–40; vol. 40, pp. 7–8 and 29.

² Prior's *Life of Burke*, 5th ed. (1854), p. 4.

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own or his family's belief was as to the year of his birth; neither he nor they made any recorded statement in reference to it. The following facts lead to the conclusion that the 1st January, 1729, O.S., was the correct date. His parents, Richard Burke and Mary Nagle, were married in the end of 1724. There were several children of the marriage, but all of them died in infancy, with the exception of Garret, the eldest son, Juliana, the only surviving daughter, Edmund and Richard. The marriage licence bond, dated 21st October, 1724, entered into by Garret Nagle, on behalf of the bride, and Richard Burke, the bridegroom, prior to the marriage, is amongst the records of the Diocese of Cloyne, deposited in the Public Record Office, Dublin¹. It was in the following terms:

Marriage Licence Bond, 1724, Diocese of Cloyne. Noverint Universi per presentes nos Richard Bourke de Shanballyduff in Comit' Corc' gen' & Garret Nagle de ead gen' teneri & firmiter Obligari Reverendo in Christo patri Domino Domino Carolo Providentia Divina Clonensia Episcopo² in quingentis libris ster. bonae & legalis monetae Angliae solvendis eidem Domino Episcopo aut suo Attornato Haeredibus vel Successoribus suis ad quam quidem solutionem & fideliter faciendam obligamus & nos utrumque nostrum Haeredes Executores & Administratores nostros & utriusque nostrum per se pro toto & in solido firmiter per Praesentes sigillis nostris sigillat. Datum vicesimo primo die mensis 8bris Anno Domini 1724.

The condition of the Obligation is such, That if at all times hereafter, there shall not appear any Canonical Let or Impediment, but that the above-bounden Mr Richard Bourke may solemnize Matrimony with Mrs Mary Nagle of the Parish of Monanimy and that there is no Pre-contract of Marriage of either of the said parties with any other, nor Suit depending in any Court concerning the same, and that the consent of the Parents and Friends of both parties, be thereunto first had and obtained. And lastly that the said Matrimony be publicly solemnized according to the Canons of the Church of Ireland, that then this present Obligation to be void, and no effect, or else to remain in full Force and Vertue in Law.

Signed, Sealed and Delivered for the use of the said Lord Bishop in the presence of THO. CASEY (BOY)LE BROWNE.	RICHD. BURKE (seal) GARRET NAGLE (seal)
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It will be noted that the name is spelled Bourke in the body of the bond, but it is signed Richard Burke. The name is spelled differently Burke, Bourke, and Burk in several parochial register

¹ Now destroyed.
² Charles Crow, D.D., Bishop of Cloyne (1702-26).

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entries, and also in the books of Trinity College, Dublin. The original will, dated 4th November, 1767, of Richard Burke is in the Record Office, Dublin; the testator signs as Burke, and the name is thus spelled in the body of the will, while Edmund, his son, who was a witness, signs his name (quite exceptionally) as Edmd. Bourke. The handwriting of this signature is undoubtedly Edmund Burke's¹.

Garret was probably the first-born child of the marriage. His baptismal certificate cannot be discovered and the date of his birth is not known. Juliana was baptised in Castletown-Roche parish church, and her baptism is entered on the first page of the parish register, which is in the Public Record Office, Dublin. The left margin of the entry has frayed away through the effects of time, and the entry reads now as follows:

(Paris)h of Castle t Roche
(b)aptised-an-Dom-1728
(Jan) ye 1st—Juliana—Daught of
(Ric)hd & Mary Burke
Ed. Fitton, Gd Father
Mary Dunworth, Gd Mothers
,, Nagle.

The next entry in the register is a baptism of the year 1729². Richard Burke, Edmund's father, in his will dated 4th November, 1761, directed that he should be buried "privately and therefore decently in St James' churchyard, Dublin, as near the place where my children are buried as may be guessed." The visitation returns of the register of St James' parish covering the years 1724 to 1729 still exist in the Record Office, Dublin³. The following entries of burials appear in them: "25th April 1728 James Burke." "1728-1729. 7 March Edmund Bourke." The register of burials preserved in St James' Church does not begin until 1743, but the earlier visitation returns were authenticated by the signatures of the vicar and church-

¹ See the will, *post* p. 405. The original is now destroyed.
² In the note of the entry of Juliana's baptism made by A. P. I. Samuels in 1912, as taken by him from the Parish Register in the Record Office, the date appears as "Jan. ye 1st." From an inspection of the same entry made by me with Mr Herbert Wood, Deputy Keeper of the Records, in March 1922, the first page of the Register appeared to have crumbled away slightly on the edging; and it was not possible then to say from the fragment of the letter preceding "ye 1st" whether the month was January. There is no question as to the year being 1728, O.S. A mere fragment remaining appeared to be the end of the letter "n." This register has escaped destruction, fortunately. (A. w. s.)
³ Now destroyed.

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wardens. There was therefore an Edmund Burke buried in St James' churchyard on 7th March, 1728–9, O.S. In the Register of Baptisms of St Michan's New Parish¹, which embraced Arran Quay, appears on the 18th December, 1733, the baptism of "Richard s. of Richd. Bourke Gent. & Mary." On "June 1st 1735, Mary D. of Richd Burk Attorney & Mary."

"Oct. 19th 1737 Mary D. of Richd. Burk Attorney & Mary." Evidently the Mary born in 1735 had died before the second Mary was christened, 19th October, 1737.

On "July 25th 1739 Elizabeth dr. of Richard Burk Atty & Mary" was baptised, and on 14th October, 1741, "Francis Dr. of Richd. Burke Atty & Mary—Aaron Quay." and "1744 July 19th Ellen Dr. of Richard Burke Atty & Mary—Aron Quay."

No entry has been discovered of the baptism of the Edmund Burke who was buried in St James' churchyard on 7th March, 1728–9. The visitation returns of the burial entries in the parish register do not record anything more than the names of the persons buried. From the early deaths of so many of the children of Richard and Mary Burke it is clear that several of them must have been weaklings at the time of their birth, and it is probable that need compelled them to be baptised at home. Private baptism, however, was by no means unusual in Ireland down to the middle of the nineteenth century. The first baptismal entry as yet found of any of the children (except Juliana) is that of Richard, younger brother of Edmund, who was baptised in St Michan's, Dublin, on 8th December, 1733. If (as is probable) the Edmund Burke buried in St James' churchyard on 7th March, 1728–9, was one of the children of Richard and Mary Burke who died in infancy, then it is also probable that the next boy born was christened Edmund in fond consolation, just as we find a girl was baptised in the name of Mary on 9th October, 1737, in loving memory, doubtless, of the Mary who had been christened in St Michan's on the 1st June, 1735, and faded away in infancy.

The entry of Edmund Burke's matriculation as it appears in the books of Trinity College, Dublin, under the date 14th April, 1743, describes him as "*annum agens 16.*" It is essential to understand, however, that the year 1743 in the register is not the Calendar year, but the Academic year, which, in the eighteenth century, began in Dublin University on 9th July, and ended on the same day in the succeeding year. The calendar date of his matriculation was 14th April,

¹ Now destroyed.

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1744 A.D. Burke was then “going on” (*agens*) sixteen, and his previous birthday was his fifteenth, *i.e.* 1st January, 1743, O.S. Therefore his first birthday was 1st January, 1729, O.S.

The memorial tablet in Beaconsfield Church states that he died 9th July, 1797, aged 68 years. This would also give the year 1729 as the year of his birth. The existing evidence therefore establishes that Edmund Burke was born 1st January, 1729, O.S.

Richard Burke, Edmund’s father, was an attorney of His Majesty’s Court of Exchequer in Ireland. Attorneys admitted by the judges of any one of the Superior Courts of Common Law could, by special retainer, act in any of the other courts, becoming “Solicitors” therein¹. Edmund Burke was enrolled as a student of the Middle Temple. The entry is 23rd April, 1747, “*Mr Edmundus Burke, filius secundus Ricardi Burke de civitate Dublin, unius Attornatorum Curiae Scaccariae Domini Regis in Regno Hiberniae*”². Edmund Burke, writing to his friend Rd. Shackleton on 28th October, 1766, describes his father as always practising in the Superior Courts and never in the County Courts, and states that

“he was for many years not only in the first *rank*, but the very first *man* of his profession in point of practice and credit, until, by giving way to a retired and splenetic humour, he did in a manner voluntarily contract his practice.”

Richard Burke was a member of the Established Church, Mary Nagle, his wife, was a Roman Catholic. The Nagles of Ballyduff were of the kin of Sir Richard Nagle, Attorney-General and Speaker of the Irish House of Commons under James II. A David Nagle appears in the parish register of Castletown-Roche as attending a vestry meeting in the parish church on 18th April, 1727, but it was an assessment meeting, and as a cesspayer and owner of property he may possibly have taken part in it, though a Roman Catholic. The family were unquestionably Roman Catholics, and Mary Nagle, after her marriage to Richard Burke, remained constant to that creed. It was not until 1733, eight years after the marriage of Burke’s parents,

¹ See Howard’s *Pleas of the Exchequer in Ireland*.

² It was necessary, from the time of Henry VIII down to the year 1885, for any student intending to be called to the Irish Bar to join not only the King’s Inns but also one of the Inns of Court in London and eat dinners there. Burke’s entry in the Temple therefore does not throw any light on the question whether he was intended for the English or Irish Bar. By the Statute 48 & 49 Vic. c. 20 (1885), persons seeking to be admitted to the Irish Bar shall not be required to keep any terms commons, or enter their names in any of the Inns of Court in London. They may, however, at their option keep four of the required terms of commons in one of the English Inns.

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that the Statute 7 George II, ch. 5, portion of the Penal Code was passed, which enacted that:

If any person or persons now or hereafter to be admitted a Barrister, Six Clerk, Attorney, or Solicitor (such Solicitors as were comprehended within the Articles of Limerick excepted) shall marry within this kingdom, or out of the same, any woman of the popish religion, or do or shall educate or permit to be educated any of his children, who are now under the age of fourteen years, or shall be hereafter born, in the popish religion, such person so marrying or educating any of his children or permitting any of his children to be educated in the popish religion, shall be henceforth deemed a Papist and disabled from being a Barrister, Six Clerk, Attorney or Solicitor, unless such person so marrying shall within one year after such marriage procure such wife to be converted to the Protestant Religion.

The act was not retrospective in its effects so far as marriage was concerned; accordingly Burke's father was not disabled from carrying on his practice and the penalties for having married a papist did not affect him. There were, as already stated, several children of the marriage, but all died in infancy except three sons, Garret, Edmund, and Richard, and one daughter, Juliana. The sons were all brought up as members of the Established Church of Ireland; the daughter, Juliana, as we have seen, was baptised in the parish church of Castle-town-Roche in the Diocese of Cloyne, and probably this ceremony in the Established Church would have been held sufficient to qualify her as a "legal Protestant" and to arrest any inquisition into the matter of her upbringing, and enable her father to escape the tentacles of the code¹. Richard, however, ran but little risk. Except in the case of families of property trouble was rarely taken to enforce rigorously the Penal Statutes. Juliana received her education at her mother's knee, and, though her baptism and marriage were according to the rites of the Established Church, there is no doubt that she was of her mother's creed.

Garret Burke, Edmund's eldest brother, followed his father's profession in Dublin, he too was an Attorney of the Exchequer in Ireland. He died unmarried in 1765.

Richard Burke, the younger brother, went to the English Bar, became Recorder of Bristol, and died in London, 1794, also unmarried.

¹ Richard Burke appears in the "List of Attorneys of the Court of Exchequer in Ireland who took the oath directed by the Act of Parliament made for the Amendment of the Law relating to Popish Solicitors and Remedying other mischiefs relating to Practitioners in the Several Courts of Law and Equity" (7 G. II, ch. 5, Ir.), Dublin. Printed by George Grierson, 1735. King's Inns Library. *Pamphlets*, 614.

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Juliana Burke married Patrick French of Loughrea, county Galway, in 1766. He was a member of an old Roman Catholic family, but the licence for the marriage was for a marriage by the Church of Ireland Rector or Curate of St Catherine's parish church, Dublin. They had one child, Mary, who was married to Lieut.-Colonel Haviland. From this marriage descend the Haviland-Burkes.

The following is a copy from the Dublin Diocesan Records in the Public Record Office, Dublin¹:

A Licence was granted the eighth day of January in the year of our Lord 1766 by the Rt Worshipful Alex. McAulay, Esqre, Doctor of Laws, Vicar General of the Diocese of Dublin and Official Principal and Chancellor of the Consistorial and Metropolitan Court of Dublin lawfully constituted, to solemnize marriage between Patk. French of Loughrea in the Co. of Galway Gentleman and Juliana Burke of the Parish of St Catherine, Dublin, Spinster. Directed to the Rev. Samuel Pullein Clerk, Master of Arts, Vicar of the sd. Parish, or to his licensed Curate asst. Sealed with the Seal of the afd Court.

There is no entry in the parish register of the marriage being celebrated in St Catherine's Church. The ceremony probably took place privately. The Act 19 Geo. II, c. 13 (Ir.), s. 1 provided that any marriage celebrated after 1st May, 1746, between a Papist and any person who hath been...a Protestant or between two Protestants if celebrated by a Popish priest should be absolutely null and void.

As Juliana had been baptised in the Established Church it was necessary, to prevent any question of the validity of the marriage, that the ceremony should be performed by a clergyman of that church.

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CHAPTER II

SCHOOLDAYS

EDMUND BURKE, when a child, was delicate, and showed symptoms of lung trouble. To escape from the unfavourable atmosphere of his home on Arran Quay, which was liable to flooding by the Liffey, he was sent, at an early age, to the residence of his mother's family at Ballyduff, near Castletown-Roche, in the north of Co. Cork, where he spent most of his boyhood.

He had learnt his letters at his mother's knee. What was his first schooling, we ascertain from Mrs Leadbeater. She tells us that the three brothers, Garret, Richard and Edmund,

had been when very young, at school with an old woman, who was very cross, and they resented her crossness so much, that one holyday the three little fellows set out for her cabin, with intent to kill her. As her good genius would have it, she happened to be from home, and their fit of fury evaporated before the next opportunity¹.

His next school was in the ruined castle of Monanimy, an old stronghold of the Nagles, in which a kind of hedge school was held². The school-master's name was O'Halloran, who (as Prior states),

lived to a great age, and was known to one or two of the oldest inhabitants living there many years ago, who remembered him, in his youth, as boasting upon all occasions that he was the first to put a Latin Grammar into the hands of Edmund Burke.

Prior, in his second edition, tells an interesting story how Burke, when on a visit to the Nagles in 1766, was shaving one morning and saw O'Halloran coming up the avenue to see him. He rushed down half shaved, grasped him by both hands, and gossiped with him about the old times, and then—"didn't he put five golden guineas into my hand as I was coming away," said the old man.

O'Halloran was evidently one of the old race of Philomaths, who kept alive in rural Ireland under circumstances of difficulty, and often of danger, in the troublous times of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the traditions of classical learning. Poor hedge school-masters were, down to time of living memories, to be found in Ireland, well versed in the masterpieces of Greek and Roman literature, and they

¹ *Leadbeater Papers*, 1, p. 46.

² *Historical and Topographical Notes, North Co. Cork*, p. 161.

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were often, too, mathematicians of no mean attainments. Oliver Goldsmith also received his earliest teaching from such a village pedagogue—Thomas Byrne, an old soldier, “who, besides being something of a bookman, dabbled in rhyme, and was even capable of extemporizing a respectable Irish version of Virgil’s *Eclogues*¹.”

Close by Ballyduff was the site of Kilcolman Castle, where Edmund Spenser had lived and written the early books of the *Faerie Queene*. Thence on the 27th December, 1591, he dated the dedication of *Colin Clout’s Come Home Again* to “the Right Worthy and Noble Knight, Sir Walter Raleigh,” and there were the woods he bid to “answer” and “eccho ring” to his exquisite *Epithalamium*². Burke felt Spenser’s inspiration, and delighted in the same “mountains and rivers and fair forests”; he, too, wandered by “Mulla, faire and bright”; and in after times he looked back to those days of his boyhood, and wrote of them in terms of most affectionate recollection³. He composed, when in Trinity College, a poem on the river Blackwater—Spenser’s “swift Awenduff, which of the Englishman is called Blackwater”—and invoked

Ye beauteous nymphs that haunt the dusky wood
Which hangs recumbent o’er the crystal flood;
And ye whose midnight dance in mystic round
With a green circle marks the flowry ground;
Oh aid my voice that I may wake once more
The slumbering echo on the Mulla’s shore⁴.

The Blackwater runs through Castletown-Roche, and is there fed

¹ *Goldsmith*, by Austin Dobson, p. 14.

² Sylvanus Spenser, son of Edmund Spenser, married Ellen, daughter of David Nagle of Monanimy. She was great-aunt of Edmund Burke’s mother. *Topographical Notes, North Co. Cork*, p. 225.

³ See *Colin Clout’s Come Home Again*:

“One day, quoth he, I sat as was my trade
Under the foot of Mole, that mountain hore,
Keeping my sheepe amongst the cool and shade
Of the green alders by the Mulla’s shore.
There a strange shepherd chaunst to find me out
Whether allured by my pipe’s delight,
Whose pleasing sound enshrilled far about,
Or thither led by chaunce, I know not right.”

⁴ In the *Faerie Queene*, Book VII, Spenser makes the neighbourhood of Kilcolman the haunt of Faunus and Cynthia and her Nymphs.

Cp. *Faerie Queene*, Book IV, Canto XI. See also *Mutabilitie*, Cantos VI, XXXV, XLII, and *Epithalamium*:

“Ye nymphs of Mulla, which with careful heed
The silver scaly trouts do tend full well.”

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by the tributary Awebeg (termed Mulla by Spenser) that courses down from Kilcolman and glides close to Ballyduff,

Strong Allo tombling from Slewlogher steep
And Mulla mine, whose waves I whilom taught to weep.

With the exception of a few stanzas, which are contained in a letter to Richard Shackleton of 3rd February, 1746–7¹, this poem of Burke's is lost. Dennis, one of his college friends, wrote in November, 1747, to Richard Shackleton, "Ned (Burke) has finished the first canto of the Blackwater," but "the poem on the Blackwater, once in possession of Shackleton, was, with some of his earlier letters from London, borrowed by Burke's father, and never returned²."

The boy had gained strength by five years' residence in the genial climate of Southern Ireland. He returned to Dublin, and went for a year to a school, kept by a Mr James Fitzgerald, in Smithfield, close to his father's house³.

On the 26th May, 1741, he was sent, together with his brothers Richard and Garret, to Ballitore School. Some fifteen years previously this famous school had been founded by Abraham Shackleton, a Yorkshire Quaker, who, early in the eighteenth century, came over to Ireland as tutor to the children of John Duckett, of Duckett's Grove, and of William Cooper, of Cooper's Hill, in the county Carlow. With their encouragement he opened the school on 1st March, 1726, at Ballitore, a small town in the south of the county Kildare, and continued as its headmaster till 1756, when he was succeeded by his son Richard, Burke's friend, who was one of the seven original members of the "Club." Abraham Shackleton died on 4th June, 1771.

The simple, yet fascinating, *Annals of Ballitore*⁴ bring before the reader a picture of the later portion of the eighteenth century in Ireland far different from that of most of the memoirs of the time. They contain the traditions of the cultivated Quaker circles of the county Kildare, and of the school kept by the Shackletons.

The hamlet and school surroundings with its fields and orchards, where Edmund Burke played and studied as a boy, whither he loved to return, and through which he would wander again in his visits in after life, are presented as the scene of secluded prosperity and tranquillity, during a period when too often in Ireland "the grim form

¹ *Post* p. 111.

² Prior, *Life of Burke*, 5th edition (London, 1856), pp. 25, 26; *Leadbeater Papers*, 1, p. 169.

³ *Beauties of Burke* (London, 1798).

⁴ The first volume of the *Leadbeater Papers* is so termed by the authoress.