

**THE OLD COUNTESS OF DESMOND,  
AN INQUIRY, DID SHE EVER SEEK  
REDRESS AT THE COURT OF QUEEN  
ELIZABETH AND DID SHE EVER SIT  
FOR HER PORTRAIT?**

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The old countess of Desmond, an inquiry, did she ever seek redress at the court of queen Elizabeth and did she ever sit for her portrait? by Richard Sainthill

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**RICHARD SAINTHILL**

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AN INQUIRY, DID SHE EVER SEEK  
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THE  
OLD COUNTESS OF DESMOND:

An Inquiry,

DID SHE EVER SEEK REDRESS AT THE COURT OF  
QUEEN ELIZABETH,

AS RECORDED IN THE JOURNAL OF ROBERT SYDNEY, EARL OF LEYCESTER: .

AND

DID SHE EVER SIT FOR HER PORTRAIT?

BY

RICHARD SAINTHILL,

OF TOPSHAM, DEVON.



FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY, VOL. VII.

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TO MISS SAUNDERS FORSTER.

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MY DEAR CHARLOTTE,—

I really did suppose that my days of shedding ink and blotting paper were past and ended. But behold! proof to the contrary—"petticoat influence" has decreed Other-Wise. And the influence comes, not from "the maiden of blushing sixteen," nor yet from "the widow of fifty," but is exercised by "the widow" of probably three times "fifty"—"The Ladie Cattelyn, Old Countesse Dowager of Desmond." Indignant at the attempted degradation of this venerable and noble personage, the Lady paramount of the Castle, Barony, and Manor of Inchiqwyn for seventy years, to that of a pauper trampler on the Queen's high-road from Bristol to London, there to sue, as an eleemosynary abject, for her known legal possessions, I have drawn my shaft (I hope not goose-feathered, but steel-pointed) against the invaders of her peace and dignity, with what result we have yet to learn. Assured of your sympathy for the Countess, and good wishes for her champion, I submit the attempt for your acceptance.

Yours affectionately,

RICHARD SAINTHILL.

CORK, 8th August, 1861.



## P R E F A C E.

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UNTIL very recently, "Who was the Old Countess of Desmond"? was a tantalizing puzzle. She was not a myth; for we have the printed authority of Sir Walter Raleigh, A. D. 1614, that in 1589 he personally knew her, and that she lived years subsequently, though married in the reign of Edward IV., who died 1483, a positive interval of 106 years of wedded and widowed life! Here was abundant incentive for inquiry, but unintentionally accompanied with material to mislead—verified, in a very anxious attempt on my part, thirty years ago, to resolve the question, which recent discoveries have enabled a very distinguished writer in "The Quarterly" to answer clearly and decidedly, who at the same time gave the weight of his great authority to the Earl of Leicester's gossip, that the old Countess, at the close of her life, was dispossessed of her jointure-lands, and sought redress by a personal appearance at the English Court; and that the painting at Muckross is an original portrait of the Old Countess. My inquiry on these two points convinces me that she was not disturbed in her property, and did not seek redress at the English Court, and that she never sat for her portrait. My inquiry of 1830, and its erroneous conclusion, having been brought into notice and animadverted on, I have, at the opening of the present paper, gone into some detail of the grounds of the conclusion come to, in which I give "Extracts" from letters I was favoured with by my very kind friend, the late Sir William Betham.



Since this paper was written, there has been a debate in the House of Commons, referring back to the falsification of the dispatches of Sir Alexander Burnes, which is thus explained in a very able review of a "History of the War in Affghanistan," by John William Kaye, which appeared in the "Times," Saturday, December 25, 1852 :—

"But there is left still to tell one other portion of the history—perhaps the saddest of all—though a portion nearly eclipsed by the more exciting record of the actual conflict. With what feelings did the authorities in this country first prompt the exposure of those lives? What feelings, in other words, predominated when the issue had made itself plain? On the 23rd June, 1842, upon Mr. Baillie's motion, the then Sir J. Hobhouse and Lord Palmerston asserted in the House of Commons that Lord Auckland had adopted, and could not have done otherwise than adopt, the views of Alexander Burnes. To support this theory, and throw their own blame upon the memory of a man who was no longer alive, and who was not then known to have left behind him duplicates, and even triplicates, of all his official letters, a blue book was presented to Parliament, in which every portion of every document was diligently cut out which could implicate the really responsible persons. Even the first few lines of one letter were expunged, leaving just enough of the commencing clause to convey the impression that Burnes was speaking of his own opinions, when he was in reality replying to ideas thrown out by Lord Auckland."

The revival of this scandalous transaction exciting at this moment a general distrust of "Extracts," I have, in self-defence, printed Sir William Betham's letters in full, with the exception of a few sentences on private matters; and as the originals are returned to the gentleman to whom I had given them, security is afforded that the original text is printed, and that the "Extracts" are not cooked.

Queen Elizabeth's celebrated "reply" to the Polish Ambassador being referred to, Sir Robert Cecil's report of it to the Earl of Essex is reprinted, to elucidate the reference.

I feel greatly indebted to my good friend, Dr. Aquilla Smith, for having obtained permission from the Royal Irish Academy to have my inquiry read before them, and then himself undergoing the fatigue of reading it. And I naturally feel extremely gratified at the (to me) unexpected honour conferred upon my paper in printing it with the Proceedings of the Academy; which has entailed on me the additional obligation to Dr. A. Smith of "correcting the proofs" in the printing of it.

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The following are the letters from Sir William Betham, Ulster King-at-Arms, to Richard Sainthill, on the Inquiry of "Who was the Old Countess of Desmond"? :—

*Dublin, 5th December, 1832.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I have not been unmindful of your request respecting the Old Countess of Desmond, but it required no little consideration to answer your query—indeed, I am not satisfied even now on the subject of the lady's identity. I must premise that the pedigrees of the Kildare and Desmond Geraldines are exceedingly erroneous, and mislead rather than instruct; so much so, that I found it impossible to make out the thread of history from them, and therefore discarded them altogether, and set about making the pedigrees anew, *from evidence of record*. I cannot think that Ellen Barry was the lady mentioned by Sir Walter Raleigh as living in 1589. Her husband was beheaded in 1467, leaving five sons and many daughters; his eldest son was twenty-nine years of age in 1467; his mother must, therefore, have been at least fifty, which would place her birth in 1417, and make her 172 years of age in 1589, a thing altogether incredible. You are mistaken in supposing that James, the ninth Earl, died unmarried; his wife was Margaret, daughter of Thady O'Bryen, and is much more likely to have been the lady alluded to. She might have danced with the Duke of Gloucester, *before she was Countess of Desmond*, a title she only bore a few months, for she became Dowager on the murder of her husband in 1467 (not 1487).\* Ellen, the

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\* ANNALS OF THE FOUR MASTERS.—"1487. The Earl of Desmond was treacherously slain by his own people at Rathgaels, at the instigation of John, his own brother. John and the other perpetrators of the murder were banished by Maurice, son of the

wife of Maurice, the tenth Earl, Catherine, the widow of Thomas, the twelfth Earl, or the widow of John, the fourteenth Earl, all might have been the person alluded to. To answer to all your queries, I will send you a copy of my pedigree of the Desmonds, by which you will see that some Earls have been altogether omitted, at least one of them.

I am not yet satisfied of the accuracy of all the dates in my pedigree of the Desmonds; but must examine and revise it again and again, after which I will give you a copy for your work.

I am, dear Sir, truly yours,

W. BETHAM.

Richard Sainthill, Esq., Cork.

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Dublin, 9th Jan., 1833.

MY DEAR SAINTHILL,—After our hearty commendations and good wishes for the best of enjoyments to drive away the blue devils during this wet and gloomy season, I have to thank you for yours of the 6th by Barry. You must know that the pedigree of Desmond I sent you is but a draft, which I have never had time to *prove*—*i. e.*, to compare accurately with evidence every point, and verify it, so I cannot at this moment undertake to declare it immaculately correct, but I believe it to be so.

Inchiquin is in the *county of Clare*, and a mountainous country; and Thady O'Bryen was of that county, and, I believe, place. I think there is not much doubt that this Margaret was the *raal ould Countess*. If the old lady's jointure was under a settlement in which a trust for one hundred years was created, to preserve the settlement inviolate, it might be necessary to revive the trust, but I cannot undertake to decide that point. I think Raleigh's words, of *Inchiquin*, would indicate that the lady was an O'Bryen—indeed, the whole evidence, if I understand it,

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Earl." Upon which Dr. O'Donovan the translator has the following note:—"Rath-Gaela, now locally called in Irish Rath Caecla, and in English Rathkeale, a town in the barony of Kenry, and county of Limerick, and about fourteen miles south-west of the city of Limerick. In the Dublin and Bodleian copies of the Annals of Ulster this event is recorded as follows:—"A. D. 1487. The Earl of Desmond—*i. e.*, James, son of the Thomas, son of James, son of Garrett, son of Maurice the Earl, was treacherously slain towards the end of this year, by John Manntach . . . and his brother Maurice was made Earl; and John Manntach was slain for his crime by this young Earl Maurice."