

DÁNTA AMHRÁIN IS CAOINTE

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Dánta amhráin is caointe by Sheathrún Céitinn & Eoin Cathmhaolach Mac Giolla Eáin

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SHEATHRÚN CÉITINN & EOIN CATHMHAOLACH MAC GIOLLA EÁIN

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LIFE OF REV. GEOFFREY KEATING, D.D.

GEOFFREY KEATING, or, as he is called in Irish, Seathrún Céitinn, was born in the village of Buirgheas, ten miles south of Cluain Meala, towards the close of the sixteenth century. The year of his birth is uncertain, though Halliday says 1570. He was educated at a Latin school near Cathair Dúin Iasc. After receiving Holy Orders, he left for the Continent to complete his studies.* His name appears in the 17th place in the list of 209 Irish students who passed through the College of Bordeaux, founded in the year 1603, by Cardinal de Sourdis, Archbishop of Bourdeaux. This list was published in the year 1619, by Derby MacCarthy, and the entry we speak of reads: "P. Geofroy Ketting, docteur en Theologie, Vatterford" (Cal. State Papers, Ireland, 1615-1625, p. 318). Whilst in France, he wrote his poetical epistle to his friends in Ireland, "Mo beannaict teac," (Poem No. II.), and probably collected materials for his large prose work, "Coémp-rciact an Aírinn," or "The Defence of the Mass."

About the year 1610, he returned to Ireland, as we find in a report drawn up and forwarded to the Government in the year 1613, containing "the names

*Abbé Henegan, *apud* Moréri, Dict. Hist., Paris, MDCCLIX.

of sundrie priests and friars within some dioces and counties of Ireland, that you may see what numbers of priests were come over, and whether yt were not tyme to look to their seducinge of the subjects," the name of "Doctor Keating, in the Countie of Tiperarie" (T.C.D., Class E., Tab. 3, No. 15). In 1615 another spy reported that there was "in the diocese of Lismore Father Geffry Keating, a preacher and Jesuit, resorting to all pts. of the diocess" (Brit. Mus., Addit. MSS. 19836, p. 281). But the spy is wrong in calling him a Jesuit.

His fearless preaching brought him, however, into difficulties at last. Elinor Laffan, the wife of Squire Moclar, imagining that a sermon of the Doctor's was directed against her, invoked the aid of the President of Munster, who immediately put the Penal Laws into force. "The result was that orders were immediately issued for horse and foot to go in quest of our preacher, as obnoxious to the laws provided against seminary priests, etc., and a great reward was offered to any who should apprehend him" (Clanrickarde's *Memoirs*, Preface, London, 1722.)

The doctor took refuge in the recesses of the Galtees, in Gleann Eatharlach. A cave, called *pott griantha*, seven or eight miles west of Cabir, was still remembered in 1816, as the place "where Father Keating remained for three days without food, when Cromwell's (!) soldiers were hunting him" (Percy Society, vol. XIII., p. 5). While hiding here, he began accumulating materials for his *popur feara ar Éirinn*. Having exhausted the MSS. which he found in his

immediate neighbourhood, he set out in disguise, in search of the old and valuable MSS. then scattered up and down the country. We know from himself that he was in Connacht, and was struck by the customs which he noticed there at funerals. (Τῶν Ὀστρο-ἑσέτε ἀν Ὀστρο, l. 3, c. 8.) The Abbé MacGeoghegan tells us that his Norman extraction caused him to be unfavourably received by the Irish of Ulster and Connacht. The tradition to this effect still lives in both provinces. He seems to have travelled as far as Derry, where he called upon the historian, Ua Ceallaigh of Gleann Concadhain. Ua Ceallaigh asked the doctor to show him his notes, and, after reading a portion, he replied that the doctor "had favoured Munstermen, and concealed the history of Ulster, which was the most distinguished province in Ireland" (Ordnance Survey Letters, Derry). In Leinster the difficulties encountered were of a different kind, as is evident from the following letter from an ecclesiastic of that province, written to the celebrated Father Luke Wadding, Defender of the Catholics at Rome:—

"Ye 7th Feb., 1630.

"One Father Keating laboreth much, as I hear say is compiling Irish notes towards a history of Ireland. Ye man is very studious, and yet I fear if his worke ever come to light, it will need an amendment of ill-warranted narrations. He could help you to many curiosities, of which you can make better use than himself. I have no interest in the man, for I never saw him, for he dwelleth in Mounster" (Wadding Letters, Merchant's Quay, Dublin).

In spite of these obstacles, the *Dionbhrollach*, or Preface, was written in 1629, and the whole *Forus Feasa ar Éirinn* was completed in 1631 (Moréri). The earliest copy known to exist now is dated 1636, and is preserved in the Franciscan Archives, Dublin. About the same time, he wrote his *Trí Bior-ghaethe an Bháis*, a series of Moral Reflexions on Death and Human Life.

Keating is believed to have become P.P. of Cappoquin, and a small silver chalice of his, is still preserved in the parish church, bearing the following inscription: "Dominus Galfridus Keatinge Sacred. Sacrae Theologiæ Doctor me fieri fecit, 23 February, 1634. (Waterf. Arch. Journ., April, 1895.) In the year 1644, he assisted in the building of the chapel of Tiopraid, near Cluain Meala, as we learn from the following inscription above the door of it: "Orate pro animabus Patris Eugenii Duhý, vicarii de Tybrad et Domini Doctoris Galfridii Keating huius sacelli fundatorum necnon et pro omnibus aliis tam sacerdotibus quam Laicis quorum corpora in eodem iacent Sacello, Anno Domini 1644."

During the war, which broke out in 1641, Dr. Keating was enthusiastically in favour of the Ulster party, otherwise called the Old Irish party, under Eoghan Ruadh Ua Néill. When the two sons of Lord Dunboyne, Thomas and James, fell on the Irish side, in 1642, he lamented them in the fine poem, *Mór Antrom Inne Danba* (*infra*, p. 62). He had already written a *Caoineadh* on their father's

death in 1640. But his intimacy with the Butler* family did not dim his clear-sighted patriotism, and we have no finer condemnation of the intrigues of the Ormonde faction, than the magnificent poem *Márcait do Mhínead, a Dán da* (*infra*, p. 70). This seems to be his last poetical production. He lived on a few years, and died in 1650, as the night began to darken over his native land. An uncertain tradition has it, that, on the capture of Clonmel, 10th May, 1650, he was murdered in the Church of St. Nicholas, formerly called Teampul na Pláighe, by the Cromwellian soldiers (*Wat. Arch. Journ.*, April, 1895.) In addition to the poems contained in this volume, and now for the first time collected and edited, and his three great prose works, *Eochair-Scaith an Aifrinn*, *Trí Bior-ghaethe an Bháis*, and *Forus Feasa ar Éirinn*, Dr. Keating appears to have written two smaller works, one on the *Copóin Mhuise* or Rosary of the B.V.M., a copy of which, with the name of *Seatrún Céicinn* at the end, is preserved in the Franciscan Archives, Dublin, and the other entitled *tomagallam an Anna agus an Cúipp*, according to a writer in the *Gaelic Journal*, No. 103, p. 312.

* We have a *Caoineadh* from him on the death of James Butler, uncle of James, first Duke of Ormonde, whose duplicity ruined the Irish cause (*infra*, p. 24).