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by The Knight of Glin

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COVER: The cover is adapted by Liam Miller from the copper engraved title page of the 1780 Dublin edition of Sterne's works.

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BY

THE KNIGHT OF GLIN

My *bumble* muse *awake* and *sing* the praise  
 Of lovely Glin in *simple artless* lays. . . .  
 Near yonder mount *whose* sloping sides are crowned  
*With* forest trees and ever-greens around  
 There, on the margin of a stately wood  
 With ancient oaks coeval with the flood  
 Stands the proud castle; our present Knight\*  
*Whose* sterling *virtues* I would fain indite  
 Unlike *OUT* Absentees *who* now devour  
 The vitals of our country. . . .

(FROM 'IN PRAISE OF **GLIN**'  
 BY MICHAEL **STACPOOLE**, 1826).

\* Lt. Colonel John Francis **Fitz-Gerald**, Knight of Glin, J.P., D.L.,  
**M.A. (1791-1854)**. Begley, the historian of the diocese of Limerick,  
 writing about a quarrel between this Knight and the local priest,  
 mentioned that Father O'Sullivan did much 'to curb the **oriental**  
 proclivities of his aristocratic neighbour'. The Knight's sterling  
**virtues** were no doubt in other fields.

## GLIN

IN IRELAND families became civilized or declined with mercurial quickness and brilliance. The Encumbered Estates Court and the Absentees brought many amazing changes in each generation. The grandson of an eighteenth century 'man of taste' often regressed into the violently barbaric habits of the squire and where once elegant assemblies danced under elaborate plaster work and jewelled chandeliers, the grandson might sit in a tattered chair surrounded by unpaid bills, a whiskey flask and a mangy hound. Often the reverse was the case and the money arrived in the nineteenth century, so incredible pseudo Gothic and Jacobean castles and manor houses rose in all their ebullient crocheted splendour. These are extremes, but Glin and the family who have lived there since the thirteenth century fall between them.

The Glin Fitz-Gerald's chief claim to fame has been their romantic title, in fact, since the 14th century this family has produced few, if any, men, of distinction. An enigma to genealogists and antiquarians, and a pain to hostesses' lists of precedence and flunkeys at reception announcing, the title has caused many a quizzical glance and much delving into those red embossed reference books that have been so important a part of English and Irish life. It is not the place here to go into the early family history except to say that they followed the usual vicissitudes of the Geraldines of Desmond, rebelling, fighting, being attainted and sometimes hanged. In 1600 the old castle of Glin was destroyed by Sir

**George** Carew and his **demi** canon. The heir of **the** Knight was sent out of the way to Spain with Don Juan del Aquila in **1601**, and was educated at **Campostella**. His father **regained** some of his old estates comprising about **10,000** acres and his son, known as Sanish **Tom**, succeeded in **1628**. The family seem to have been in possession of the **old** castle for some rime as it was again sieged in **1641**. Various complications arose over Spanish **Tom's** successor and eventually after endless quarrels, suits and cases, which make many entries in the State Papers, **Gerald Fitz-Gerald** inherited. He fought under Ormonde on the Government side and was **also** **M.P.** for Limerick in **1661** and for Limerick County in King James' Patriot Parliament of **1687**, and he was later killed at the siege of **Derry** fighting with the Jacobites in the same year. It was either him or his father who built a thatched dwelling a mile west of the old castle near the present house known as Glin **Hall**. The old castle and the lands immediately adjoining were granted to a **Cromwellian** London Alderman named Barker. He never lived there and the ruin became one of the main quarries for the building of the village. Today the old castle is an undignified stump, brooding silently by the Glin river which once supplied its moat. Meanwhile the family juggled in Jacobitism and cleverly obtained a certificate for not having done so in **1701**. At the dawn of the eighteenth century the family had evidently installed itself in its new house for the hospitality of the then Knight and his wife was praised by Egan O'Rahilly. Dame Mary **Fitz-Gerald** of Glin was the mother of

five sons and one daughter (she married 'Holy Bob' Robert Fitz-Gerald Knight of Kerry, the friend of Charlemont and Richard Rigby). The eldest son died young and various keens on him remain. The second, John, succeeded to the estates, conforming to the Protestant faith and died as a result of dancing at his wedding feast. His brothers Edmond and Richard conformed in 1741 and 1740 respectively, and after the dancing death in 1737 Edmond, then a Catholic, became Knight. Three years later in 1740 Richard conformed to Protastantism and ousted his elder brother from the estate, as under the penal laws inheritance was impossible for Catholics. Edmond then conformed in 1741 and regained his patrimony. None of these men had any legitimate son and the youngest brother, Thomas, eventually succeeded.

The years of the eighteenth century were lively times at Glin and in 1740 Glin Hall, the thatched house, was burnt. Dr. Madden's words on the Irish countryside of 1730 probably could well describe the Glin ménage "Even in great estates of several thousand acres you will not meet with two houses of lime and stone fit, I will not say for a gentleman but even for a farmer to live in", and Lord Orrery writing to an English friend in 1737 said more or less the same "Our nobility like the old patriarchs live in cottages with hogs, sheep and oxen". The influence of classicism and elegance had not yet reached this remote estate in West Limerick. Probably after the fire a better house was built and certainly the walls of the wing of the present castle appear older though the date 1615 on an inscription over one of the archways

is misleading, for it was removed from the old castle ruin in the village. Larger rooms must have been built for there is a full length portrait of Richard Fitz-Gerald, Knight of Glin, being challenged to a duel of circa 1740/5. The painting is by Highmore and shows a very haughty, large nosed Knight standing in a plum coloured coat, and a sycophantic servant with the challenge waiting with anticipation. He had married a Fitz Gibbon and there is a table with his arms on it and some Georgian silver with the Fitz-Gerald Fitz Gibbon quarterings. A George II punch ladle with the inscription 'A bumper dear Knight and prosperity to Ireland' gives a hint of the usual pursuits of that time. Evidently whenever he entered the Hell Fire Clubs or Assemblies of Limerick and Dublin he would always cry 'Is there a Moriarty present'. This being a carryover from the time when a Moriarty had betrayed the 'Sugane' Earl of Desmond near Tralee two centuries before. In the 1739/40 famine, Alary the mother of these fighting brothers (Richard was known as the dualist Knight) used to raid neighbouring estates on horseback and carry off cattle and distribute them to the poor. All these stories come from the folklore of the district which has been rich in memory, but all the family documents were burnt in the times of the 'Cracked Knight' in the 1860's — a gentleman we will hear of later.

What the house looked like no one knows, for no picture has survived, but in 1781 John Bateman Fitz-Gerald succeeded his father Thomas, the youngest of the brothers. John Bateman seems to have

been the first really civilized member of his family for some time, despite the fact that his dualist **uncle**, Richard, had brought back a Sebastiano del Piombo and some other pictures on the grand tour in the 1740's; whether he cried for Moriarty's in the halls of Spain and Italy, history does not relate. John was evidently living in England on £4,000 a year in 1781 according to Arthur Young. This was a reasonable income in those days though by no means a princely one. In 1789 he married Margarett Maria, daughter of John Fraunceis Gvyn of Combe Florey, Somerset, and Forde Abbey Devon. This lady was probably the main influence on the building of the present house. She was very beautiful, as is shown in a Cosway miniature of her at Glin, and evidently she brought some money for her father was a very rich west country squire. In 1790 the present castle of Glin was started though its battlements were not added until the house was finished in 1812. John was a volunteer colonel of three regiments and as was usual had inherited many debts, including a law case with David La Touche of the Dublin bank. In 1801 he was again in financial trouble, so much so that a Private Act of the **British parliament** — the hated union had by now been engineered — was passed to vest the estates in trustees 'for raising by sale or mortgage, monies sufficient to pay off incumbrances'. In this act we find that he had spent £6,000 and upwards in building a mansion house and **offices**'. This, of course, refers to the present house and is the only mention of building costs that we know of. It certainly seems 2 conservative estimate.

The house John built probably was designed by him and his wife, and their quartered arms appear in the magnificent plastered hall ceiling. The detail throughout the interior is fine and the front hall and stairs are amongst the best rooms of this pleasing late eighteenth century date in Ireland. The circular hall ceiling is apple green with wreaths of flowers enclosing terra cotta plaques of allegorical figures. The room is split into two by four fluted Corinthian sphinxes. This great hall opens, through two fan-lighted arches on either side of a stone mantle, on to the inner hall and stairs which spring by way of two ramps on to a central thrust which leads to a gallery. A fine circular compartmented plaster ceiling in blue and white with light pastel touches completes the design. The stairs are lighted by a large Venetian window surmounted by an ellipse which encloses cornucopias and plaster flowers. The drawing-room has a rather more conventional and coarser ceiling with fruit and flowers and a radiating fan design of 'rose' as the centre piece. The frieze has plaster Wedgewood-like plaques, urns, lyres and garlands. There is a Bossi chimney piece to match. Next door is a library with a charming Sheraton built-in, broken-pedimented bookcase with its bust, the door being hidden in the woodwork. All through the house the panelled doors are pleasing and there are three good Adam chimney pieces in the three other reception rooms not mentioned. The dining-room has plaster plaques on the walls.

The pictures at Glin are not very remarkable. The usual multitude of portraits include a Coates pastel,

the full length **Highmore** and a full length Joseph Michael Wright of the last White Knight in armour. Other religious pictures are a Bonifazio Veronese, a Sebastiano del **Piombo** and a Francesco del Cairo. There is also a rather doubtful Rubens sketch. The most interesting picture of all is undoubtedly the Irish **xviii** century primitive of Colonel John, the builder of the house, in the uniform of the Royal Glin Artillery.

Colonel John and his wife died in **1803** and **1801** respectively. He had been a patriot in the widest sense, and was adored by his tenantry. Lord Edward **Fitz-Gerald**, his kinsman, had been at Glin in **1797** and John's younger brother, Gerald, was a United Irishman and appears illusively in the diaries and journals of the Emmet uprising. After Colonel John's death various auctions of the contents of the house took place which make for tantalizing reading in the Limerick Chronicle of that date, and his only son, a minor, succeeded to the title.

John Fraunceis Fitz-Gerald went to Winchester and Cambridge, married in **1812** and finished the house by adding the castellations and Gothicising the old wing and farm buildings in that very pleasing and uniquely Irish pastry-like rough cast, complete with arrow loops and crenellations. In the **1820's** and **30's** he built the three Gothick lodges, one of them was a copy of the second of the family **crests**—**'a** castle of two towers argent'—though it was not completed by 'issuing from the sinister a knight in armour argent holding a key proper'. John Fraunceis, known to the Gaelic peasantry as **'John of the**

women', evidently lived up to **this** rather dubious title. He built a bow-windowed dower house for his wife and seemed to lead an interesting life. Various law cases with the local Catholic priest over the seignorial **rights and dubious** political dealings in the **1830 Limerick election** concerning the necessity of his **becoming** High Sheriff to pack the jury, cast a **rakish** light on him. He was **an excellent** Irish scholar and a **M.R.I.A.** Also a legendary figure on a horse, but **above all he** seems to **have been a successful gambler** and recouped the family fortunes. **The** present demesne wall was built as a result of a bet with Gerald Blennerhassett of Riddlestown. **A folly** and a hermitage were also built by him.

The **house was** described in the guide books as 'a spacious and **elegant** mansion finely situated in 1 richly wooded and highly embellished demesne', from the purely architectural point of view it **would be** called a semi-Gothic castellated **house**, but **no one** leaves any account of **a visit** to Glin except a **parson cousin who** wrote a book on the Colleen Bawn in **whose case** the Knight as magistrate was very active. After John **Fraunceis'** death he was succeeded **by** his son John Fraunceis Eyre **Fitz-Gerald**, known for his madness as the 'cracked Knight'. The stories leaves any account of a visit to Glin except a everything from riding his horse up to bed **to horse** whipping Lord Kitchener's father at Tralee races for rackrenting his tenants. The bailiffs were frequently visitors at Glin and some more of the good furniture was sold in his time, the Knight being more **interested** in his pack of hounds than **Hepplewhite. It is** perhaps

hot remarkable that the hall chairs remain, as they are cock fighting ones.

Glin during the latter part of the nineteenth century fortunately never suffered plate glass and Victoriana because **there** was never enough **money** to enable the owners to do so. Only the **dining-room furniture** was replaced by heavy mahogany, the dining-room table being made from some of the **floor boards** from St. James' Palace! Dame Isabella Fitzgerald wrote bad novels of high life and tried to keep her husband away from his mistress, Mrs. Richardson. She had married the 26th Knight by threatening to hold him to breach of promise, when he had wanted to marry Lady Alice Maria Hill daughter of Lord Downshire, an heiress. (She later married Lord Bective). At the 26th Knight's funeral Isabella rather dramatically threw his incriminating letters into the **coffin**—a breach well healed?

In those days things were thin and later much of the estate dwindled under the Land Acts. The place really never came back to its former elegance until **1929**. Before then fly fishing, shooting and horses in the usual Irish manner were more significant than keeping the house well. The paralysis of the 27th Knight was not an added help either.

Today Glin has been restored from entrance lodge to castle battlement and perhaps it would be well to **conclude** with another fragment from the pleasing eulogy written in **1826** by John Fraunceis Eyre Fitzgerald's tutor, Michael Stacpoole:

No more let's talk of Lord Kenmare's domains  
Killarney's lakes or Windsor's groves and plains  
Romantic beauties far surpassing these  
Our lovely Glin conspicuously displays  
Tut hold, my Muse! whole volumes I should swell  
Ere half its beauties I could rightly tell.