The Bold Fitzgeralds

The Norman noblewomen of the Fitzgeralds of County Kildare enjoyed a longer than average time at the forefront of Irish life, and their history is all more marked and emblematic, for that reason. Established in the immediate wake of the Norman invasion when Maurice Fitzgerald (d. 1176), “the founding father of the Irish Fitzgeralds,” was granted large tracts of land around Maynooth, the dynasty that emerged was at its most influential in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries when success- ive leaders of the family ruled the lordship of Ireland on behalf of the crown. Famously, and spectacularly, eclipsed in the 1530s when the Kildare’s ambition to remain in the ascendance in Ireland collided with the Tudors’ ambition to subordinate the lordship, they might well have disappeared permanently, like so many other Norman families and Gaelic clans, but for the adaptability and resolution of successive earls and dukes of Kildare in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This required them to embrace not only Protestantism but also the new political order that was brought into being in the seventeenth century, and they did so with such success that their place at the head of the Irish aristocracy was officially recognized in 1766 when George Ill raised James, the 19th Earl of Kildare, to the dukedom of Leinster, which was the highest rank in the Irish peerage. Over the following century and a half, a succession of individuals bore the title with varying degrees of distinction, but Edward the seventh in that sequence, was forced by reason of his egregious financial irres- posibility to transfer the lordship of Kildare to his family’s ancestral home at Carton to an English property speculator, thereby hasten- ing the eclipse of a family that, through many vicissitudes, had continued across eight centuries to remain at the forefront of Irish political and social life.

Since the family had a mere two decades earlier sold the bulk of the broad acres upon which it place at the head of the Irish peerage depended, it could be argued that the seventh duke just hastened the inevitable, but one of the many virtues of this elegantly produced collection is that it encourages caution about such facile and reductive conclusions.

Comprising nineteen short essays on various “aspects” of the Fitzgeralds and the magnificent eighteenth-century mansion, against which they are inseparably identified, the story of the dynasty and the residences they occupied provides a useful backdrop against which one can pursue the ebb and flow of the political manifestation of advanced nationalism from 1900. This book is as much a biography of Arthur Griffith as an alternative history of the period from which that shaped his politics. McGeer’s book is an important contribution to the historiogra- phy, given Griffith’s role in shaping the political

By James Kelly

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I n Ireland Says Yes: The Inside Story of How the Vote for Marriage Equality Was Won, Gráinne Healy, Brian Sheehan, and Noel Whelan offer their insiders’ take on the campaign in favor of same-sex marriage, which was passed by 62% of Irish voters on May 22, 2015, the first instance of same-sex marriage being legalized through popular referendum. Written right after this decisive victory by co-directors Healy and Sheehan (aka Bráine) and their direct advisor Whelan, it offers a first-hand, chronological narration of the background and details behind the successful campaign to add seventeen words to the Irish Constitution in what became the 34th Amendment, namely, “Marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to sex.” The book includes sixteen pages of glossy photos of people and material mentioned in the text, as well as an appendix listing the names of many Yes Equality staff and volunteers.

Gráinne Healy, Brian Sheehan, and Noel Whelan.

With a Foreword by previous President of former Prime Minister of Ireland McAleese.

Ireland Says Yes: The Inside Story of How the Vote for Marriage Equality Was Won, Brian Sheehan, Colm Killeen, Merrell Press, 2015.€55/£42.50.

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Following a short, effusive foreword by President Mary McAleese, herself an powerful player in the Yes campaign, the three Yes Equality organizers begin their narration with the Constitutional Convention that considered the question of same-sex marriage in 2013. Next, we learn of the formation of Yes Equality between 2013 and 2015 and early campaigns such as “Out to your TD” that helped raise visibility. We discover the origins of the slogan “I’m Voting Yes, Ask Me Why” (a Scottish political campaign tag line on TV) and the details of the political machine built to run the campaign, including the creation of the canvassing army between the fall of 2014 and the vote in May 2015. We hear the story of the Yes bus which toured the country raising awareness and inspiring volunteers and key personnel that influenced public discussion, and behind-the-scenes aspects of the public debates that were held in the spring of 2015. Final chapters discuss the impact of media coverage, key personnel and responses, and offer two statements that followed the referendum: Gráinne Healy and Brian Sheehan’s remarks on behalf of Yes Equality welcoming the results, and a dignified and consolatory Message from Yes Equality Reps. to the man, the only county where Yes did not pass.

Particularly for those who were not in Ireland during the campaign, all this information, along with details of the volunteer army, the most interesting material found in the central chapters concerning the nitty-gritty of events, strategy and conditions. We hear of the challenge of historicallv low voter-turnout (as low as 19% among under 25s), the Yes side’s highly effective registration drive (especially among older demographics), the mobilization of young and old people to the rolls, and epic canvassing feats. The narrative portrays the impressive can-cam of the Yes army, this portrait is even more emphatically of Robert, the nineteenth earl (1673-1744), who more than any other made the modern dynasty, and James (1722-1773) and William (1749-1805). The first and second dukes, whose contributions are not adequately captured in divers essays on “aspects” of the development and decoration of Carton and its estates. We read of the recent bio by Horner (2), Alison Fitzgerald, Terence Dooley, William Laffan and Brendan Rooney, and Cormac Begadon. By contrast, the story of the Whig politics of Augustus Frederick, the third duke (1791-1874), is deserving of mirroring the “homophobic” on air, for which supposed “identity and rights” is taken to mean “we are do to with them? Send them to redress or trapped in direct provis- is taken to mean “we are do to with them? Send them to redress or trapped in direct provis-