

CASTLE-CONNEL, or STRADBALLY:

A post-town and parish, partly in the barony of Owney and Arra, county of Tipperary, and partly in that of Clanwilliam, county of Limerick, but chiefly in the county and city of Limerick, 5 3/4 miles (N.E.) from Limerick, and 88 miles (S.W. by W.) from Dublin; containing 5616 inhabitants, of which number, 1313 are in the town. This place, which was anciently called Carrig-Cnuil derives its name from an ancient fortress, originally a seat of the O'Briens, Kings of Thomond, and in which a grandson of Brian Boroihme is said to have been treacherously murdered by the reigning prince. At the period of the English invasion this was a fortress of some eminence. In 1199 King John granted five knights' fees to William de Burgh, a baron of the family of Fitz-Aldelm, in which was included this parish, with a condition that he should erect a castle therein. This and the adjoining parishes were the first places in Limerick of which the English obtained possession. In 1578 Queen Elizabeth wrote letters of condolence to William de Burgh for the loss of his eldest son, who was slain in a skirmish with the Earl of Desmond, and the same year created him Baron of Castle-Connel, and gave him a yearly pension of 100 marks. In the war of 1641 Lord Castle-Connel forfeited his estate and title, which were restored on the accession of James 2nd.; the title became extinct in 1691, but the estate continues in the De Burgh family. In 1651 a strong garrison was placed in the castle by General Ireton, while on his march to blockade Limerick. It was strongly garrisoned by the troops of James 2nd. in 1690, but on 12 August, in that year, was surrendered at discretion by Captain Barnwell to Brigadier Steuart. On the retreat of the English army, it was again garrisoned by James's troops, which in the following year defended it for two days against the Prince of Hesse Darmstadt, and after its surrender it was blown up by order of General de Ginkell.

The town, which is pleasantly situated on the eastern bank of the Shannon, which separates Limerick from Clare, lies a mile and a half west of the Dublin road, and in 1831 contained 178 houses, many of which are handsome villas and cottages of modern erection. It is resorted to during the summer, for the benefit of its spa, the waters of which resemble those of Spa in Germany. The soil around it is of a calcareous nature, and the sediment of the water has been successfully applied for the cure of ulcers, while the waters have proved very efficacious in scorbutic affections, bilious complaints, obstructions in the liver, jaundice, and worms; they are a strong chalybeate, having a mixture of absorbent earth and marine salt. Treatises have been written on their nature, and many persons are stated to have been cured by them, after ineffectually trying the continental spas. The waters rise from between limestone and basalt, filtering through a thin layer of blue unctuous earth, and yielding a constant supply. The spring is enclosed in a mean building, and the surplus water flows into the Shannon. There are two good hotels and a number of commodious lodging-houses in the town; a coach runs daily to Limerick, and there is a daily post. A constabulary police force has been stationed here, and petty sessions are held every alternate Monday. There is a patent for fairs on Easter Monday, 1 June, 16 July, and 4 October, of which only the first is now held.

The parish comprises 5850 statute acres, as apportioned under the tithe act, about three-fourths of which are arable and pasture land, and the remainder is common pasture and reclaimable bog on the bank of the Shannon: it contains also a large

undefined portion of the bog of Allen. The lands are principally under tillage; the soil is fertile, and the system of agriculture rapidly improving by the introduction of green crops; limestone is abundant. The bulk of the inhabitants are agriculturists, or dependent on the visitors to the spa; but many obtain employment in cutting turf and conveying it to Limerick, particularly for its large distillery; River Lawn, a mile below the town, is an extensive bleach-green and mill; and at Annacotty, near Mount Shannon, one of the first paper-mills established in Ireland was erected by Mr. Joseph Sexton. The parish is connected with the county of Clare by an ancient structure called O'Brien's Bridge, originally built by one of the royal line of Thomond, and in later times often strongly contested by the various parties who strove to obtain possession either of the important fortress of Castle-Connel, or the wealthy city of Limerick. It was partially destroyed by the Earl of Ormonde, in 1556, but was soon afterwards restored. The Shannon is not navigable here until within about a mile of the bridge, where the canal from the Clare side joins the river, there being many shoals, rocks, and cascades in its channel. It abounds with trout and salmon, of which latter there is a valuable fishery at the waterfall called the Leap. The falls here are numerous, there being a descent of 50 feet in less than three miles, and add greatly to the beauty of the scenery, which is embellished with the mansions and parks of the neighbouring gentry, and the ruins of three ancient castles, that of Castle-Connel being in the parish, and those of Newcastle and Castle-Troy being distinctly visible from its higher parts, while the Keeper mountains form a noble background on the north-east. The climate is good, the air remarkably pure, and great improvements have recently been made by reclaiming bog, etc., particularly by the proprietors of the Limerick distillery. Among the seats, the most distinguished is Mount Shannon, the residence of the Earl of Clare, and one of the finest mansions in the south of Ireland: the hall and library are particularly entitled to notice, and the grounds are laid out with great taste. Not far distant is Hermitage, the beautiful seat of Lord Massy; Caherline, of W.H. Gabbett, Esq.; Prospect, of Godfrey Massy, Esq.; New Garden, of Massy Ryves, Esq.; Shannon View, of W. White, Esq.; Belmont, of Captain Stackpoole; Woodlands, of J. Tuthill, Esq.; Castle-Connel House, of H.O. Callaghan, Esq.; Stormont, of Mrs. Kelly; Doonass, of Sir Hugh Dillon Massy, Baronet; Fairy Hall, of H. O. Bridgeman, Esq.; and Mulcaher, of the Rev. J. Crampton. A handsome range of well-built houses, called the Tontine, three stories high, with projecting roofs, was erected here in 1812, by the late W. Gabbett, Esq., from a fund raised by subscription; but not answering the expectation of the subscribers, they have been sold. Opposite these buildings is an island of about four acres, connected with the mainland by a causeway 23 feet wide. About two miles north of Castle-Connel is the small but pretty village of Montpelier, which has a sulphureous spa of great virtue in ulcerous and cutaneous diseases; but in consequence of other water being allowed to mingle with it, its efficacy has been diminished and few resort to it.

The living is a rectory and vicarage, in the diocese of Killaloe, episcopally united, in 1803, to the rectory and vicarage of Kilnegaruff, and in the patronage of the bishop: the tithes amount to £244.12. 3 3/4., and of the benefice to £516.7.1 1/2. The church, erected in 1809, by aid of a grant of £250 from the late Board of First Fruits, was greatly enlarged in 1830, and is now a beautiful cruciform edifice with a lofty octagonal spire. There is no glebe-house, but a glebe of 2a.0r.14p. The R.C. union is co-extensive with that of the Established Church; the chapel is a large plain edifice. The parochial schools are chiefly supported by the rector; and there are a female school near Mount Shannon, supported by Lady Isabella Fitzgibbon, and an infants' school supported by voluntary contributions. In these schools are about 90 boys and 180 girls; and there are four private schools, in which are about 260 children. A

dispensary was established in 1819. The only remains of the ancient and strong fortress of Castle-Connel are part of the tower and fragments of some other parts, situated on an isolated limestone rock, having an area of 42 by 27 1/2 yards. The only other vestige of antiquity is on an island opposite the Tontine, which was formerly called Inis-cluan; it consists of the remains of a friary, founded in 1291 by Renald de Burgh, for Franciscans, and has lately been converted into out-houses to a handsome newly erected cottage.