

THE EARLIEST GRACES

This great and illustrious family yields to none in Great Britain for antiquity. There is not a family of which succession is traced with greater distinctness and certainty, and with so little interruption.

Founded by Otho, a Saxon baron, ante conquest, the line has continued unbroken for a period of nearly nine centuries. Lord Othoere, Ortho's father, is mentioned in the appendix to the Life of King Alfred as living in his reign and being a rich and powerful lord, having descended from the kingdom of Norway. It also appears by the Domesday Book that Otho was living in England in the sixteenth year of the reign of Edward the Confessor. Ortho's son was Castellan Walter Fitz-Ortho, born about 1000 A. D., and at the general survey of the then kingdom in 1078 was Castellan of Windsor and was appointed by William the Conqueror to be warden of all the forests in Berks. He and Gladys, daughter of Ryal ap Conyn had three sons: Gerald (born in 1030 A. D.), Robert, and William. The first son, Gerald, held the titles of captain, governor, president, chamberlain, and Castellan of Windsor. He married Nesta, daughter of Phys Ap Tudor Mawrd (Theodore the Great, king of South Wales), who was reputed to be the most beautiful woman of her time. They had three sons: Maurice Fitz-Gerald, who was born in 1080 and was ancestor of all the Geraldines; William Fitz-Gerald, who was born in 1088 and from whom sprang the families of Fitzmaurice, Carew, Grace, and Gerard; and David, who was born in 1090 and became Bishop of St. David's.

This second son, William Fitz-Gerald, was of the Castle Kerrinor Karru, in Carmarthenshire, South Wales, and was sent by Earl Strongbow (Richard de Clare) to Ireland in 1171 with his son Raymond where for a time he assisted in the reduction of the Kingdom.

According to the Edward MacLysaght's *More Irish Families*, 1982, and Richard Langrishe's *Guide to Irish Surnames*, 1902, the Graces are descended from this Raymond le Gross or le Gras, one of the three outstanding figures of the Anglo-Norman invasion. He married Strongbow's sister, Basilia de Clare, and was viceroy in 1176. He assisted King Henry II, and on the death of Strongbow in 1177, Raymond Le Gross was chosen by the Council as Chief Governor of the Kingdom of Ireland. It is he that is the ancestor of the Graces, Baronets, and the Fitz-Maurices, and the Earls of Kerry. This original ranks among the earliest of Anglo-Norman settlers in Ireland.

The territory which they acquired in consequence was in what is now County Kilkenny, and it was called Grace's county. The head of the family was known as Baron of Courtstown. In 1690, the extent of this property was 32,000 acres, and the then owner, Robert Grace, was exempted from confiscation by an article of the Treaty of Limerick, but his son was disposed in 1701 on a technical legal point.

The Graces, like almost all the great Hiberno-Norman families remained Catholic and espoused to the Jacobite cause. Colonel John Grace raised and commanded one of the regiments in James II's army in which at least ten of the name served as officers. Colonel Richard Grace (1620-1691) was one of the most notable personalities of seventeenth century Ireland. He was prominent in both the Cromwellian and Williamite wars and in the latter he was killed at the siege of Athlone at the age of 70. Up to the time of the Courtstown confiscation, the Grace connection was mainly--but by no means entirely--with County Kilkenny. In 1659 it was recorded as a principal Irish name in four baronies of County Kilkenny and also in the adjoining County Tipperary barony of Eliagarty. A number of places in the four Midland counties of Kilkenny, Carlow, Leix, and Kildare have taken their names from the Grace family: Castle Grace, Grace Castle, Grace's Wood, Graceland, Grace's Court, and Gracefield. The last named near Athy was formerly called Shanganagh.

The Ormond Deeds, the Justiciary Rolls and every mediaeval record which deals with that part of the country abound in references to the Grace family who held many public administrative positions and were closely associated with the monastery of Jerpoint of

which two Graces were abbots. James Grace was an annalist from Gracefield, the home of the Courtstown family. Another very notable member of the Gracefield branch was John Grace (1734-1811) who while serving with the Austrian Army was detailed as the special escort of Marie Antoinette on her journey back to France.

The list of Graces continues, but special mention must be made about Sheffield Grace (1788-1850) who was an antiquary and a significant author of Grace ancestry.

These are only a sample of all the Graces worthy of mention. However, it gives the reader an idea of the beginnings of this proud and noble family; and it sets the stage for this family's movement into North America.