



*Abbey (Lios Mor in Gaelic) was one of the most well-known monasteries in southern Ireland in its day. ...This particular monk, Domhnaill, had two sons. These were the first to take the name McDomhnaill (McDonnell), meaning 'son of Domhnaill'.*

In a book this large one would expect details. McDonnell supplies them. He offers minutiae of interest to die-hard history buffs, but does so within clear narratives of Irish history and development. This allows the casual reader to digest one portion of his immense body of research before having to ingest another.

It works. One description begins to get at the on-going enmity between Protestant and Catholic in Ireland. With regard to land tenancy, the "Ulster custom" gave Protestant tenant farmers

*a reasonable expectation and security under their tenancy. As long as rent was paid on time, the lease would continue indefinitely and a Protestant tenant could improve his house or his farm without an increase in rent. ... A Catholic tenant had no such expectation. If a Catholic improved his house or farm, it would become more valuable. As a result, the landlord would raise the rent. If the Catholic tenant could not pay the higher rent, he would be evicted.*

It is the type of historical tome that offers general information about the subject and illustrations to whet the appetite. It also provides the detail we might look for in doing our own research. Much of McDonnell's information on early Ireland comes from the Irish annals and chronicles; some is in Gaelic, some in Olde English. He has done us a service. He has summarized the material, and allowed us to avoid learning a new language. He has also provided links to the original sources, should we want to spend months or years perusing them ourselves.

The effort and finesse put into presenting stories in modern terms is impressive. Ancient legends and tales can be extremely cryptic and the connection to modern concepts hidden in archaic terminology and meaning. McDonnell does a fine job of untangling them.

McDonnell incorporates a lot of information on things we take as common knowledge, such as the "potato famine". He addresses these in a clear and comprehensive manner. After his stories and discussions, we are more informed than before. One such note is the fact that there was Indian corn (maize) aplenty in 1847.

The corn ...

*was provided by food traders and merchants in response to the high prices and potential high profits. ... But, it didn't do the Irish any good. By the time the food arrived in 1847, the Irish didn't have any money. All their resources had been exhausted, even those who once had been reasonably well off. ... The corn was kept in warehouses while the people outside starved.*

*ClanDonnell* is imposing and inspiring in several ways. The length gives one pause. The research is inclusive. The dedication to achieve completion is inspiring. The text is reader-friendly. The stories enchant and engage. Overall, David McDonnell has produced a life-work worthy of the term, and a welcome addition to the literature about Ireland.