THE COUNTESS OF IRELAND.

Who was "The Countess of Ireland?" No such title is recognised in any work on the Peerage, and yet there is record evidence that a lady so styled existed. In the "Rotulus de Dominabus" we read as follows:—

[Herts.]

Comitissa de Hybernia est de donatione Domini Regis. Westone, que est de dote sua, valet annuatim xv libras. . . .

[Essex.]

Comitissa de Ibernia est de donatione Domini Regis; filius (*sic*) ejus est in custodia Domini Regis et est xij annorum. Cestreford, que est dos ejus, valet annuatim xii libras[1] . . .

[1] *Rotulus de Dominabus* [1185]. Ed. Stacey Grimaldi, pp. 35, 40.

It is easy to identify both the manors named. The account of Weston given in Cussans' "Hertfordshire" is this:—

"William de Ow was succeeded in possession of this manor by his son Richard and grandson Walter. This latter died without issue in 1131, leaving Gilbert his brother and heir. This Gilbert was a great benefactor to the Knights Templars, to whom he gave the church of Weston, and the land on which the town of Baldock now stands. He died in the year 1148, and was succeeded by his son Richard de Clare (surnamed Strongbow), Earl of Pembroke, who died in 1176. Richard's only son Walter, then three years of age, died shortly afterwards, whereupon his vast estates devolved upon his only child Isabelle de Clare."[1]

A more wildly erroneous story it would be hard to find. Isabel de Clare was not "the only child" of Walter, but the daughter of Strongbow himself; and Gilbert, Strongbow's father, was not the "brother and heir" of Walter, son of Richard, neither of whom, moreover, were any relation to William d'Ou, the Domesday tenant of this important manor. But a knowledge of the feudal changes of the time enables one to see what had happened. After the forfeiture of William d'Ou had thrown his lands into the hands of the Crown, his honour of "Striguil" or Chepstow, with the land of Gwent, was given by Henry I to Walter, a younger son of Richard de Clare.[2] On Walter's death, under Stephen, his lands are known to have passed to his nephew Gilbert de Clare, a younger son like himself; and this Gilbert was created Earl of Pembroke by Stephen. It was by him that the church of Weston was given to the Knights Templars, and it was from him that his son, "Strongbow" (Earl Richard), inherited this manor. We see, therefore, that "the Countess of Ireland," who held Weston in dower ten years after his death was no other than his wife Eva, the daughter of King Dermod, whom he had married at Waterford in 1170.

This discovery is of some interest, because, in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, neither in the life of her husband nor in the life of her father do we find any mention of Eva after her marriage. It will further be observed that the "Rotulus" assigns her *a son* of twelve years old in 1185.[3] Her daughter and heir, as is well known, brought the fief to William Marshal some years later, and in it, clearly, was included that other manor of the Countess (Great) Chesterford, Essex, of which Morant could only say that it was held by the Crown in 1086, and that "afterwards this lordship was part of the possessions of the family of Mareschal, Earls of Pembroke." We can now say at least that it formed part of the dower, which the famous Strongbow settled on his wife "the Countess of Ireland."

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[1] *Hundred of Broadwater*, p. 36.

[2] This "Walter, son of Richard," is shewn by the Pipe Roll of 1130 to have held lands in Herts at this date.

[3] Possibly "filius" is a misreading of "filia." For the question of whether Strongbow had a son see *Complete Peerage*, vi, 198, and compare my *Commune of London*, p. 309.