

size, and the volume in which it is contained is "composed," according to Dr. O'Donovan, "of various fragments, written at different periods by several hands." The words "Senchur mop" at the head being, as he believed, in the handwriting of Dubhaltach MacFirbis. The numbered pages of the volume are 391.

Date of
MS. in H.
2. 15.

As showing the antiquity of this manuscript, Dr. O'Donovan has translated a note which purports to have been written in A.D. 1350 :—

"One thousand three hundred ten and forty years from the birth of Christ till this night ; and this is the second year since the coming of the plague into Ireland. I have written this in the twentieth year of my age. I am Hugh, son of Conor MacEgan, and whoever reads it let him offer a prayer of mercy for my soul. This is Christmas night, and on this night I place myself under the protection of the King of Heaven and Earth, beseeching that He will bring me and my friends safe through this plague, &c. Hugh (son of Conor, son of Gilla-na-naeve, son of Dunsleavy) MacEgan, who wrote this in his own father's book in the year of the great plague."

In the Annals of the Four Masters a great plague is mentioned as raging in 1349, a fact which coincides with MacEgan's description of 1350 being the second year of the plague. It would also appear that his life was spared for some nine years, which he employed profitably ; for in 1359 there is recorded the death of Hugh, the son of Conor MacEgan, who is described as the choicest of the Brehons of Ireland. He was, no doubt, the Hugh, son of Conor MacEgan, who made the entry in 1350 in his father's book, which contains the Senchus Mor manuscript.

This MacEgan would appear to have belonged to a tribe or family of Brehons of that name, who are noticed by MacGeoghegan* under the name of MacKeigans. "The

* Note to this version of the Annals of Clonmacnoise, cited by O'Donovan, in note (m) to Annals of the Four Masters, A.D. 1317.

Brehons of Ireland," he says, "were divided into several tribes and families, as the MacKeigans, O'Deorans, O'Breans, and MacTholies. Every country had its peculiar Brehaire dwelling within itself, that had power to decide the causes of that country, and to maintain their controversies against their neighbour countries, by which they held their lands of the lord of the country where they dwelt."

In the Annals of the Four Masters the deaths of several MacEgans are recorded, nearly all of whom are stated to have been Brehons or Ollamhs ; and the country for which they held office was generally Connaught, or parts of that province :—

A.D. 1309. Gilla-na-naeve MacEgan slain, "Chief Brehon of Connaught, and the most illustrious of the Brehons of his time."

A.D. 1316. John MacEgan slain—"O'Conor's Brehon."

A.D. 1317. Maelisa Roe MacEgan died—"the most learned man in Ireland in law and judicature."

A.D. 1329. Maelisa Donn MacEgan died—"Chief Ollav of Connaught."

A.D. 1354. Saerbraethach, son of Maelisa Donn MacEgan, died in Inniscloghran, an island in Lough Ree—"Ollav of Clonmacnoise."

A.D. 1355. Teige MacEgan died—"a man learned in the Fenechus," or ancient laws of Ireland.

These were all predecessors or contemporaries of Hugh MacEgan who made the entry in the book containing the manuscript of the Senchus Mor. Gilla-na-naeve MacEgan, who died in 1309, was probably his grandfather.

The facts thus recorded in the Annals of the Four Masters, all tend to confirm the conclusion that the manuscript in H. 2. 15, was in the possession of one of the most distinguished families of Irish Brehons prior to 1350, and most probably prior to 1309.

The MacEgans appear to have retained a distinguished position as Brehons for many years ; for in A.D. 1399 there is recorded the death of another Gilla-na-naev, son of Conor