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plás ; plámás

The word **plás** I take to be a borrowing of the Mid. Eng. *fallace*, *fallas*, 'deception, falsehood.' MacFirbis in the preface to his *Leabhar Geinealach* twice spells the word *fallás*: viz., as *nár édir dhóibh . . . bréug na fallás do dhénamh* (sic leg.) *ann*, p. 6; and *iarraim do athc[h]uingidh orra gabháil ga ffohantaidh gan fallás*, p. 26.¹ Tadhg Ó Neachtain in his MS. Dictionary gives '*fallas* i. earraid'; and '*fallasach* i. earraídeach.' O'Reilly gives (in addition to *fallsachd*, derived from the adj. *fallsa*), *fallasachd*, 'deceit, deceitfulness, fallaciousness.' But from the 17th century onwards (and I have no earlier examples of the word) the usual spelling is *plás*,² though dictionaries previous to Dinneen's curiously ignore this form of the word. Thus Aonghus Ó Dálaigh calls the Clann Amhlaoibh *samhairlighe pláis* ('The Tribes of Ireland,' p. 66). Keating (*Poems*, l. 37) has a *Fhódla phláis*, i.e. 'false (faithless, deceitful) Erin.' In later verse *plás* is of very frequent occurrence, sometimes with the meaning 'deceit, falsehood' (cf. Eoghan Ruadh, ll. 286, 1234), and sometimes 'flattery, lying compliment.' For the transition from 'lying' to 'flattery,' cf. the various shades of meaning of *bréagadh*, *brionnach*.

plámás makes its appearance in Irish later than *plás*. The first lexicographer to notice it was Peter O'Connell, who in his MS. dictionary gives "*plámas*, adulation, flattery." Later O'Donovan, in his Supplement to O'Reilly, has "*plamás*, cajolery; query? diplomacy." It is a word³ of rare occurrence in our literature; and I have noted no instance earlier than the use of the adj. *plámásach* in two warrants of Eoghan Ruadh's (GJ. 110, p. 20, and ed. Dinneen, p. 109). It is safe to equate it with the English *blancmange*, formerly *blamanger*, *blaumanger*, etc., the ending having been shortened to *-mange* in the eighteenth century. Just as in the case of *flummery*, from meaning a kind of sweetmeat the word acquired the secondary meaning of 'flattery, empty compliment.' The New English Dictionary quotes only one instance of its use in this sense, but that one is, significantly enough, from an Irish-born writer, Edmund Burke. In a letter of Burke's written in 1790 occurs the following: "Whenever that politic prince made any of his flattering speeches, . . . when he served them with this and the rest of his *blanc-mange*, of which he was sufficiently liberal." The usual Irish form

¹ Keating in his *Trí Biorghaoithe* (ed. Atkinson) uses the spelling *fallásach* (adj.); he twice couples it with the kindred *fallsa*. So in Ó Bruadair, i. p. 84, l. 3, we should probably read *fallás* (= *fallás*) for the *fuallás* of the MS. The o of this spelling represents the neutral vowel developed from an unstressed a.

² *plás* stands for **flás*; for initial *f* becoming *p* cf. *plúr*, *plainnín*, *Pléimeannach*, *Proinsias*. The shortening of *fallás* (accented on last syll. like the Anglo-French word) to **flás* could hardly have taken place outside the South, for elsewhere in Ireland the overpowering tendency would have been (as in native English speech) towards recessive accent; hence it would seem that *plás*, in as far as it is known in Leath Chuinn, must have spread out from the South of Ireland. Cf., for Donegal, *plásaidheacht*, "soothing soft talk," and *plásánta*, "given to cajoling," 'Troid Bhaile an Droichid,' pp. 8, 23.

³ Of course a derivation (such as O'Donovan seems to suggest) of *plámás* from 'diplomacy' is impossible. The earliest instance quoted in the N.E.D. of 'diplomacy' in the now usual sense of 'artful management or address,' is dated 1848.

of the word doubtless owes its initial *p*- and its ending *-ás* to the influence of *plás*, a word of kindred meaning.¹ In Óriel the word is *blámás* (Lloyd), and is thus a step nearer to the original.

Neither *plás* nor *plámás* appears to have got a footing in Scotch Gaelic.

T. F. O'RAHILLY.

Sorcha

Several conjectures—some of them rather wild—have been made as to the location of the country called Sorcha in Irish romance. It has, at different times, been identified with places as far apart as Ardnamurchan (in Argyle), Portugal, Sweden and China (this last on the strength of Lat. *Sérica*). The evidence of the texts, however, particularly that of some as yet unpublished ones, points unmistakably to the identity of Sorcha with Syria.

In the Irish version of the pseudo-Turpin's 'History of Charles the Great,' found in the Book of Lismore and elsewhere, occurs the following: *co tainicc [sc. aithech] dar ainm Ferreacutus do chenal Golias a crichaib na Sorcha*; ² which in the original Latin runs: *quod apud Nageram gigas nomine Ferreacutus de genere Goliath advenerat de oris Syriae*.³ Similarly in a late text the Syrians (the writer is referring to 4 Reg. vi.) are called *muintir Ríogh na Sorcha*, Seanmóiri Muighe Nuadhad, iii, 33.

In 'Eachtra Chonaill Ghulban' Sorcha is said in one place to be part of *an Ghréag Mhór* (i.e. the Eastern Empire? the Near East?): *go ráinic go críocha na Sorcha isan Ghréig Mhóir*. Elsewhere in the same tale we infer that Sorcha is adjacent to *an Ghréag Mhór*, and that it is on the coast of the Mediterranean, not far from Cyprus. And Conall, on leaving Sorcha in order to fight the King of Greece, proceeds to Gréag Mhór, Gréag Bheag, Macedonia and Mermidonia. (Cf. 23 M 10, pp. 48, 54, 60, 80, 95, 108).⁴

In 'Leighes Coise Chéin' Sorcha is adjacent to, and reached through, Greece (Silva Gadelica, i. 300, 302). In 'Eachtra Ridire na Leomhan' the Macaomh Mór returns from France to his native Sorcha via Greece (H. 2. 6).

In a modern romance, 'Eachtra na Gcuradh,' I find Sorcha used as

¹ The ending *-ás* might represent Eng. *-ance* (as in *ordnás*, 'ordnance'), as well as Eng. *-as*, *-ace*, etc. Hence, independently of the influence of *plás*, Eng. *blamange* might have given *blámás* in Irish by substitution of ending. Cf. *orange* (the only other borrowing I can recall of Eng. *-ange*), treated as if **orage*, hence Irish *oráiste* (supra p. 81). Cf. also Mid Eng. *omage* (*homage*), which has in borrowing been treated as if it were **oma(u)nce*, and hence has given Ir. *ómós* or *fómós*, on the analogy of such words as *pionós*, 'penance,' and *cuntanós*, 'countenance.' (Another hibernicisation of the same word is seen in the by-form *ómóid*: cf. *ómoideach*, 'obedient,' Book of C. Prayer, 1712, 2nd page of text.)

² L. Lism. fo. 101a, col. 2 (R.I.A. copies).

³ Historia Karoli Magni et Rotholandi, ed. F. Castets, Paris, 1880, p. 27.

⁴ The author of 'Eachtra Chonaill Ghulban' gives the name of the capital of Sorcha as *Pampelina* or *Pampilin(i)a*, a name I have not met outside this tale. It may simply be a case of his appropriating *Pampilonia* or *Pampalonia*, i.e. Pampeluna in Navarre, which occurs in the pseudo-Turpin (L. Lism. fo. 96 b). Perhaps it was Pamphylia in Asia Minor which suggested this borrowing, much as Bithynia (Ir. *Bethuin*) has in 'Eachtra Chloinne Ríogh na hÍoruaidhe' been made the name of another city in Sorcha (*Cathair na Bethuine i gcríochaibh na Sorcha*, Ir. Texts Soc. i. 162). Lloyd's suggestion that *Pampilinia* is a jumble of Cambaluc + Pekin (Eachtra Mhacaomh an Iolair, p. 101), is much too far-fetched to convince, and is moreover based on the unproved assumption that Sorcha = China.