

THE PARTEEN EVICTION

Whenever there is talk of the Land War in Clare, one regularly hears mention of the evictions at Bodyke, Kildysart and Miltown Malbay. Little is heard of a brutal eviction in south-east Clare, where a farmer, his wife and their ten children were savagely forced out of their home in late September, 1887.

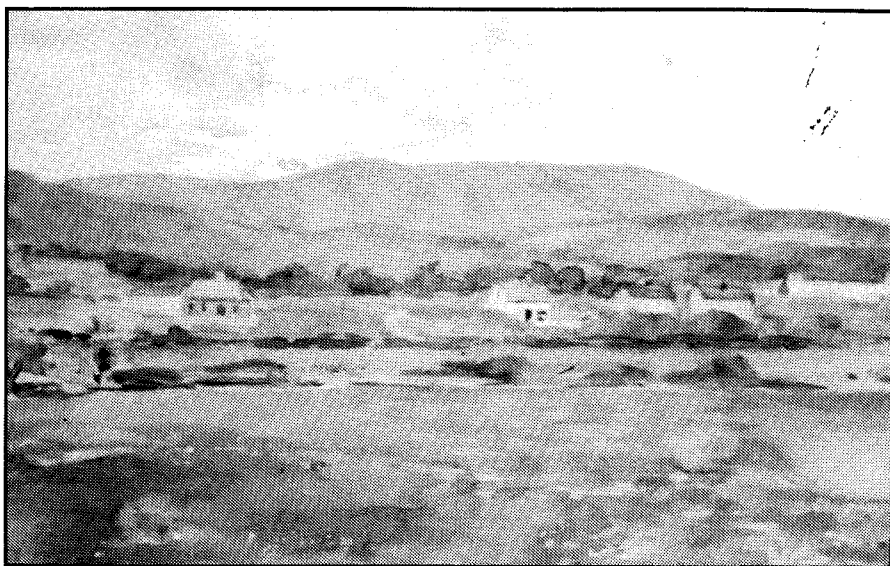
Michael Lane of Firhill, Parteen, was a tenant on the 600 acre estate of Colonel Thomas J. McAdam of Blackwater. He and his wife, Joanna, had lived on their 32½ acres farm for 14 years. Michael had inherited the farm from his father, who had toiled there for over 30 years. The valuation was £38.10.0. Initially, the rent was £40 a year, rising to £50, and eventually to the exorbitant rate of £102 a year.

The bad economic times of the 1870s and early 1880s led many farmers to look for a reduction in their rents. The requests of the luckier ones were acceded to by the more benevolent landlords such as Vandeleur of Ralahine, Blood of Brackhill, Westropp of Tulla and some others. Many of the tenants had to have their requests processed through the newly formed Land Courts, which were empowered to reduce rents if they saw fit to do so. In 1882, Michael Lane applied to the court for a reduction, and his annual rent was reduced from £102 to £80.

For many tenant farmers the reduction in judicial rents was enough to see them through their difficulties, but times were never so bad. The thin wind of economic depression continued to cut, and agricultural prices fell throughout the 1880s. But it was when the slump hit the dry cattle industry in 1886-87 that the crunch really came for many farmers, and it was then, too, that their uneconomic smallholdings proved unviable.

Michael Lane was representative of his class. He was in deep financial trouble. In 1886, he could cobble together only £40 of his £80 rent, and so the landlord moved in. In the early days of January, 1887, his farm was put up for sale at the Courthouse, Ennis. It was 'bought in' for Col. McAdam by a clerk named Lyons for £40!

The local response was swift and angry. Within a few days of the sale, the Parteen Branch of the Irish National Land League held a meeting at Ardnacrusha (now Parteen village) to denounce the landlord and to condemn his action. Two bands entertained contingents of the League from Limerick, Sixmilebridge, Newmarket and elsewhere. The *Clare Examiner* estimated the attendance to be about 5,000. The meeting was headed by F. Luke Gleeson,



A watercolour of Parteen by E. Hawker.

BY MICHAEL MCCARTHY

parish priest of Parteen. Interestingly enough, a strong presence of police was reported; seemingly, this was for the protection of a government notetaker, 'whom they so well enclosed in their midst that few, if any, of the people observed his presence or, if they did, they took no notice whatever of him'.

At the outset a number of resolutions were proposed by P.M. Lane and seconded by M.Corry:

1. *That we renew our pledges of entire trust in Mr. Parnell and the Irish Parliamentary Party and that we bind ourselves to give a constant and unflinching support to the programme of the Irish National League until the achievement of the complete realisation of our hopes in the establishment of our national independence.*
2. *That we trust that the landlords of this district will follow the example set them in many parts of Ireland by granting reductions in rents proportionate to the admitted fall in the value of all agricultural produce.*
3. *That we pledge ourselves to support by every lawful means within our power Mr. Michael Lane in his struggle with his landlord until such time as he shall have wrung from him a fair and reasonable settlement.*
4. *That we call upon all those who are not already enrolled to join the ranks of the Irish National League, and so to take a manly and honourable part in Ireland's struggle for independence.*
5. *That we again call public attention to the fact that up to the present there*

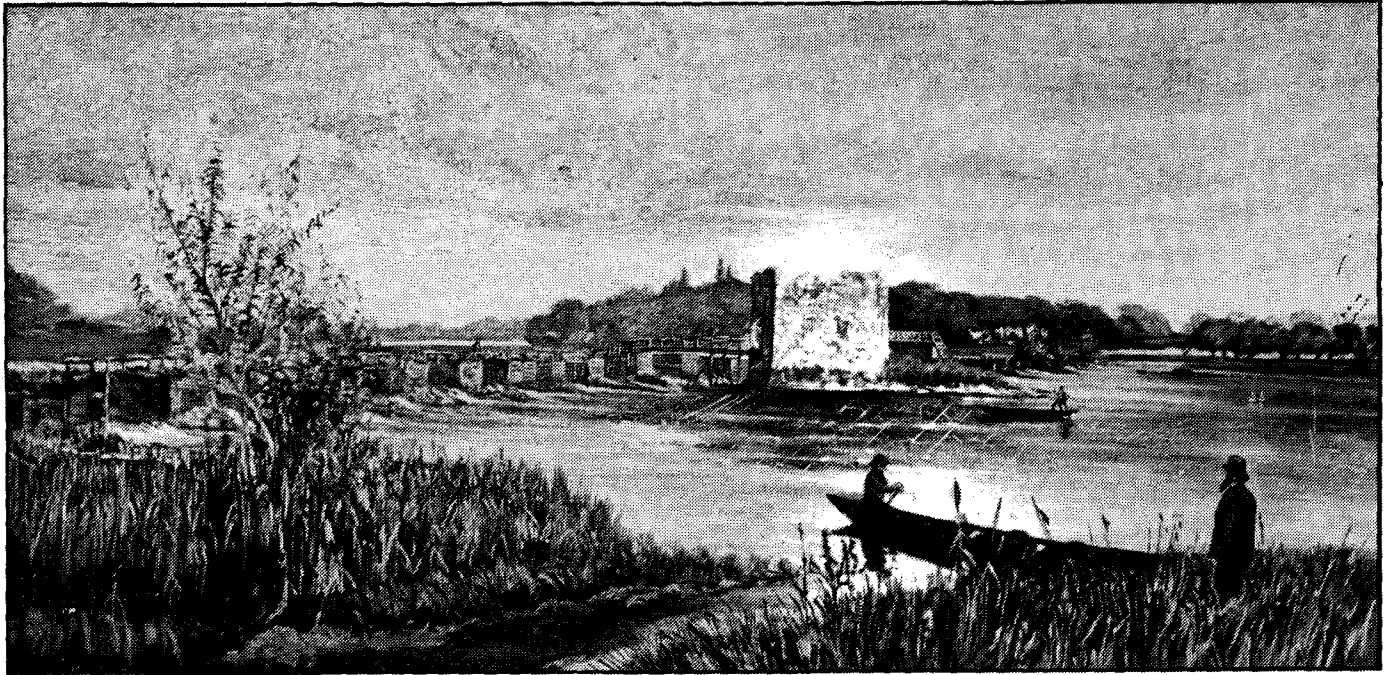
has been no labourer's cottage built in this division of the Limerick Union, and that we appeal to the guardians to at once proceed to erect suitable dwellings for the too long oppressed labourers.

6. *That we desire to make an emphatic protest against the mockery of trial by jury which occurred during the recent trials of Sligo and we trust that the priests and people of Ireland will take vigorous measures to prevent a repetition of the gross insults offered to the Catholic jurymen of Ireland by the action of the Crown lawyers.*

Needless to say, the resolutions were passed unanimously.

Next to the platform was R.J. Cox, M.P. for east Clare, who was a vocal champion of tenants and their rights. He got the crowd going fairly quickly with some rousing remarks about landlords and their style. He outlined the circumstances surrounding Michael Lane's case, and then addressed Col. McAdam 'in the name of the people of Clare and Limerick until Michael Lane was restored to his farm it would remain idle - a monument to the tyranny of landlordism (cheers). The man that would, however, injure the hair of the head of Col. McAdams or Horsford, or Delmege (other landlords), or any emergency caretaker in the farm would do a greater injury to the National cause and the case of Michael Lane than the emergency man who would go into the farm.'

The Land League had a very clear policy when a farmer was evicted from his land. Nobody was to touch the land, and if anyone did so, he was boycotted. Emergency men, as they were known, who operated the farm for the landlord



The Lax Weir, with Parteen in the background.

got a hard time generally. John Dillon's words were followed assiduously: 'If any man takes up that land, let no man speak to him or have any business transactions with him'.

Cox concluded his speech by calling on all present to support the tenant farmers: 'It was no use meeting there and shouting God Save Ireland, and sending denunciations of landlordism up to the high heavens, if they left the field and went to their houses without doing some real genuine work; and the work they were asked to do was to assist them and give them support by going and joining the National League'.

William Abraham, M.P. for Limerick County, echoed Cox's sentiments when he addressed the gathering, but applied the knife to the landlord much more severely:

The landlord sought for half a year's rent to confiscate the improvements of half a century – for £40 to seize £400. It was proof of the honesty of the motives which activated them, that Col. McAdam with his own misdeeds and his ancestors' treachery known all over the country – could walk over the land freely and unmolested by the people whose liberty his ancestor had betrayed and whose rights he himself had trampled upon; but while they fought with felonious landlordism, they fought within the laws. Theirs was not a policy of rapine or bloodshed, with which their opponents credited them; it was the policy of justice by the force of public opinion and restitution by constitutional means (applause).

His reference to the treachery of McAdam's ancestors linked the affair with the betrayal of the ford across the Shannon by a McAdam during the Siege of Limerick.

The other M.P. for County Limerick, John Finucane, then addressed the meeting and berated the local branch of the League for having allowed matters to deteriorate to the point where McAdam could actually sell Lane's farm. He was followed by a number of speakers of lesser importance and then Fr. Gleeson closed the meeting.

In spite of the rhetoric of the National League leaders and the outrages committed by its members, evictions became a common feature throughout the county in the spring and summer of 1887. Michael Lane's turn came in mid-autumn.

'An eviction is a sentence of death', Gladstone had said, and, as if to emphasise the point, the chapel bell tolled funeral-like on the morning of 27 September. Ominously, bodies of police and military began to arrive in what is now the vicinity of the Tail Race Bar and what was then Parteen. First to arrive at 10 o'clock were the Royal Irish Constabulary, under the command of County Inspector Heard, District Inspectors Siddal of Tulla, Keyser of Sixmilebridge and O'Reilly of Abbeyfeale. Then, about 80 men of the Second Leinster Regiment marched up, fully accoutred and with bayonets fixed, and took a position close to the police. Their commanding officer was Captain Cole, who was assisted by Lieutenants Drummond and Meyer. A Dr. Stoney was in attendance, in case of any contingency that might arise. The whole force was under the command of Colonel Turner R.M., Capt. Walshe R.M., Kilkee, and Mr. Hodder R.M.

At about 10.45 a.m., the 150 police and 80 soldiers marched to 'the scene of operations'. Fr Gleeson, P.P. and Fr. Russell C.C., accompanied by approximately 150 neighbours, were already at the farm, lined up on the ditches opposite the house. Reportedly, the

evicting brigade were surprised by the appearance of the place when they arrived, as the windows had been removed and the openings in the wall filled by large stones. It soon became clear that there was going to be nothing easy about this eviction.

Lane, his wife and his brother-in-law, Thomas O'Grady, left it until the last minute before they went back into the house and slammed the door in the face of the sheriff and his bailiffs.

A number of police, armed with rifles, were ordered to approach the house and to stand within a few yards of the door to guard the sheriff and his bailiffs. Possession was demanded by Capt. Croker, the sheriff, but a shout of defiance was the only answer he got.

Once the preliminaries were over, the police were ordered in. Baton-men first cleared onlookers, including Lane's ten young children, from the hedge at the opposite side of the road. No opposition was offered to the police, even though one or two constables were over-robust while carrying out this order. The bailiffs then began to apply their hatchets on the wall near the door but had only displaced some mortar when one of them used a crowbar to put the door flying in.

At this point, police were ordered to draw swords. Lane, his wife and O'Grady then appeared in the doorway. Mrs. Lane was armed with a poker; her husband had the handle of a shovel, and O'Grady brandished a large stick with a lump of lead on top. They shouted at the police and bailiffs to come on, and then made a bold dash amongst them, throwing the police into temporary confusion. They struck right and left as the police strove to disarm them. Capt. Croker saved himself from a severe beating with the shield he had carried for protection ever since hot water and gruel and been thrown on him at Bodyke; he



The grave of Colonel MacAdam, Blackwater House.

escaped with only a slight scratch on the face. Some of the police, however, received sharp blows on their helmets, but the closeness of quarters at which they fought prevented the free play of Lane's and O'Grady's use of weapons. One of the policemen managed to strike Lane on the side of the head with his rifle, inflicting a nasty wound from which blood trickled down his neck. Lane, in turn, smashed part of a sergeant's rifle which came between his stick and the constable's head. Superior numbers won out in the end and Lane was knocked down and handcuffed. After a similar struggle, O'Grady was overpowered too. But Mrs. Lane fought on. She was surrounded by a separate party of police and matched her husband and brother for bravery and effort. Armed with her poker, she kept the police at bay for quite some time. One officer, Detective Inspector O'Reilly, would remember her for a while, as she gave him an almighty blow on the left side of his head and inflicted a deep wound, the poker smashed in two from the effects of the blow. So, disarmed, she was eventually overpowered but not handcuffed. The struggle was over.

After about thirty minutes, when

caretakers had been placed on the farm, under the care of armed constables, the police and military were once more ordered to fall into marching order. With the prisoners in the centre of the military, the homeward march to Parteen was begun. A halt was made, and possession of a jarvey-car was taken against the owner's strong protestations. On the order of Col. Turner, the jarvey, named Sheehy, had driven Mr. Hodder, R.M., and another man from Limerick. But he refused to convey the prisoner even though he was ordered to do so by the Colonel. He remonstrated and said that he would hold Turner responsible. The latter sharply replied that if Sheehy 'did not shut up he would damn soon make him!' Sheehy replied that he was ready to meet the Colonel at any time, claimed that the car was his and that he would not drive it. At that, Col. Turner ordered the police to commandeer the car and to drive Mrs. Lane into the city. The whole party then set out for Limerick with Mrs. Lane on on the jarvey-car and her husband and brother on foot.

At approximately 2.30 p.m., the prisoners were placed in William Street police station. Five hundred people gathered outside and groaned and hissed at

the police. A baton-charge followed and two men were arrested for obstruction.

A week later Michael Lane, Joanna Lane and Thomas O'Grady were brought to court in Clonlara. The courthouse was packed and knots of people cheered the prisoners as they were brought from Limerick. Maurice P. Leahy, Sessional Crown Solicitor, prosecuted and P.S. Connolly defended. Shortly after 12 noon, J.B. Irwin, R.M., Limerick, chairman, and Major Rolleston, R.M., New castle West, entered and the court began.

The three prisoners were charged with assaulting, unlawfully and wilfully resisting and obstructing Captain Croker, the police and bailiffs in carrying out their duties. An outline of what happened on Lane's farm in the proclaimed district of Ardnacrusha was given to the Court by the prosecuting solicitor. Croker then gave evidence, and he was followed by the police. Connolly defended, and laid great emphasis on the fact that Lane's ten children and Mrs. Lane's aged mother were put through the ordeal of the eviction.

In delivering judgement, J.B. Irwin said that this 'was a case when these three prisoners yielded to a temporary fit of ungovernable passion, rushed out and made this onslaught on the sheriff and police. There was not the usual adjunct to these cases of hot water and boiling tar being used; if there had been, I would not have the slightest hesitation in giving each of the prisoners six months' imprisonment'. As it happened, they were given one month each. Lane and O'Grady asked to do Mrs. Lane's term but this was refused. The court adjourned at 3.15 p.m.

There was a curious sequel to the court case and eviction. On Tuesday, 21 February, 1888, Lane's farmhouse, by then occupied by an emergencyman and three policemen, was burnt to the ground. On the following morning, the eviction hut was burnt down. A local man, James Hartigan, was charged with burning the hut, but it was thought that the burning of the house was not malicious. Hartigan was a rate collector. When he was charged at the Clonlara sessions in March, it was stated that he was of unsound mind. Later in the year, Hartigan was in further trouble for embezzling funds of the Limerick Board of Guardians and had to resign his post. Michael Lane was nominated to take his place as rate collector and was duly elected by the Board by 39 votes to 23. Col. McAdam abstained. The Local Government Board later queried the happenings of the previous year but took no action. He named as his guarantors Thomas O'Grady, Blackwater, and William O'Grady, Caherconlish. His appointment stood and he operated in the area as rate collector for some time. Not comfortably though. As one member of the Limerick Board of Guardians remarked: 'The pity is that Mr. Lane should stoop to the position at all'.