

REMINDER OF THE PENAL DAYS

When The Priest-Hunters Were Busy

MASS ROCK ON THE HILL OF KNOCKFIERNA

(By JAMES REIDY)

WHEN "Orjay's" very interesting articles on "The Mass Rocks of West Limerick" were printed in "The Leader" last January I wondered if he had any information about an out-of-the-way place at the base of the "Strickeen," the highest point of the hill of Knockfierna, where, in a depression in the ground, shut off from view on all sides, the Holy Sacrifice was offered up in the Penal Days beside a huge rock, shaped somewhat like a pulpit. Mass was not said on the rock, which is too high and has not sufficient space on its top for an altar, but at the base of it, at its eastern side.

When I was at home at Knockfierna on a four-months visit in 1910, my uncle, the late James Reidy, who resided at Ballinacrouga, in the parish of Clouncagh, told me about this hallowed place as we walked on a field, at that time in the possession of our family, situated on a slope on the north side of the hamlet (formerly the village) of Knockfierna. There is a small glen in the north-east corner of that field, the northern boundary of which is a centuries-old boreen.

ACCORDING TO TRADITION When we had climbed the fences, to the opposite side of the boreen from the little glen, my uncle showed me the spot where, according to tradition, handed down from generation to generation, Mass was celebrated to avoid attracting the priest hunters.

The place, which appeared never to have been cleared, was studded with rough stones, between which there was a luxuriant growth of wild ferns.

My uncle pointed out a two-room thatched house, about 20 or 30 yards west of the rock, where, he said, the altar was sheltered in stormy weather, probably with the door of the house open, so that the congregation could see the priest going through the sacred ritual. I heard afterwards that a hedge schoolmaster, prevented by English law from teaching openly, taught his classes in this secluded cabin. It was owned when I left Ireland, more than half a century ago, by Timothy Aherne, who lived nearby, and later by his son, Thomas, and was then used as a cow house.

MASS IN THATCHED CHAPEL My uncle also told me that, when the rigours of the Penal Laws had been relaxed, Mass was said in a thatched chapel in the village of Knockfierna, on the northern side of the road, where it begins to dip down to the valley leading to Granagh. This place is about 100 yards east of the house in which the late Richard Byrnes lived.

In later years, when the people of Ireland had won the right to perform their religious duties according to the dictates of their consciences, without being penalised by English law for doing so, the "Mass House" at Knockfierna was closed as a place of worship and a chapel was erected at the crossroads at Granagh, where the Catholic Church now stands.

THE ROAD OF THE CURSEL

The boreen which runs past the place where the Knockfierna Mass Rock is situated is evidently a very ancient road and some terrible tragedy must have taken place on it or near it centuries ago, because its name is Robert Malacht (the Road of the Cursel). It branches off the main road, which runs westward, towards Ballingarry and eastward in the direction of Granagh. Its course is northward for about 300 yards, and it then turns eastward at the base of the "Strickeen." It has its beginning at a point about 200 yards east of the house in which Mr. Speerin, a school teacher, lived some years ago. There is another and shorter boreen at the western end of the hamlet of Knockfierna, but this does not run past the Mass Rock.

SERMONS IN STONES

I have thought many times of this holy place since I last saw it and have often made a mental picture of it in the Penal Days, when the hunted priest re-enacted the great Sacrifice of Calvary there for his persecuted flock at an improvised altar, on which the flickering candles were sheltered from the west wind by the massive rock, while sentinels, on the higher ground stood watch against a surprise visit of the minions of alien law. It has been said that there are "sermons in stones." What a sermon there is for the thoughtful in that Mass Rock at Knockfierna in this better day, when foreign rule has disappeared from the greater part of Ireland, now recognized, even by the English Government, as an independent Republic, and when a united Irish race is pushing the bigoted despotism still maintained and subsidized by England in North-East Ulster into oblivion.

SUGGESTED PILGRIMAGE

Wouldn't it be a great and inspiring demonstration of reverence and patriotism if the parishioners of Ballingarry and Granagh, with their neighbours from adjacent parishes participating, would make a pilgrimage to that sanctified ground on some holiday, such as Lady Day in August, and join in thanksgiving to God for the victories which the people of Ireland have won, with His divine aid, and in a tribute of proud and loving remembrance to their ancestors, who exemplified their imperishable Faith there in the terrible years of persecution?

THE WRITER OF THE ABOVE ARTICLE

[The writer of the foregoing interesting article, Mr. James Reidy, is himself a native of the Knockfierna-Ballingarry district. Attached to the "Gaelic American," New York, he has for years been a tower of strength to every worthy Irish movement in that city. A sterling nationalist, he has unselfishly devoted a long life and brilliant talents to the cause of his native land. At present he is actively engaged in the furtherance of the Anti-Partition movement in the United States—Ed. L.L.]

MUINTIR NA TIRE

Pleasant Function At "Drom"

WORK OF THE LOCAL GUILD

A VERY pleasant function was held at the Vocational School, Dromcollogher, during the weekend when a social held under the auspices of the local Guild of Muintir na Tíre was attended by upwards of seventy guests, members of Dromcollogher and the adjoining Guilds of Muintir na Tíre. Rev. H. O'Connor, P.P., Dromcollogher, presided, and welcomed those present, expressing the hope that eventually every person in the locality would become a member of the Organisation.

Amongst those in attendance were Rev. T. Cullhane, C.C., Feobnagh, and Mr. W. O'Donoghue, N.T., Froemount, members of the National Executive of Muintir na Tíre; An t-Athair C. O'Sullivan, S.P., Cill Ide, and Rev. P. Enright, C.C., Broadford.

WORK OF THE GUILD

The Secretary of the local Guild, reviewing the work of the Guild throughout the year, stated that, through representations made, the following local needs had been attended to:

1. A defective water supply to the town had been partially remedied.
2. The cause of the flooding of houses at Church Street had been removed.
3. Improvement of local cemetery.
4. Extra street lamps erected in the town.
5. The cause of rural electrification had been pressed and there seemed to be reasonable hope of the extension of current to the rural area in the near future.
6. Pig and calf markets had been established.

Representations had also been made for the erection of a cattle loading tank for fairs and the speeding of provision of houses under the proposed housing scheme. On the social side a successful 45 drive had provided funds for the Guild and the formation of a ladies' section had infused new life into their activities and their jumble sale had proved highly successful.

DISCUSSION AND "SOCIAL"

Following short lectures by Rev. T. Cullhane, Feobnagh, and Dr. T. F. McNamara, Dromcollogher, informal discussions took place.

Then followed a very enjoyable "social," at which many of those present contributed vocal and instrumental items, which were thoroughly enjoyed, while one of the highlights of the evening was the very enjoyable supper provided by the ladies' section of the Guild.

The function concluded with the singing of "Faith Of Our Fathers" and the National Anthem.

EFFIN AND GARRIENDERK GUILD

With a view to raising funds in aid of the Effin and Garienderk Guild of Muintir na Tíre a "45" drive was held at Effin on the 12th May. There was a large attendance and the drive was successful and very efficiently conducted. Valuable assistance was given by every member of the Guild. Mr. David Magner, N.T., and Mr. Bertie Prendergast acted as M.C.s.

First prize of £2 was won by Matthew McCarthy, Garienderk, and the following secured £1 each: William O'Connor, Ballyhea; Michael Cotter, Ballymac, and John Hales, Thomastown.

OTHER REPORTS

Other Guild reports, received too late for this issue, will appear next week.

SALE OF HOUSE PURCHASE BY COUNTY COUNCIL

The sale to Limerick Co. Council of Mr. M. J. K. Dore's house at Newcastle West for £2,500 was mentioned again at the Council's meeting last Saturday.

Arising out of the minutes of the previous meeting, Mr. T. O'Connell asked if any further correspondence on the subject had been received from the Consulting Engineer (Mr. P. J. Sheehan).

Co. Secretary T. F. Broe—No. Mr. O'Connell said that strictly as a valuer of house property, Mr. A. J. Sexton, the independent valuer appointed by the Council, had given a figure of £2,500 as the market value of the house. Of course, it would be of more value than that as a potential dispensary-clinic to the Council, and the Engineer had

FISHERY BOARD

And Tail-Race Screen

STRONG CASE FOR ITS REPLACEMENT

AT the usual monthly meeting of the Limerick Board of Fishery Conservators, held at the Irish Club, O'Connell Street, on Monday last, the following notice of motion, over the name of Major H. L. Place, was carried unanimously:—

"I hereby give notice that I will move at the next meeting of the Board, to be held on the 15th of May, 1950, that this Board is of opinion that it will be in the best interests of the fisheries of the River Shannon to replace the fish screen, at the outlet of the Ardacrusha, tall race, the screen having been removed some years ago on the grounds that it was ineffective, whereas there was no evidence to that effect, but merely that the screen was faulty in construction and operation; and, further, I will move that the new screen shall be erected and constructed to the satisfaction of this Board in a manner which will obviate faulty operation in future."

LOSSES IN THE TAIL RACE

Major Place, speaking for his motion, said that it was almost certain that the potential progeny of great numbers of salmon was lost each year in the tail race. Since the instinct of the salmon urged it to nose its way to the uppermost reaches of rivers and streams, in the mountains and hills, to deposit its spawn it was unnatural that the fish should be compelled to remain cooped up in this cul-de-sac until the end of the season. There was evidence to prove that some fish re-entered the main channel at an earlier stage, but it was equally evident that large numbers of salmon became so heavy with spawn as to be unable for an upstream journey, and when trying to surmount obstacles the spawn was crushed prematurely and washed away in the stream.

The tall race, too, had become a sanctuary for hundreds of fine trout that might otherwise be sporting themselves in the long untenanted haunts of the Shannon.

Major Place called for the unanimous adoption of his motion, pointing out, the question was not a controversial one; rather was it a matter of grave concern for the future of the Shannon, and, indeed, for everyone interested in fishing generally.

Commandt. G. Lane, proposing the adoption of the motion, said that a screen or grating at this vital junction was a "sine qua non." There could be no opposition to the motion and he urged the Board to push the matter with all the power at its command.

"ABSOLUTELY SOUND"

Mr. A. J. Blood-Smith, M.P., said the motion was absolutely sound. The old electric screen was faulty in operation. The current was circulated through a series of links and as grit and sediment formed between these links the continuity of the flow of electric current was disturbed; consequently there was a concentration of power at fish times which proved fatal to fish instead of scaring them away. Electric fish screens were being successfully operated in America and other countries and he saw nothing in the way of the erection of similar apparatus here.

The motion was passed with acclamation after several other

CLERK OF WORKS

Recent Appointment

MOTION BEFORE COUNTY COUNCIL

AN objection was made at a Limerick Co. Council meeting last Saturday to the recent appointment of a clerk of works for the Abbeyfeale housing scheme.

The members who had signed the notice of motion objecting to the appointment were Messrs. J. Hayes (Vice-Chairman), who presided at the meeting in the absence of the Chairman (Mr. J. W. Canty), P. Fitzsimons, T. O'Connell and P. M. O'Connor.

The Chairman said he had put in the motion because he had information that the man appointed wasn't qualified.

Mr. D. McAuliffe—He had seven years experience and there was never a complaint against him.

QUALIFIED ACCORDING TO ADVERTISEMENT

Mr. J. J. King, Chief Officer, Public Assistance Department, said that according to the terms of the advertisement, Mr. R. J. Sheehy, Kylestown, Rathkeale, was qualified for the job. There had been seven applicants for the job, among them two qualified engineers. The two engineers withdrew and the other five didn't have academic qualifications. But according to regulations Mr. Sheehy was, through experience, qualified for the job. His appointment was recommended by the Consulting Engineer (Mr. P. J. Sheehan).

Mr. T. O'Connell—This man has no qualifications at all for the job.

Mr. King—He was clerk of works on previous occasions.

Mr. O'Connell—But he shouldn't have been.

Mr. King said Mr. Sheehy had considerable experience of supervising contracts.

Mr. P. H. Donegan said the terms of the Council's advertisement gave the poor man a chance against the competition of the men who could afford to get college degrees. He agreed with the Abbeyfeale appointment.

TERMS LAID DOWN BY DEPARTMENT

The Manager said the terms, appointments of clerks of works were very definitely laid down in a Departmental circular. The appointment in Abbeyfeale was recommended by Mr. Sheehan, who had been ill for the past month and wasn't able to be present. He suggested the discussion be adjourned until Mr. Sheehan could attend.

This was agreed to unanimously.

INSPECTOR'S REPORT

The following is an extract from the report of the Fishery Inspector for the month ended on the 10th inst.:—"The run of fresh salmon from the sea was small on the Shannon, Fergus, Maigue and Deel for the past week. Good numbers of fish ascended these rivers during the latter end of April. On the whole the foregoing rivers hold the biggest stock of salmon for many years. The net men and weir owners did not fare so well this week, but they had some splendid catches in February, March and April."

Since the date of my last report good numbers of salmon were taken by anglers in the district. The catches on the Shannon were best at Castleconnell—here some large salmon were taken."

CASTLECONNELL SALMON FISHING

MOTORING AND TOURING MAP

Messrs. W. & A. K. Johnston, Ltd., Printers and Bookbinders, Easter Road, Edinburgh, 7, have just issued a very useful "Motoring and Touring Map of Ireland." Splendidly produced, the map is large in size, cloth-backed, with a scale of eight miles to the inch, and although full of interesting detail everything in it stands out clear and distinct and very easily traceable. All classes of roads in the thirty-two counties, as well as railways, canals, ferries, etc., are given and distances between places indicated. It is in every respect a valuable and creditable production, and is excellent value for the 5/- at which it is on sale.



Salmon fishing at Castleconnell, Limerick, this season has been almost as good as in the pre-Shannon Scheme days. These pictures, taken in the grounds of Coolbawn House, show (1) Mr. J. S. Duncan, of Cogh, with his gillie, Mr. Anthony Mackey, holding a 36 pounder.

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RECENTLY

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COMING SIRI

COMING SIRI

Bigger demand brings lower price

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