

Poems of celebration

ON SATURDAY, September 11, when taking the large group from the Joyce Brothers School in Kilfinane on a tour of Kilmallock, we commenced our tour at the little mound called Crochta, just outside the old town walls of Kilmallock and at the rear of the Catholic church. Here, on or about the 13th of August, 1579, were martyred two Franciscans, Patrick O Hely, Bishop of Mayo, and Fr. Conn O Rourke, son of the chief of Breifni.

It occurred to me as we looked at that little grass-grown mound where the martyrs died, that it was now almost a year since they and fifteen other Irish martyrs for the Faith were beatified in Rome. Kilmallock, of course, had even a closer connection with another of the martyrs than it had with Bishop O Hely or Fr. Conn O Rourke, for Fr. Maurice Mac Kenraghty, another of those beatified, was born in Kilmallock. He was martyred in Clonmel in 1585. The beatifications took place on September 27, 1992. And what a day that was for those of us who had gone to Rome!

All this talk today about Crochta and the martyrs arises from the fact that a few days ago, when going through some papers, I came across three poems dealing with the martyrs, which were written last year, but which, inexplicably, I omitted to publish at the time.

The generally accepted belief is that the bodies of Bishop O Hely and Fr. Conn O Rourke were taken for burial from Kilmallock to the Franciscan friary in Askeaton. This, it is stated, was arranged by John of Desmond, brother of the Earl of Desmond.

That they should be taken

to Askeaton for burial seems very likely, as Askeaton was the nearest Franciscan house to Kilmallock in the Desmond Geraldine territories.

On the Sunday of the beatifications in Rome special ceremonies were held in Askeaton to mark the occasion.

Michael Ryan of Askeaton celebrated the occasion with this poem:

MARTYRS REMEMBERED

Enclosed within these abbey walls

Of sculptured stone 'neath staring sky

Awaiting Judgement's final call,

The bones of our forefathers lie.

Earl and abbot, farmer's boy,

Wrinkled crone and damsel gay,

Are here, released from wordly toil,

All made equal in stony clay.

And here, amidst our own loved remains,

The bones of two saintly martyrs rest;

Here midst all the local names

Are two the Vatican has blessed.

The hangman's noose, the ghastly prize

That Bishop O Hely claimed,

His body hung twixt earth and sky,

His tortured frame was scarred and maimed.

O Rourke, of royal Breifni blood,

That oft had flowed in Ireland's cause,

Beneath that gibbet too had stood,

A priestly victim of savage laws.

Their bodies from Kilmallock came

To rest in Géitine's friendly clay,

And we with pride now bless their names,

And sing their praises here today.

*They died that we our faith might live,
And hand it down, unbroken chain,*

And to our children's children give

That precious seed to plant

Again . . . again . . . again!

On June 13, 1992, a large truck, full of bicycles, arrived in Kilmallock from Askeaton. Those who were to ride the bicycles came in cars. First, the cyclists and their friends visited Crochta, where refreshments were waiting for them. Then the cyclists set for Askeaton, their journey a pilgrimage celebrating the sad and lonely last journey of Patrick O Hely and Conn O Rourke to Askeaton 413 long years before. Michael Ryan, who was with the group, wrote the following poem about it — it is in humorous style, not too unlike a Chaucerian account of the pilgrimage to Canterbury:

THE GREAT CYCLE

From Kilmallock to Askeaton there was a great cycle,

With everyone out for the spin;

There were racers, high nellies, and men with fat bellies,

And a cúpla fat ladies thrown in.

There were grandads and grannies and lots of sore fannies,

Such a mixture you ne'er saw the likes;

There were barmaids and bankers and ould men cantankerous,

And children of nine on their bikes.

And Mainchín Seoighe spoke i nGaeilge, ar ndóigh,

His Irish go breá is go binn;

His friend, Canon Wall, did welcome us all,

As we dived into cheeses and fíon.

There were posters saying 'Oúi' as we hit for Bruree

(But how can we wheel on wheel?).

In sweet Ballingarr some time we did tarry

Before we set out for Rathkeale.

There many a rider drank bottles of cider,

There many a bottom was sore;

On tender locations we rubbed embrocations,

And then started pedalling once more.

At the four roads we arrived, some barely alive,

But our pilgrimage now was completed.

The thirteenth day of June we'll not forget soon,

Oh, how could we ever forget it!

The third poem is a very beautiful one in Irish. It was written by Máire Ní Shúilleabháin, who teaches in Kilcormán National School. Seo é:

CUIMHNEACHÁIN

Beirt i gcré sa bhfothrach ársa,

Faoi mhúrtha bána, i nGéitine thiar.

Deireadh beatha, ach tús aiséirí;

Cloig le fuaimniú, áit le riar.

Fada macalla ó Chroch an Chrochtha,

Anáil mairtíreach, mórghuth Dé,

Ó Ruairc, Ó hÉalaí, manaigh sean-oird,

Éireoidh anois, i ngile gréin.

D'Ord Phroinsias an bheirt a bascadh,

A d'éag, neamh-choin-tach, faoi gharbh-lámh.

Sa Róimh inniu, beidh mór-cheiliúradh,

I nglóire Dé, beidh an bheirt go hard.

Céasadh iad mar céasadh Íosa,

D'fhonn tine an chreidimh a choinneáil beo.

Cuirimís guí ar son na hÉireann,

Go gcumhdaí siad ár dtír go deo!