Down into the Limerick Plain

Dromcollogher, which is a mile east of Springfield, made world headlines in the early days of September 1926 when forty-eight people were burned to death in a fire that swept through an improvised cinema in the village. The disaster happened after a film accidentally caught fire. The victims were buried in a common grave in the grounds of the Catholic church, where a tall Celtic cross marks their last resting-place.

Percy French, the author of many popular songs, including 'The Mountains of Mourne' and 'Come back, Paddy Reilly', also sang of Dromcollogher:

> Have you ever been to Dromcollogher? You have not? – now I declare
> You ought to have been to Dromcollogher and seen the fine place we have there.

There is a spacious square in Dromcollogher, and part of it has been designated a Garden of Remembrance to those who strove, or fell, in the cause of Irish freedom. In 1968 Dromcollogher won the premier Glór na nGael award for its efforts to promote the Irish language, and President de Valera presented the award in the presence of a large gathering in the square.

It comes as a surprise to many people to learn that the best-known product of Dromcollogher is Dresden porcelain. The original Dresden industry, established by Anton Mueller in Volstedt, Germany, was destroyed in World War II. After the war, Anton's grandniece and her husband, Oskar Saar, came to Ireland, and in 1962 they set up a factory in Dromcollogher. From the factory specially commissioned pieces have gone to the White House and to Limerick city for presentation to Pope John Paul II on the occasion of his visit to Limerick. Some fifty highly skilled workers are employed in the factory, and their delicately beautiful products are exported to all parts of the world. Each piece is stamped with the traditional Mueller-Volstedt

trademark, with, underneath, the words 'Irish Dresden'.

The next phase of our journey through County Limerick will take us in a more or less northerly direction from Dromcollogher, and it will bring us – if one can imagine such variety existing within a single county – into a slightly different cultural *milieu* to that of the upland country of West Limerick. In that area of lower ground that fans out north-west and north and north-east from Dromcollogher, the lands are richer, the farms are bigger, the sense of tradition is not so strong as in West Limerick. And in so far as it begins to differ from West Limerick, this area to some extent begins to resemble East Limerick.

Setting out northward from Dromcollogher, we follow for a time the unusually straight road that leads towards Newcastle West, passing through the small village of Feohanagh, four miles on, and continuing for another four miles before taking the road to the right, into Castlemahon, a place also known as Mahoonagh.

Michael Scanlan, who was born in Castlemahon in 1833 and who emigrated to America with other members of his family in 1848, became deeply involved in the Fenian movement in the States. He was a prolific song-writer and was known as 'The Poet Laureate of Fenianism'. One of his early songs tells of his leaving Castlemahon:

> The valleys never looked so sweet
> As on that day,
> When from my childhood's blest retreat
> I turned away,
> To breast the wild and searching sleet
> That sweeps the world's highway.

In his most famous song, 'The Bold Fenian Men', he visualizes his countrymen, aided by their exiled kin in America, marching together to win Freedom for Ireland:

> See who come over the red-blossomed heather,
> Their green banners kissing the pure mountain air;
> Heads erect, eyes to front, stepping proudly together,
> Sure freedom sits throned on each proud spirit there.
> Down the hills twining, their blessed steel shining,
> Like rivers of beauty that flow from each glen;
> From mountain and valley,
> 'Tis Liberty's rally –
> Out and make way for the bold Fenian men.

Kilmeedy is four miles east of Castlemahon. As in the case of Killeedy, this village takes its name from the West Limerick Saint Ita, or Íde. In the early days of Christianity in Ireland saints held in very special regard often had the word '*mo*', 'my', prefixed to their names. This explains how the name Íde sometimes became Míde – *Mo Íde* being abbreviated to *Míde* in the spoken language – as in Kilmeedy (*Cill Míde*, the Church of Míde).

From Kilmeedy we take a nice, if somewhat narrow, country road that travels eastward to Castletown (four miles) on the southern side of Corronoher, one of two old red sandstone ridges that run, east-west, across the southern part of the central limestone plain of Limerick. We leave Feenagh to our right. The name Feenagh, which comes from Fiodhnach, meaning a place abounding in woods, is a reminder of the time when forests covered a great part of south Limerick.

The small village of Castletown, or Castletown Mac Eniry, is situated at a crossroads in a rather pretty woodland setting. For long it was the seat of the Mac Eniry family, who were chiefs of the *tuath* of Corca Muichead, a petty kingdom that extended from near Dromcollogher to within a couple of miles of Bruree. The name of the old territory still survives in the anglicized form of Corcamohide. The Mac Enirys held their ancestral lands longer than any of the ruling Gaelic families of Limerick, escaping confiscation of their property at the time of the Cromwellian Plantation by reason of the fact that the grantee did not, for some reason, go into possession. They were finally dispossessed after the defeat of the Jacobite forces in Ireland in 1691. The family had probably held their lands, or at least part of them, in unbroken succession for the most of fifteen hundred years. The name is still fairly common in the district and in surrounding areas, though in many cases it is now spelt Mac Enery. There is a tradition in the Mac Enery family of Curragh, Castlemahon, that they are descended from the last chief of the Mac Enirys, who left Castletown Mac Eniry in the early 1700s.

About the middle of the last century the name Castletown Mac Eniry was changed to Castletown Conyers, after a family of English origin who had settled there in the previous century. The brown sandstone remains of the castle of the Mac Enirys are situated a short distance south of the village, close to the house that had once been the residence of the Conyers family. In the field where the ruined castle stands there is a

holy well, Lady's Well, where rounds are paid on the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. There is another holy well two miles south of Castletown, in Kilgobnet (*Cill Ghobnait*, the Church of Gobnait) near Ballyagran. It is dedicated to St Gobnait, the famous woman saint of Ballyvourney in County Cork.

A wooded by-road leads northward out of Castletown and climbs over the Corronoher ridge, from the summit of which, on a clear day, one can see the Shannon Estuary, some sixteen miles to the north-west. Once over the ridge the road descends rapidly to Lee's crossroads, a five-road junction. Here we turn left and follow the Newcastle West road for about five miles, travelling between those two parallel sandstone ridges that, as already mentioned, run in an east-west direction across the Limerick plain. To the south is the Corronoher ridge; to the north, the Knockaderry-Knockfierna ridge, which, at its greatest altitude, rises to almost a thousand feet.

At Teernahilla crossroads, about five miles west of Lee's crossroads, we turn right and head towards Rathkeale, which is some seven miles further on. Our road goes through a gap in the Knockaderry-Knockfierna ridge, about 1½ miles east of the village of Knockaderry. The name Knockaderry is derived from *Cnoc an Doire*, the Hill of the Oak Wood, another reminder of the vanished forests of Limerick.

Rathkeale, with a population of about two thousand, is the second largest town in County Limerick. It is situated in the valley of the Deel, in flat country, and the tall slender spire of its Catholic church is visible for miles around. The town, which consists principally of a very long main street, with some smaller streets branching from it, has some interesting Ionic and Doric doorways, a number with fanlights. The white-painted early-nineteenth-century courthouse is a very fine building, with steep pediment, breakfront, clock and bell.

Rathkeale, too, was a Geraldine town, and the remains of an old Geraldine castle can still be seen there. But it was at Castle Matrix, also on the Deel, and a mile south-west of the town, that their principal stronghold in the Rathkeale district was situated. Castle Matrix was built about the year 1440.

The original form of the place-name was Castle Matres, which leads the present owner of the castle, Colonel Sean O Driscoll, to believe that here, in the remote past, was a sanctuary to the Celtic group of three divinities honoured under the title of Matres or Matronae. The Matres were goddesses of love, fertility and poetry. The fruitful earth, as it manifested itself

in the rich lands around Rathkeale, may well have been revered as a divine mother in that triplication of a single person that was the Matres.[1] Sanctuaries to the Matres occur in France, on tributaries of the sacred rivers, the Seine and the Marne (Matrona). The Deel, on which Castle Matrix is situated, is a tributary of the Shannon, a sacred river in Celtic times.

In 1487 James Fitzgerald, ninth Earl of Desmond, was murdered by his servants at Castle Matrix, at the instigation of his brother. Nearly a hundred years later, or, to be more exact, in late October 1580, at the height of the Geraldine Rebellion in Munster, two famous figures arrived in Rathkeale. They were the poet Edmund Spenser and the poet and courtier Walter Raleigh, and they had come with the forces of Lord Grey de Wilton, the English Lord Deputy in Ireland. They were quartered at Castle Matrix, and it is thought that it was during their sojourn there that their lifelong friendship began. A sonnet in Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, which is dedicated "To the right noble and valorous knight, Sir Walter Raleigh", begins: "To thee that art Sommer's Nightingale".[2]

Unfortunately for his Irish reputation, the memory of Raleigh's association with the Rathkeale district is not a happy one. On the day the troops left Castle Matrix for Kerry, a number of local people came to view the remains of the camp but, while gratifying their curiosity, were set upon and slaughtered by Raleigh, who had remained behind in hiding with his company.[3] But even worse was to follow. Grey's army marched from Rathkeale to the fort of Dún an Óir, in the extreme west of Kerry, where a small mixed force of Italians and Spaniards had landed to aid the Geraldines. Some Irish had joined the foreign troops in the fort. After being besieged for a few days by Grey, the fort surrendered, the garrison laying down their arms on 10th November 1580. They were promptly massacred. Grey himself wrote: "Then I put in certain bands who straight fell to execution. There were six hundred slain." It was a savage war.

After the defeat of the Munster Geraldines their lands were confiscated and parcelled out among English colonists, both Spenser and Raleigh being granted large estates. In the Castle Matrix and Rathkeale area some of the Geraldine lands passed to one Edmund Southwell. A note in a brochure on Castle Matrix informs us that the curious 'Virginia Tubers' imported to Ireland by Sir Walter Raleigh were given by him to Edmund

Southwell, who conducted the first large-scale potato cultivation in the Old World by planting them in the fertile fields surrounding Castle Matrix. In 1610 the Rathkeale tubers were distributed throughout the province of Munster.[4]

It is an interesting fact that a belt of land extending from Rathkeale eastward to Tory Hill, north of Croom, is particularly favourable to the growing of crops. Cornfields and meadows ripen there sooner than in other parts of the county. This has led to the area being described by one noted agriculturist as "Limerick's Mediterranean belt".*

Robert Southwell, a brother of Edmund, and a renowned poet, became a Jesuit priest and was martyred at Tyburn in 1595. He was one of the large group of English martyrs canonized as saints by Pope Paul in 1970.[5]

The Jacobean wing of Castle Matrix was added to the fortress in 1610, thereby transforming it into a residence. Irish forces captured it in 1641, but it was subsequently retaken by the Cromwellians. In 1662 Thomas Southwell of Castle Matrix was created a baronet by King Charles II. Twelve years later Lord Southwell married a daughter of Count Walsh de Serrant. Count Walsh was a colonel of the famous Walsh Regiment of the Irish Brigade in the service of France, which later fought against the British in the American War of Independence. His brother, Anthony Walsh, was head of the expedition which brought Bonnie Prince Charlie to Scotland in 1745.

In the 1820s linen was manufactured at the castle, and a flour-mill was established there. Finally, in 1970, the ruined castle was acquired, and meticulously restored, by the Irish-American architect Colonel Sean O Driscoll, who opened it to the public. The castle has a very fine library, unique in Ireland for its remarkable collection of original documents relating to the 'Wild Geese', the Irish soldiers who left Ireland to serve in the armies of France and Spain and other European countries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Here we find commissions, promotions and assignments made out to distinguished soldiers of the Wild Geese, as well as letters written and signed by them. The documents bear such names as O Mahony, O Farrell, Mac Suiny, O Moran, O Kennelly, Dillon, Wall. There is a Cusack commission signed by Louis XVI in 1791 and a letter written by General Arthur

* So described to the author by Eamon O Connell, Headmaster, Newcastle West Vocational School.

Dillon to Camille Desmoulins from the Madelonette Prison, in Paris, on 26th July 1793. The Dillon sword, with the maker's name, Andrea Farara, and stamp, is there; so are the original Order of Battle and a map showing the disposition of the troops at the battle of Fontenoy in 1745; so, too, is the small red notebook which had belonged to Lucile Desmoulins and which she gave to a friend as she went to the guillotine in 1794. Castle Matrix has also got an excellent graphic arts collection. In addition to all this, the castle is available for special group functions, including private dinners or special receptions; its mediaeval wood-fire rotisserie is unique in Ireland.

It was Thomas Southwell who brought the Palatines to County Limerick in 1709. The Palatines were Lutheran refugees who had fled from the Rhenish Palatinate of Germany after it had been invaded by the French. Queen Anne of England arranged for eight thousand of the refugees to be granted temporary asylum in England. Some four thousand of them later emigrated to the British colonies in North America. A further three thousand were sent to Ireland and were settled on estates in various parts of the country. The largest and most successful Irish settlement was that on the estate of Sir Thomas Southwell in the Rathkeale area, where over two hundred families, comprising about twelve hundred persons, were settled in three groups, in the townlands of Ballingrane, Court Matrix and Killaheen. Smaller colonies from the Southwell estate were later settled in the neighbourhood of Adare and of Kilfinane.

Their holdings were relatively small, but these Palatine tenants were very industrious. They kept geese, planted orchards and made cider. They introduced some new methods of horticulture to Ireland, such as sowing potatoes in drills rather than in ridges, as was the Irish custom. They elected a *Burgermeister* to settle their disputes and continued to speak German for a couple of generations, although they also learned Irish and English. Long Anne Teskey was the last of the Rathkeale Palatines who spoke both Irish and German. She was still living about the year 1880 and was then reputed to be 115 years of age.[6]

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, visited the Limerick Palatines at various times between 1758 and 1789. On his first visit he found that they were "eminent for drunkenness, cursing and swearing", but this unseemly state of affairs was attributed to the fact that since their arrival in Ireland they

had had no minister of their own to attend to their spiritual needs. After hearing John Wesley preach they readily adopted Methodism and became thoroughly reformed. Two of the Ballingrane Palatines who had become followers of Wesley were co-founders of Methodism in America. They were Barbara Heck (née Ruttle) and her cousin Philip Embury. In 1760 they had sailed from Limerick for America with a small group of Palatines from Ballingrane. The leader of the group was Philip Embury.

In October 1766 Philip Embury preached to a congregation of five in his own house, the first Methodist sermon ever preached in America, and in 1768 the first American Methodist church building was dedicated by him in John Street, New York. In all his work he had received invaluable assistance from Barbara Heck, who was a lady of great religious fervour and proved a major influence in the growth of American Methodism, which today has some fourteen million adherents.

The house in which Barbara Ruttle Heck was born in Ballingrane, in 1734, still stands and is still occupied by the Ruttle family, but the house in which Philip Embury was born, in 1728, has long since been demolished. Its site however is marked by a stone mound with an inscribed plaque. The Embury and Heck Memorial Church in Ballingrane attracts large numbers of visitors.

Among the Palatine names which are still fairly numerous in the Ballingrane district, and in other parts of County Limerick where smaller colonies were established, are: Barkman, Bovenizer, Doupe, Fizelle, Mee, Miller, Modler, Ruttle, Shier, Sparling, Steepe, Switzer, Teskey. Most of the names have undergone some alteration in spelling or pronunciation. Bovenizer, for example, was originally Bubenheiser; Mee was Mye; Miller was Müller; Shier was Schyer; Switzer was Schweitzer.

The real objective in encouraging the settlement of the Palatines in Limerick, and in other parts of Ireland, was, as officially stated, "the strengthening and securing the Protestant interest in Ireland", the Protestant interest and the English interest in Ireland being considered by the authorities to be identical. But the Palatines soon showed themselves to be more interested in working their small farms and in establishing good relations with their Catholic Irish neighbours than in promoting any particular religious or political views among them. The good relations that developed between the Palatines and the native Irish is well evidenced in a very

popular traditional song in Irish, '*Inion an Phailitínigh*', 'The Palatine's Daughter', which tells of a young Irishman meeting, falling in love with and marrying a Palatine lass – and living happily with her ever after.

Leaving Rathkeale and the Palatine country, we head south-eastward for about five miles until we come to Ballingarry, a village that nestles at the south side of a seven-hundred-foot-high hill. Ballingarry came into the possession of the Norman family of de Lacy in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. There were three main branches of this illustrious family in County Limerick, the other two branches being settled in Bruree and Bruff. They were underlords of the Earl of Desmond and staunch supporters of the Irish and Catholic causes in the various wars fought in Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As a result, their lands were confiscated and granted to Cromwellian planters.

Many of the de Lacys went overseas, to France, Spain, Austria and even distant Russia, and fighting in the armies of their adopted countries they won, as the eighteenth-century Limerick historian Ferrar tells us, "honours as high and distinctions as marked, as were ever conferred on any family". Peter de Lacy, who left Ireland after the fall of Limerick in 1691, became a Field Marshal in Russia, and William de Lacy, from near Bruree, rose to be General Count William de Lacy of the Spanish Army and was made a Knight of the Order of Santiago. Many other bearers of the name rose to high rank in the armies of the countries they had chosen to serve. The old de Lacy castle at Ballingarry, greatly modernized as a residence at the beginning of the nineteenth century, stands fifty-five feet high.

The small village of Kilfinny is situated about four miles north-east of Ballingarry. Here, at the eastern side of a low ridge, Lady Dowdall, a lady of English extraction, locked herself up in her castle when the insurrection of 1641 broke out. Besieged for forty weeks by Edy de Lacy of Bruree, she conducted the defence of the castle herself, but was forced to surrender on 29th July 1642, after the castle had "endured four great shots". A long account of the siege, written by this redoubtable lady and preserved in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, ends with the statement: "The rest of the castles in the county of Limerick after I was beaten down were all taken with paper bullets." The ruins of Lady Dowdall's castle still stand, and from the nearby ridge, on which are the ruins of two

windmills, one can enjoy a very pleasant view over a large area of County Limerick.

From Ballingarry we take the road to Bruree, ten miles to the south-east. Three miles beyond Ballingarry, at the right-hand side of the road, where a statue indicates the location, there is a holy well dedicated to St Patrick, who is said to have passed this way on his journey from Knockpatrick to Ardpatrick. A short distance beyond the well we again find ourselves at Lee's Cross, the five-road junction we met earlier on our journey, when we approached it from the opposite direction, from Castletown. On that occasion we turned west at the cross and headed, by a slightly roundabout way, for Rathkeale. Now we turn east at the cross, onto the Bruree road.

Along this way our attention is attracted by a conspicuous hill on our left. The hill is Knockfierna, 948 feet high, of volcanic origin, and one of Munster's most celebrated fairy hills. The stories told about the Knockfierna fairies and leprechauns form a considerable proportion of the folklore of this part of Limerick.

But behind the fairy lore of Knockfierna lie more ancient mythologies. The name Knockfierna derives from *Cnoc Fírinne*, a name, that, on the face of it, seems simply to mean 'The Hill of Truth'. It was so called, some people said, because it was possible to forecast the weather from it, depending on whether it was covered in cloud in the morning, or clearly visible, or whether it looked near or far away.

However, in the people's lore there were many references to a mysterious being called Donn Fírinne, who resided in the hill and who gave the hill its name. Some stories equated him with the king of the fairies; other stories saw him in a more sinister or forbidding role. The noted German Celtic scholar Kuno Meyer, having sifted through archaic traditions in Irish texts of the eighth to tenth centuries, arrived at the conclusion that Donn was, in fact, a Celtic god of Death or the Otherworld.[7]

Writing in *Béaloideas* (volume XVIII, 1948, pp. 162-3) Käte Müller-Liskowski says that the number of oral traditions collected in the Knockfierna district about Donn was astonishing. She described the traditions that were recorded as last-minute salvages from shipwrecked ancient civilizations.

Máire Mac Neill summarizes some of these traditions in her book *Festival of Lughnasa* (p. 204). There was said to be an entrance to Donn's dwelling at a deep hole in Knockfierna called *Poll na Bruíne*. A ball of thread thrown into it was

thrown back with blood on it. A surveyor who tried to fathom it with a plumb-line was pulled down and never seen again. A sceptic called Carroll O Daly, who saw a strange rider dismount and enter the hole, threw a stone into it, "to knock at the spirits' door"; the stone was thrown back in his face, breaking his nose.

A farmer who diverted dirty water from the foot of Knockfierna so pleased Donn that he was granted admission to his palace under the hill. There he saw a great number of young lads studying "the mysteries of the creation since the stars began to shine". Among them he recognized his only brother who had died nine years before. In another hall he saw a crowd of girls writing about "the virtues and weaknesses of women since Adam and Eve"; and he recognized among them his sister who had died twelve years before. Both brother and sister were restored to the farmer by Donn.

Liam Ó Danachair, who lived in his grandmother's house near Knockfierna from 1873 to 1884, heard the man of the house say on a night of storm: "*Abair go bhfuil Donn ag dul ar cos anairde sna scamalla anocht!*" ("You may say the Donn is galloping in the clouds tonight!") An old woman, replying, asserted she could hear Donn screaming in the wind, and prayed: "*Dia idir sinn agus an t-olc!*" ("God between us and harm!")[8]

Liam Ó Danachair also remembered visiting an old man who lay dying and who had just received the Last Sacraments of his Church from the local priest. Shortly after the priest departed, the old man looked through the small window in his room in the direction of Knockfierna and remarked that he would be up there soon with Donn. Recalling the occasion, Liam Ó Danachair says: "I was struck by the strange hold this stark paganism still had over minds which, after fifty generations of Christian baptism, still cling to older beliefs."[9]

Strange customs prevailed in the Knockfierna district. Eggs were buried in hay and in crops of corn, as were also parts of dead animals in places within view of the hill; and on May Eve (the Celtic feast of Bealtaine) and Hallowe'en (the Celtic feast of Samhain), girls left gifts on the high fields or at the foot of the Strickeen, a ridge running westward from Knockfierna.[10]

One of the great tales of Irish mythology is that known as *An Bhruíon Chaorthainn*, the Palace of the Quicken Trees. According to the story, the famous warrior band, the Fianna, had gone one day to hunt over the plains of Limerick, and their

valiant leader Finn mac Cool and some of his companions had climbed to the summit of Knockfierna to view the chase from there. While there they were approached by a tall warrior in full battle array, who invited them to a feast in his palace, which lay to the north of Knockfierna, in the neighbourhood of Pallaskenry.

They discovered that the strange warrior was Miach, son of the King of the Four Tribes of Lochlann, who, many years before, had invaded Ireland with a great army, only to meet defeat and death at the hands of the Fianna. Finn spared Miach because of his youth and brought him up in his own household. And when Miach was grown up, Finn gave him a large tract of land in Kenry, between Knockfierna and the Shannon. Though well treated, Miach in his heart never forgave the Fianna for the death of his father and the slaughter of his people.

As soon as Finn had accepted the invitation, Miach departed, saying he wanted to have everything in readiness for his visitors. Because, however, they were somewhat suspicious of Miach's intentions, not all of the Fianna who were on the hilltop went to the feast. Oisin, Finn's poet son, and a number of others, remained behind, and it was arranged that Finn and those of his companions who were going to the feast, would send back word as to how they fared.

When the visitors drew near Miach's palace, they were amazed at its size and splendour. It stood on a smooth green lawn and was surrounded by a plantation of quicken trees. The wide door of the palace stood open, and the Fianna entered. They found themselves in a great circular hall with extraordinarily rich furnishings and a large fire that burned brightly without any smoke and gave off a beautiful fragrance. The Fianna seated themselves on the couches and rugs and waited. After a little while Miach entered the hall, stood and looked at each of them in turn, uttered no word and withdrew.

Shortly afterwards Finn and his companions noticed that the fire was now sending out great clouds of black, foul-smelling smoke, that all the rich furnishings had vanished and that they were sitting on cold, bare ground. Then came the real shock: they discovered they were firmly fixed to the clay of the floor!

Finn put his thumb under his *déad feasa*, his tooth of knowledge, and learned that they were held by the evil spells of the three kings of the Island of Torrent, who were preparing to

march with their army to the palace and put them to death. Only the blood of the three kings sprinkled on the clay of the floor of the palace could free them.

When no word came from Finn to Oisin and his companions who were waiting on Knockfierna, Oisin sent some of his men to find out if any evil had befallen them. When one of the men approached the palace, Finn spoke from within and warned him not to enter. There was a river nearby which had a ford on it, and when the army of the three kings was seen approaching from the opposite side of the river, the warriors of the Fianna, in turn, defended the ford against them. When it came to the turn of the great champion Diarmuid Ó Duibhne to defend the ford, he succeeded in driving back the foreign hosts.

Then he heard a loud voice coming from the palace. It was the voice of Conán Maol, a warrior with a mighty appetite, and he was bellowing for food and drink. Diarmuid procured food and, standing outside the door of the palace, threw it to Conán, who caught it in his huge hands as fast as it was thrown and ate it ravenously. Then Diarmuid climbed onto the roof, broke a hole in it with his spear and poured down wine; Conán opened his mouth and caught it and swallowed every drop of it.

By now the three kings and their forces had returned to the ford. Diarmuid went and engaged them and slew the three kings; taking their gory heads into the Palace of the Quicken Trees, he sprinkled the blood on the floor. Immediately, Finn and his companions were freed from the evil spells that bound them.[11]

On the already mentioned Strickeen, that ridge that runs westward from Knockfierna, there is a large ring fort which is called *Lios na bhFiann*, the Fort of the Fianna. And there are still older remains on the hill. On its northern slopes there are the remains of a megalithic tomb; and on its summit are the remains of a cairn, monument to some long-forgotten chief or hero.

In the eighteenth century a Gaelic poet, referring to the diminished realms of the *sí*, the fairy people, sadly remarked:

Sé ar fágadh acu d'fhearann is d'oidhreacht
Ach Cnoc Fírinne amháin, Cnoc Áine is Gréine.

(It is all that is left to them of land and heritage,
Save Knockfierna, Knockainy and Grean.)

Knockainy and Grean (*Cnoc Gréine*) are hills in East Limerick, and we will have more to say about them when we take the road into that part of Limerick.

Christianity finally triumphed over Donn Fírinne in the Holy Year of 1950, when a thirty-six-foot-high cross was erected on the summit of his hill. The cross shoots upward from the ancient cairn, the stones of which have been cemented together to form a base for it.

The magnificent view from the top of Knockfierna more than repays the effort of the climb. A great expanse of territory, embracing six counties, numerous mountain ranges and the estuary of the Shannon, can be seen from it on a clear day.

Continuing our journey along the road to Bruree, we come to the crossroads of Cappanihane, which is about 2½ miles east of Lee's crossroads. Anybody interested in the history of Irish music would, very likely, leave the Bruree road temporarily at the Cappanihane crossroads, turn left and continue for about half a mile before crossing in over the roadside fence on the left and ascending the low hill of Lisduane. On that hill he might succeed in tracing the foundations of the house in which the renowned Piper Jackson lived.

The house was known as 'The Turret', and its site is marked on the Ordnance Survey maps. Jackson, who was christened Walter, belonged to the ascendancy or landlord class and was a descendant of one Miles Jackson who owned eight hundred acres at Lisduane and Granagh in 1622. Walter had a brother, also named Miles, but nicknamed 'Hero', who, by his Will dated 30th September 1809, established a fund for the relief of the poor of Ballingarry parish. This charity, which still continues to yield a modest sum, is administered jointly by the Protestant rector and the Catholic parish priest of Ballingarry.

Walter Jackson was one of the Anglo-Irish, separated by upbringing and social standing from the masses of the Irish people; yet he came to have a great regard and affection for those ordinary people and their traditions, especially their music. He played the traditional Irish pipes as well as any man in Ireland in his day, thereby earning for himself the description by which he has been known ever since – 'Piper Jackson'.

He was a prolific composer too, particularly of Irish dance music, and a collection of tunes written by him was published by Sam Lee of Dublin in 1774, under the title *Jackson's Celebrated Irish Tunes*. A number of the tunes have the composer's name incorporated in their titles, such as 'Jackson's Morning Brush',

'Jackson's Turret', 'Jackson's Cup', 'Jackson's *Dúiseacht*' ('Jackson's Awakening'). He was president of a kind of convivial club which met in Limerick city and which was called *Cuideachta gan Chiarum* 'The Company without Care'. It is not unlikely that the name of the society was chosen by Jackson. Many of his tunes are still regularly played by traditional musicians in Ireland. His music is his monument.

From Cappanihane Cross, where one may turn off briefly to view the site of Jackson's home, the road gradually descends into the valley of the River Maigue in which is situated the old, historic village of Bruree. A mile before we reach Bruree, we cross the main Cork-Limerick road (N20).