

Adare, in the county – but with protests in recent years by members of the Irish Council against Blood Sports. And then there is fox-hunting. Limerick, with its formidable fences, especially its double banks, is considered great fox-hunting country, and it boasts a number of famous packs, including the Scarteen and Black and Tan hounds.

Of field games the great traditional Gaelic game of hurling has the widest popular appeal in Limerick, particularly in the county. The game is played with a hurling stick, called a hurley (*camán* in Irish) and a ball called a *sliotar*, which is a little larger than a tennis ball. The *sliotar* has a cork centre, with thread wound round it, and is covered with sheepskin – in the old days it was covered with horseskin. The seams are not flush with the surface, as in the case of a tennis ball, but are raised slightly. The regulation weight is between about 3½ and 4½ ounces, with the circumference between nine and ten inches.

For speed, skill, daring and spectacle, hurling is, at its best, one of the finest games in the world. It is an amateur game, and a team consists of fifteen players. Hurling is principally played in the southern half of Ireland, especially in the province of Munster. On seven occasions Limerick has won the coveted All Ireland Hurling Championship, the highest honour in the hurling world. The last occasion was 1973.

The famous Limerick hurling teams of the 1930s and the early 1940s brought a new glamour to the game of hurling. Three times in that period the Limerick hurlers won the All Ireland Championship – in 1934, 1936 and 1940. The Dublin daily newspaper, the *Irish Press*, of 8th September 1936, two days after Limerick had won that year's All Ireland Championship, paid tribute to the victors in a special article which carried headlines saying: "Surely this is a World Record?" – "Limerick's Viceroy Run of Triumphs" – "The Champions of Champions have defied the best and won every honour to be won." The article then went on to say:

Not for years has a team captivated the public as have the All-Ireland hurling champions of today. The dash and daring of the Limerickmen have drawn a colourful halo of glamour around the team . . . and everywhere one went after the final the praises of the champions were being sung. There is no doubt the Shannonsiders must rank with the greatest teams in any form of sport, and to appear in forty-six games with only one defeat is a record unequalled, I believe, in the annals of sport. . . . Only a real team of champions could stand up to the hard work these forty odd games

entailed, and when I say 'Hats off to Limerick, greatest hurling side of the age', I am only re-echoing what thousands have been saying since Sunday last.

Names from that golden age of hurling in Limerick are still remembered with pride – the peerless Mick Mackey and his brother John, Paddy Clohessy, goalkeeper Paddy Scanlan and all the others who brought fame and honour to Limerick. And of course there are names from earlier times, and from later times, which too are sure of an enduring place in the folk memory.

Gaelic football is not very widely played in Limerick, and this despite the fact that the first All Ireland Football Championship was won by Limerick. There are, however, a number of clubs in the west of the county and in a few areas in the east of the county. In the province of Munster the Gaelic football scene has for years been dominated by Kerry. Handball was a very popular game in Limerick, where its principal strongholds were Hospital, Kilfinane, Bruff and Limerick city. Johnny Bowles of Limerick city won his first Irish title in 1900, and reigned as champion for almost twenty-five years. Eminent judges reckoned him the best handballer the game has ever known.

There is a very large following for both soccer and rugby in Limerick city. Indeed, the city has long been considered one of the principal strongholds of rugby in Ireland. It has frequently been claimed that only in Wales and Limerick is rugby really a game of the people. In Limerick, at any rate, the game has been played and supported by people from all walks of life. At the moment the city has five senior rugby clubs and four junior; and the county has three junior. The five city senior clubs are: Garryowen (called after an old and historic part of the city), Young Munsters, Shannon, Bohemians and Old Crescent. The great competition in Munster is for the Munster Senior Cup, a competition that was initiated in 1886. Almost from the very beginning, up to the outbreak of the First World War, Garryowen dominated the competition. An incredible run of victories brought them the cup each year in succession from 1889 up to, and including, the year 1898. Small wonder that they became the stuff of legend in Limerick. And they are still a power to reckon with in Munster rugby.

More than a dozen rugby players from Limerick clubs have been capped for Ireland since the end of World War II. They include such famous names as Tom Clifford, Mick English, Gordon Wood, Colm Tucker, Bill Mulcahy and Tony Ward, all of

carrying him drew up at Knocklong railway station, a small group of Hogan's comrades burst into the compartment where he sat between his guards and, after a short, sharp fight, rescued him. This daring deed was commemorated in a ballad that became very popular during the War of Independence:

Now rise up, Mother Erin, and always be of cheer,
You'll never die while at your side there stand such Volunteers.
From Dingle Bay to Garryowen the cheers will echo long
Of the rescue of Sean Hogan at the Station of Knocklong.

The flat country round about Knocklong was once covered by a great lake, or series of lakes, and according to local tradition, it was then possible to sail from Knocklong to Emly, three miles to the north-east. As evidence of that, the name Emly is believed to derive from *'imeallach'*, a word that can mean 'marshy shoreland'. And there is another Emly – Emlygrennan – about three miles south-west of Knocklong. Both places very likely once heard "lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore".

In our account of Ardpatrick in Chapter 13 we told how the local chief Derbhall, when St Patrick visited Ardpatrick, asked the saint to remove a certain mountain so that he, Derbhall, could see down to Loch Long in the territory of the Fir Muí Féinne. It has been generally assumed that Loch Long lay south of the Ballahoura Mountains, in the direction of Fermoy. The antiquarian P. J. Lynch thinks however that Loch Long was in the vicinity of Knocklong and that the mountain that cut off the view was Slieveveagh, a northern spur of the Ballahouras. To strengthen his case for the identity of the location of Loch Long, he proffers evidence that would indicate that the territory of Fir Muí Féinne once embraced part of south-east Limerick.¹

It is certain that all around Knocklong was an area of great importance in the distant past. About a mile south of the village, in the townland of Raheenamadra, was, it is believed, the site of *Aonach Clochair*, the Fair of Clogher, an assembly of the people of the territory.

Raheenamadra – *Ráithín an Mhadra* – means 'the Little Fort of the Dog'. And that name reminds us of the famous pack, the Scarteen Foxhounds, whose headquarters is at Scarteen, two miles south-east of Knocklong. Originally the pack was known as 'the Black and Tans', a name that was to be transferred to a British force that was drafted into Ireland in 1920, during the War of Independence. Because of a shortage of suitable uni-

forms, this force of unhappy memory in Ireland, was decked out partly in police black and partly in army khaki – and was promptly christened 'Black and Tans', by which name they have ever since been known.

Knocklong has a number of thatched cottages, built under the 'Rent an Irish Cottage' scheme. These cottages, apart from being excellent bases from which to explore the surrounding countryside, also give the visitors the opportunity of meeting and getting to know the local people.

Elton is a small village two miles west of Knocklong. Frank Ryan was born near here in 1902. Ryan, a veteran of the War of Independence, fought in the International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War, attaining the rank of major. Captured at the end of the war, he was sentenced to death. De Valera, then head of the Irish Government, appealed to Franco for clemency, and was supported by a nation-wide campaign. The death sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life. In failing health, Ryan was set free in 1940, at the height of World War II. Unable to get home, he travelled to Germany. He died in Dresden in 1944. Elton was also the native district of Frank Roche, well-known musician and collector of Irish music.

The town of Hospital is three miles north of Knocklong. On the way there one passes by Kilfrush House, a fine early-nineteenth-century building, up to lately the property of John A. Mulcahy. Mr Mulcahy, a Waterford man who amassed a large fortune in the United States, entertained President Nixon in Kilfrush House in 1970.

Hospital takes its name from an establishment of the Knights Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem founded there in 1215 by the Norman Geoffrey de Marisco. It was the second most important house of the Hospitallers in Ireland and is described in early documents as "the house of Any", Any being the district surrounding the hill of Any (*Áine*) or Knockainy. In the ruined church of the Hospitallers there are the remains of three interesting tombs. Two dating from the thirteenth century are de Marisco tombs. One has the effigy of a mailed knight carved on it in high relief; the other has effigies of a mailed knight and his lady. The third tomb, dating from the fourteenth century, bears the figure of a mailed knight in low relief.

The hospice, or "house of Any", had a preceptor, provost, chamberlain, cook, free servants and hayward. Among the curious grants of boards and lodgings recorded from it is this one from the year 1335: "The Prior granted to Richard Cook during

his life his entertainment in this house at the table of the free servants, with clothes the same as theirs, and half a marc of silver for shoes, he performing in the kitchen the office of cook, and if he should be confined to his chamber by illness he was then to have a daily allowance of a white loaf and one of the second kind, a flaggon of the best ale and one of the inferior kind, and a dish of meat from the kitchen."

Hospital, as we have seen, was situated in the district of Any, or Knockainy. Knockainy, a conspicuous green hill, or ridge, is situated somewhat less than two miles west of Hospital. The Irish form of its name is *Cnoc Áine*, meaning 'the Hill of Áine'. The hill was sacred to the Celtic goddess Áine, and, as benefits a sacred hill, it is very rich in mythological associations.

Áine was a sun goddess. Thomas F. O'Rahilly, in his great work *Early Irish History and Mythology* (pp. 286–289), states that the element 'án' is an adjective meaning 'fiery' or 'bright' or 'glowing'; it can also mean 'brilliant', 'splendid', 'delightful'. The derivation 'áine' means 'fieriness', 'brightness', 'radiance' – all attributes of the sun.

In some of the legends Áine is mentioned as the wife of Mannanán Mac Lir, the Celtic sea god after whom the Isle of Man is named. In rural legend she frequently becomes a fairy queen and is also a *bean sí* (banshee) – one of the most celebrated in Ireland – whose crying gives warning of the impending death of important personages of Gaelic, or Norman Gaelic, stock, particularly FitzGeralds of the House of Desmond.

Knockainy was a *sí*, a fairy mansion, and all such mansions opened their doors to mortals on the eve of the Celtic feast of Samhain (1st November). One Samhain Eve, Oilioll, King of Munster, went from Bruree to Knockainy and waited until the entrance to the hill was thrown open. He then rushed through the doorway, slew Eogabal, the King of the *sí*, and outraged Áine, his daughter. Áine retaliated by biting off one of Oilioll's ears. Thereafter he was known as Oilioll 'Ollum', Oilioll 'bare-ear'.

A later legend made an earl of Desmond her ravisher; by him she had a son, none other than the famous Gearóid Iarla, Gerald the Earl, poet and magician. It was said that it was Áine who gave its sweet scent to the meadow sweet, the *airgidín luachra*, and that she protected herds, flocks, crops and their owners.²

In this latter role, Áine, the sun goddess of East Limerick, resembled Íde (or Ita) the Christian saint of West Limerick. And the cult of Áine flourished no less than the cult of Íde, even in an

otherwise completely Christian environment. Down at least to 1879 men used to go on St John's Eve (23rd June) to the top of Knockainy, carrying flaming *cliara* (bunches of hay or straw on poles), and would march three times *deiseal* (clockwise) round the triple earthwork known as *Mullach an Triúir*, the Summit of the Three. They would then visit Knockainy village at the foot of the hill and would also go among the herds of cattle in order to bring them good luck.³

A small river called the Camogue (from *Camóg*, winding or crooked) flows by Knockainy village. Spanning the river beside the village there was a very interesting primitive bridge composed of flagstones laid on large blocks of stone placed in the stream, with intervals to allow the water to run between them. The bridge was known as Clochaunainy – that is, *Clochán Áine*, Áine's Stepping Stones. According to local belief, it was Áine herself who built the bridge, transporting all the stones to the site in her silk apron. Unfortunately, *Clochán Áine* was demolished during drainage works carried out on the Camogue in the early 1930s.

Knockainy was sometimes referred to as *Áine Cliach*, meaning Áine (i.e. *Cnoc Áine*) of Cliú (genitive, *Cliach*), Cliú being the name of an ancient territory. And sometimes it was referred to as *Drom Collchoille*, the Ridge of the Hazelwood. It appears under both these names in a very early tale entitled *Mesca Ulad*, or *The Inebriation of the Ulstermen*, which tells how on one occasion the great Ulster warrior Cuchulainn, more god than man, came as far south as Knockainy, driving in his chariot – as the Roman classical writers saw the Continental Celts do.

In *Mesca Ulad*, Cuchulainn says to his charioteer, Loeg:

"Say, . . . Loeg, knowest thou in what territory we are?"

"I know not indeed," said Loeg.

"But I know," said Cuchulainn. "This to the south is Ceann Abhrat Sléibhi Caoin. The mountains of Eblinne are these to the north-east. That bright linn (lake) which thou seest is the linn of Limerick. This is Drom Collchoille in which we are, which is called Áine Cliach, in the territory of Déise Beag. . . ."

Ceann Abhrat Sléibhi Caoin is now called Slievereagh, and the mountains of Eblinne are known as the Slievefelims.

T. J. Westropp suggests the existence of a horse cultus at Knockainy.⁵ Oilioll Ollum's horses used to graze there, and even in our own days its connection with horses has been maintained

It is interesting to find the old link with Cashel still being maintained, for Knockainy is in the diocese of Cashel and Emly, as is a large part of East Limerick. Originally Cashel and Emly were separate dioceses, and Knockainy belonged to Emly. The patron of Emly is St Ailbe, and tradition claims that he was born in Knockainy in the fifth century.

'Ailbe' is a fairly common Christian name in this part of the country. One bearer of the name, Father Ailbe Hanley, who was born in Knockainy about the year 1738, is claimed to have been the author of that very beautiful Irish song called '*An Chúileann*', which begins:

*An bhfaca tú an Chúileann's í ag siúl ar na bóithre,
Maidean gheal drúchta is gan smúit ar a bróga.*

Later came an English translation, beginning:

Have you seen my sweet Coulin at day's early dawn,
As she roams through the wildwood or the sweet dewy lawn?

Cúileann ('Coulin') is a word used to describe a very beautiful woman, especially a fair-haired woman. According to local belief, Father Hanley, who was a well-known poet in Irish, wrote his song of the Coulin in praise of a girl named Nellie O Grady. Father Hanley died in 1805 or 1806 and is buried in Knockainy.

Where there are rich lands, peopled with strong* farmers, poetry has a tendency to be choked by the grass. But this apparently did not happen in Knockainy, which received favourable mention a number of times from the eighteenth-century Gaelic poets. On 8th July 1769 the celebrated poet of the Mauge countryside Aindrias Mac Craith addressed a document to Tomás Mac Canna, otherwise 'Halifax' Mac Cann, parish priest of Knockainy, in which he described the priest as "*fior-chara na héigse*", "true friend of the poets".

One wonders if the Nellie O Grady praised by Father Hanley was a member of the O Grady family of Kilballyowen, a place a short distance west of Knockainy. The O Gradys, originally a Clare family, were adherents of the Munster Geraldines, who had a castle in Knockainy and received grants of land from them in County Limerick in the thirteenth century – the earls of

* Wealthy.

Desmond, in fact, continued to hold courts in Knockainy down to the middle of the sixteenth century.

Donal O Grady, chief of the Limerick family, fell in battle in 1309. His brother John was Archbishop of Cashel, 1331–45. Donal's successor was Hugh O Grady, who married the daughter and heir of Ó Ciarmhaic. It was through her that the lands of Kilballyowen came into the possession of the O Grady family. After the overthrow of the Geraldines in the latter part of the sixteenth century, the O Grady lands were granted to Sir Thomas Standish, but romance aided the Gaelic chief to secure repossession of his lands, for he married one of the daughters of Sir Thomas and had his lands restored to him.

Kilballyowen is still in the possession of the O Gradys, and the head of the family is known, Irish style, as 'The O Grady'. Ever since the marriage alliance with the Standish family, 'Standish' has been a popular Christian name with the O Gradys.

We could dally longer in this interesting part of County Limerick, but we have miles to go before our tour is complete. And so we leave Áine's storied hill, and the fertile pasture lands of the Ó Ciarmhaics and the O Gradys, and return to Hospital. Immediately north of the town a road veers to the right for the village of Kiltely, which is some three miles distant. We take this road, a little winding road that climbs over the shoulders of some small hills and skirts the base of others and that affords numerous views of some very pretty and varied country. Cromhill (586 feet), close on our right, has the remains of a megalithic tomb on its summit. It is of the wedge-grave type, and dates from about 2500 BC. Like the similar but earlier monument on the hill of Duntryleague, it is known as *Leaba Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne* (Diarmuid and Gráinne's Bed).

Kiltely village nestles at the foot of Kiltely Hill (580 feet), a rocky eminence on which furze blooms in golden profusion in late spring and early summer. The hill was a very active volcano in geological times. The hill of Derk, a mile to the east, was another active volcano. Indeed at Kiltely we arrive at the circumference of an ellipse, having a major axis of about eleven miles and a minor axis of about seven miles, that was an area of great volcanic activity. It extended from Skool in the west to Pallasgrean (New) in the east, and from Kiltely in the south to Caherconlish in the north. Volcanic ash was spread fairly thickly over an area within a thirty-mile radius of these active volcanoes. Two parallel faults run from the vicinity of Caherconlish to just east of Kiltely.