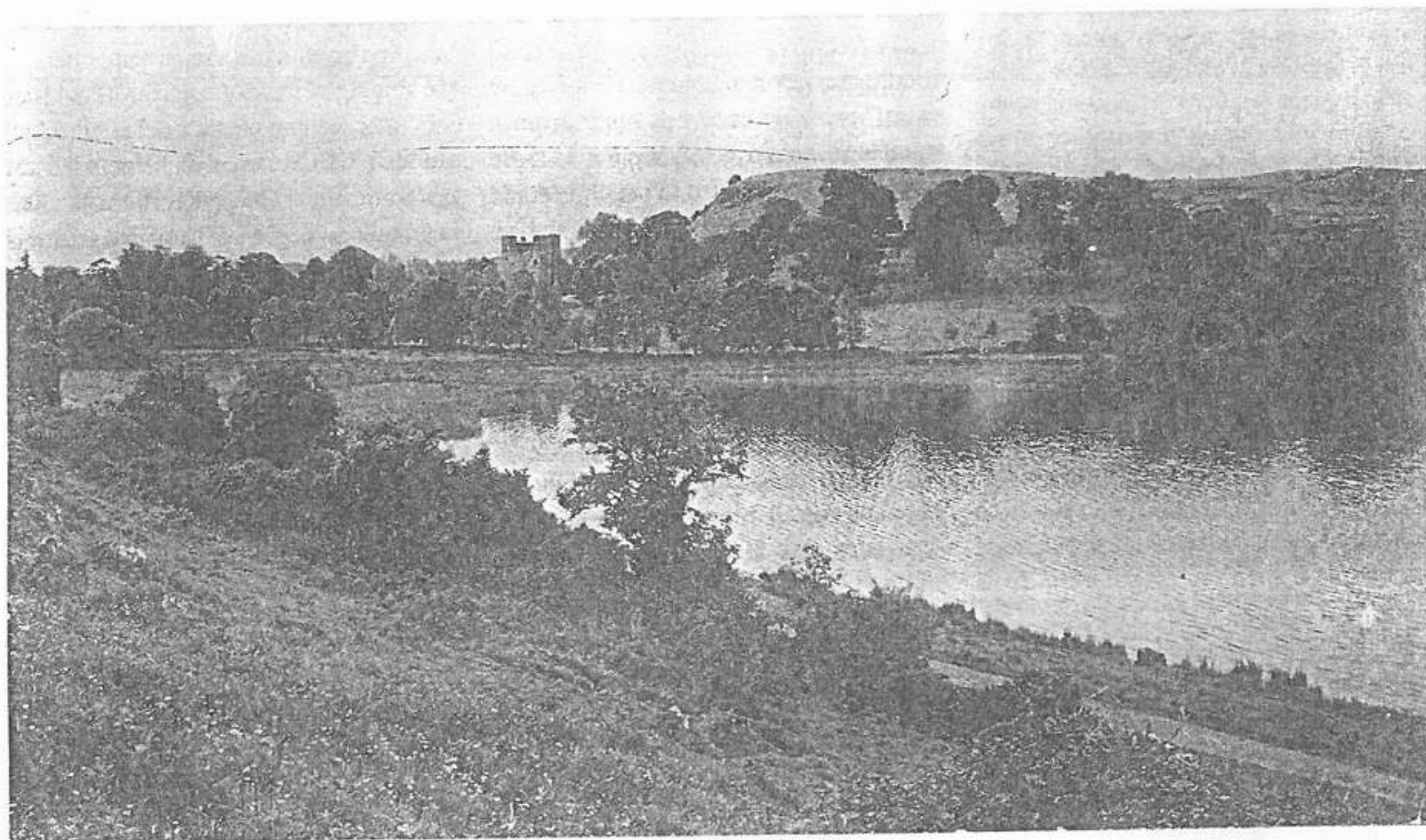


A TALE OF LOUGH GUR

The Gamekeeper and Biddy Early

By Tom Buckley



The Water Edge of Lough Gur

Old Malachy Callanan, the gamekeeper on the Count's estate was a troubled man. Why were those dreams of long ago back to haunt him? He had put them out of his head and wanted to forget all about them. Those very dreams almost cost him his sanity and the job he loved. He dreamt of buried treasure but could never pinpoint the precise location. However, he knew that it was quite near to the water's edge of Lough Gur which was part of the Count's estate. He felt that from his great knowledge of the lake and its surroundings, it would eventually lead him to the trove. His preoccupation with the search and his troubled mind left him worn out, unshaven and neglectful of himself.

After each new dream he would be out before dawn reconnoitering the lake's shore. When he decided on a possible location he would be back again at dusk

with a spade and shovel. Owing to the stony nature of the foreshore he rarely located a likely hiding place. Pike fishermen by the lake had noted Malachy's strange behaviour; they noted that he carried a spade in the crook of his arm instead of his trusty gun. In the past it was his custom to take a keen interest in fishing activities, now he would pass them sullenly with never a greeting. They shook their heads.

The Count's agent too, had noticed that he was not attending to his duties. If matters didn't improve he would have to be replaced. His job on the estate was to control the large number of vermin, such as grey crows, magpies, hawks etc. that preyed on the eggs and chicks of pheasants, ducks and other game and fowl. Also, he had to police the estate and see that no poachers were trespassing with guns. The Count and

his cross channel friends would be over for a shoot in the late autumn so everything would have to be in order.

The dreams persisted though Malachy tried to resist them. His job was too important to him. He loved the Count, who, when he visited, always had Malachy as his companion.

He knew how to please his master and was an expert at his job. He would know when requested where a fox could be located. For months before the Count's visit he would have noted the whereabouts of fox holes. He would drop crows he had shot and pieces of meat near the burrows (in order to keep them in the area). When he would have learned from his boss what day he had planned to go fox chasing, Malachy would block the burrows with large stones. This had to be done about midnight when the occupants were on

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the provd. When they returned before day break the foxes, finding that they couldn't get back to the safety of their dens, would conceal themselves in the undergrowth where they could easily be routed next day by the hunters' terriers. He knew the haunt of pheasants as he would have been dropping grains of oats and barley in the vicinity, they would remain where food was plentiful. In the same way he would have encouraged ducks and their young to shady coves along the lake shore.

In the company of his sporting friends, the Count took pride in the prowess of his gamekeeper.

...Now twenty years on, the dreams were back again to haunt him. In spite of past disappointments he found himself examining likely areas again. He didn't bring a spade with him, he knew that it would be of little use; hadn't he dug and poked around every likely spot! He was older and more philosophical about things now. Long, long ago he had given up on the idea of finding the elusive load. But then it struck him, why not go and consult with the Wise Woman of Clare, Biddy Early. He was quite excited

by the idea - didn't she locate lost people, living and dead? Didn't she tell a neighbour where he would find his stolen cow?

So, with a horse and cart he set out on the exhausting journey over rough roads on the fifty mile round trip. When he arrived at the good woman's little cottage in east Clare, she greeted him - "Welcome, Malachy Callanan!" Malachy was astounded as they had never met before and he had told no one of his errand. "I know what brought you" she said, "the treasure". He was dumbstruck but managed to nod. Biddy continued "you remember last evening - you were fowling by the lake; you fired at a duck and missed - you never miss - what happened?"

"I was standing on a little mound, it was uneven ground and right underneath my feet there was a geosadan growing".

"That's the precise spot" said Biddy, "you were standing on the treasure".

Malachy, now in a mixture of fright and excitement, rewarded the Wise Woman handsomely and thanked her. She gave him a meal for the road. He had planned to make it a two day

journey, but he was too elated to rest.

He journeyed through the long winter's night. Next day when he had rested, he made haste in great expectation to the spot Biddy had indicated. But alas the certainty that he had expressed to the Wise Woman had vanished. He noticed that there were dozens of little mounds, all similar to the one he felt he could so easily identify and the strangest thing of all was that there were healthy geosadans growing on all.

A strange feeling of depression came over Malachy. He was convinced that there were forces beyond his comprehension at work; it seemed that he was not meant to discover the fortune. Thwarted and finally beaten, he turned his back on the lake. He wasn't seen out and about much after that and he never divulged his secret of the buried treasure to anybody apart from one special friend. His great frustration he carried with him to the grave.

To this day, the treasure of Lough Gur lies near to the water's edge awaiting discovery.

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