

Some local traditions of Lough Gur

The Great Stone Circle at Grange

THE Amenity and Tourism Survey of Lough Gur, made by Nathaniel Lichfield and Associates and published earlier this year by the Limerick County Council, continues to hold wide interest and to excite no little controversy. This very historic district is, in consequence, attracting a growing number of tourists, and among quite recent visitors was a large group of students from the Netherlands. There is a growing interest, too, in Lough Gur by serious students of archaeology, and, in view of this, we include in the following article some interesting references which were made by the well-known antiquarian, J. F. Lynch, in the course of a letter to the "Limerick Chronicle" over half a century ago.

For many years the megalithic monument in the townland of Grange at the West side of Lough Gur and near Holycross has continued to hold a fascination on those who inspect the Lough Gur monuments. In John Wesley's "Journal" there is mention of this monument and he expresses his amazement at the strength of the men of old who were able to bring together such enormous stones.

When Prof. Eugene O'Curry examined this monument he was lost in wonder and remarked, pointing at the great stones: "There are the oldest records of the Gael if only we could read them!"

At an earlier period, General Vallancey spent a week at Lough Gur examining the various monuments, and this one in Grange was dubbed by him Cir Gor "the circle of the giants".

About 1830 T. Crofton Croker visited Lough Gur and in the "Gentlemen's Magazine," 1832, he published an interesting article on the Lough Gur monuments, in which he gave various particulars of the dimensions of the stones, circles, cromlechs, etc. This information is now very valuable, as many of the monuments were in later years destroyed.

Among others who made a study of the antiquities of the area were Sir Bertram Windle in the early part of the present century and, in more recent times, the late Prof. Seán O

Riordáin made some excavations in the 1930's and 1940's. Prof. O'Kelly assisted O Riordáin in his field studies and later conducted some excavations on his own account.

Rath Cloghair

Referring to the Rath Cloghair, J. F. Lynch says that it was at one time surrounded by a deep and wide trench filled with water, and inside this was a high rampart of earth; further on the inside was the circle of stones.

Count de Salis told him that in the 1860's the Count's father gave a local farmer a considerable sum of money to restore the monument, to raise the fallen stones and clear out the rubbish from the enclosure. But the farmer had ideas of his own about prehistoric monuments; he "improved" the rampart, etc., and introduced a number of stones into the circle, and so altered materially the appearance of the monument.

In later years many authorities were taken in by the "improvements."

In Lenihan's "History of Limerick," the largest stone in the circle is named Rinnach Crom Dubh. Lynch says he got the correct Irish form at Lough Gur, Rannach Chruim Dhuibh, or the distributive of Crom Dubh, an old Irish pagan deity frequently mentioned in local tales.

The word rannach, he explains, is from rann, a division, share, portion, and rannaim means I divide, share, distribute. The first Sunday in August was named all over Ireland Domhnach Chruim Dubh; "the Sun-

Sacrificial Stone?

"A few yards to the S.S.E. of the monument," Lynch continues, "is a curious stone, between which and the monument is a high fence, hence the stone generally escapes the notice of those visiting the monument. It was closely examined by the late Sir John Rhys, who, as he told me a few years ago, considered it to be of much archaeological importance."

This stone in Fitzgerald's "History of Limerick" is in accordance with the local tradition, stated to be an altar stone, and Lynch was locally informed that the victims were slain on this stone, and that the bodies were then carried into the circle and laid before Rannach Chruim Dhuibh.

He continues: "We know so very little about the Megalithic monuments that it is always advisable to give the local traditions concerning them, whether we deem them to be true or false, and this tradition of the altar stone and the Rannach Chruim Dhuibh is now published for the first time. So also is the explanation of the name, Rannach Chruim Dhuibh. The altar stone is locally called Cloch a' Bhille, "the Stone of the Sacred Tree."

"Many years ago, the late Madame O'Grady directed my attention to the difference in colour between the Cloch a' Bhille and the Rannach Chruim Dhuibh, the former being a black and the latter a red conglomerate. This difference in colour is of much importance. At Stonehenge, the Slaughtering Stone is at the N.E. side, and at Mecca the Black Stone is at the S.E. side of the Caaba.

Lost Cromlech

"According to local tradition, there was a stone a short distance to the east of the circle, and it is said to be still there, having been buried, and the site was pointed out to me. About a hundred feet S.S.W. of the rampart of the circle is the site of a large cromlech, or dolmen, which consisted of several standing stones, on the top of which was a large sloping stone. This monument was destroyed towards the close of the 18th century as it impeded the road

through an entrance of which there is now no trace. Some ceremony once a year is stated to have taken place at this cromlech, but the tradition is vague. This cromlech is mentioned in the Ordnance Survey Letters, but the site is left unidentified, which is now accurately given."

At the west side of the road is a large round depression which, Lynch holds, was the site for an immense cairn surrounded by a circle of stones, and having a serpentine avenue of stones at the S.E. side. Here, according to local tradition, was the Faithche, or field where sports were held in prehistoric times.

(Continued Next Saturday)

Church Notices

ST. MARY'S CATHEDRAL, LIMERICK

DAY—TRINITY VIII

10.30 a.m., Matins.
Processional Hymn 363
(omitting 4, 5).
Responses, Tallis.
Venite 151.
Psalm 77, Chants 148, 149.
Te Deum, Smart in F.
Jubilate 180.
Anthem, "A Day in Thy Courts" (Macfarren).
Hymns 420, 397.
Preacher, Rev. J. L. Enright.
7 p.m., Evensong.
Processional Hymn 486.
Responses, Tallis.
Psalm 42, Chant 122.
Magnificat 121.
Nunc Dimittis 160.
Hymns 497, 513, 15.
Preacher, Rev. J. L. Enright.

ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH

8 a.m., Holy Communion—
United Service in the Cathedral.
11.40 a.m., Parish Communion.
Preacher, Rev. J. L. Enright.
7 p.m., Evening Prayer—
United Service in the Cathedral.

ST. PHILIP'S CHURCH, CLARINA

9.15 a.m., Morning Prayer.
ST. MUNCHIN'S CHURCH AND KILMURRY
9.15 a.m., Morning Prayer in Kilmurry Church.
Preacher, Rev. P. Muddonyhi.

TRINITY CHURCH

11.30 a.m., Morning Prayer.
The Archdeacon.

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

10.15 a.m., Morning Prayer.
The Archdeacon.
MALLOW STREET HALL