UL to help build a fairer world

By RON KIRWAN

AMNESTY Ireland, the Irish section of Amnesty International, will hold its annual conference in Limerick next month.

The University of Limerick will welcome its biggest ever gathering of organisations to the annual conference and the Fairer World Fair on June 17.

The Fair will cover a wide range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and is open to the public.

According to national vice-chairman, John Lannon, the Fair will be well worth a visit from anyone who is interested in knowing about the work being done to help people who are discriminated against, victimised, or deprived of their basic needs.

A number of non-profit organisations have already confirmed they will attend and participate in the event, including the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, Viatories Christi, the Irish Aid Advisory Committee, the African Refugee Network, the Pat Finucane Centre for Human Rights, the Columbian Mission Education & Justice & Peace Office and Jubilee 2000. In addition, a wide variety of Amnesty International networks and groups will also take part.

After the Fair, an open discussion will take place at 5pm and a panel of experts will discuss the agenda for the eagerly awaited Human Rights commission, which the Good Friday Agreement requires the Government to set up.

Panelists include, Mary Lawlor, director of the Irish section of Amnesty International; Bill Schabas, director of the Irish Centre for Human Rights, and a member of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

The discussion will be chaired by RTE's Rodney Rice.

To commemorate the weekend, amnesty are launching a photographic weekend on Friday at City Hall, combining the work of many Limerick-based photographers with that of local artists, and showing interesting and though-provoking images of human rights issues from everyday life.

The exhibition will be opened by the Mayor of Limerick, Cllr Jack Bourke, at 8pm.

Amnesty International was set up 32 years ago to campaign for individual prisoners of conscience such as people who were imprisoned for their beliefs, ethnic origin or religion, and for any other reason, where people were being discriminated against.

"We also campaign for the abolition of the death penalty and for fair trials for all political prisoners. amnesty has also focused very much on torture and campaigned for its abolition," said John Lannon, from Knockea, County Limerick.

"Our mandate has broadened over the years and we now work across the full range of human rights as set out in the Declaration of Human Rights—campaigning on specific issues such as torture, the imprisonment of people on a number of grounds, against the death penalty and other issues.

"But there are a lot of other issues such as forced starvation or slavery which we would work with other organisations to promote an awareness of without getting directly involved," he said.

ODDS AND ENDS

By MANGAIRE SUGACH

Trees - and a strange tale

SOME time in my now far-off youth, I remember hearing somebody quote the following couplet:

Ash, elm, oak and yew
Are the four best trees that ever grew.

As and Elm were very plentiful in our locality and so were well known to us. Oak, though, we often heard of it, was scarce in the district and rarely seen by us. But the Yew was something of a mystery to us, and we didn't know where we'd find it, or what it looked like. In time, of course, we learned something about it. It was a coniferous tree, and was the sacred tree of the druids. It would often be found in churchyards (burial grounds) and could live to a great age.

In Ireland we associate the Ash very much with hurling, it being the favourite wood for the making of hurleys. The phase "the clash of the ash" has become a clichéd description of hurling. The Elm, unfortunately, has been virtually wiped out in recent years by the dreaded Dutch Elm disease. It is with a definite feeling of sadness one now recalls those lovely lines from Gerald Griffin about Adare:

There winds the Maigue as silver clear
Among the Elms so sweetly flowing,
There fragrant in the early year
Wild roses on the bank are blowing.
There wild duck, sport on rapid wing,
Beneath the Alders leafy awning,
And sweetly there the small birds sing
When daylight on the hill is dawning.

The Alder, like the Ash, Elm, Oak and Yew, is one of our native Irish trees. Trees introduced in later times, include the horse-chestnut, the Sycamore and Beech (the latter in the 18th century). The name Loghill derives from the Irish 'Leamhchoill', meaning 'oakwood'. The word 'Leamh', as used in the name, is an abbreviation of 'leamhan', the usual Irish word for 'Elm'. There is a proverb in Irish which says 'Ding de fein a scoilteann an leamhan'; that is, it takes a wedge of Elm to split Elm. Elm is a very tough timber.

The Oak is a majestic tree, and its timber is much prized for its beauty, its hardness and its durability. At one time, great Oak woods covered the larger part of Ireland. Co. Limerick had some very extensive woods, mainly Oak-woods. In her invaluable book, 'The Irish Woods since Tudor Times', Eileen McCracken says (pages 44/5):

"In the South of Limerick, woods lay against the north-facing slopes of the Mullaghareirk mountains from Feenagh westwards to Broadford, and continued to Newcastle, and through Ardagh to Shanagolden and Loghill on the coast, where there were iron-work's....

"Woods stretched eastwards from Rathkeale to link up with the long tract of forest that lay between Charleville and Kilmallock and reached the Shannon at Pallaskenry. This forest occupied the valley of the river Maigue. four miles south-east of Kilfinane, over a spur of the Ballyhoura hills lay the wooded Darragh/Glenroe, and eastwards of the Ballyhoura hills proper, lay the beginning of the wood of Aherlow which continued into Tipperary.

"Northwards of Croom, there were intermittent woods and bogs to Limerick town. From Limerick the woods reached to the foot of the Slieve Felim hills, skirting the southern edge of the Golden Vale co Cappamore and Doon".

A not very well known fact is that all the letters of the Irish alphabet (that used in the Gaelic script) are called after trees. For example, A is 'aim', an older word for 'elm'; B is 'beith', 'birch'; C is 'coll', 'hazel'; D is 'dair', 'oak' and so on. Another interesting thing is that the Brehon Laws codified all the penalties for unlawfully interfering with trees. The trees were listed in four different categories with different fines attaching to each category. There was a category of 'Noble Trees', consisting of Oak, Hazel, Holly, Yew, Ash, Pine, Apple. After that came 'Commoner Trees', consisting of Alder, Willow, Hawthorn, Rowan, Birch, Elm, Cherry. These two categories were followed by 'Lower Ranks' and 'Bushes'. (See "The Irish Landscape", by Frank Mitchell, page 177).

People familiar with the story behind the beautiful Connacht love song, "Una Bhán, will remember how two trees were said to have grown from the adjacent graves of Una Bhan Nic Dhiarmada and her lover Tomas Láidir Mac Coistealbha, and did not cease growing until they bent towards each other and met. I came across another strange story about trees and a grave in a poem given to me some time ago by a West Limerick friend. The poem is about Daniel Blake, a 21 year old Fenian, a shoemaker and a native of Rockhill, who was killed in the Fenian attack on Kilmallock Police Barracks on March 6, 1867. He had gone there with the Bruree Fenians. Here is the poem:

THE PATRIOT'S BRIDE

That morn she buckled his bright sword on,
She pinned on his breast a rosette green,
She whispered low of a country's wrong,
And lingered long in the old boreen.

He kissed her lips so rosy red,
He kissed the tears from her waxen cheek,
He told her tales of a brave, brave band,
Who no longer crouched like cravens weak.

He bade her be brave as a soldier's love,
He whispered of victories for Róisín Dhu,
He pressed her again to his manly heart,
And soulfully whispered "My love be true".

That night he fought in the old 'Balbec',
The brave, the true, for a suffering land,
Right was defeated - the old, old tale,
The Galtees' sheltered an outlawed band.

And low he lay in the gore-dyed street,
With a shining musket clasped in his hand,
And the zephyrs passing above his head
Whispered, "You're loved in the Irish Land".

In a brown-thatched cottage by the crooning Maigue,
His cailin is pining for his sake:
They bore his body to kindred dust,
God guard your soul, brave-hearted Blake!

Old Shanavoha's churchyard lone
Holds not the dust of a truer Gael;
And no tree withers above his grave,
And the grass always green to the passing gale.

This poem appeared in "the Munster News and Limerick and Clare Advocate", on April 28, 1900, that is just over a hundred years ago. The author's name was given as "Cormac Cas", obviously a pseudonym. The "old Balbec" referred to was Kilmallock. The real Balbec was a Roman city in what is now Lebanon and is famous for its historic ruins. Dr. Campbell, a traveller to Kilmallock in 1775, was so impressed by the town's historic ruins that he called it 'the Balbec of Ireland'.

The line, "And no tree withers above his grave", in the poem, is explained as follows in a footnote to the poem: "a strange freak of nature is to be seen in this cemetery (Shanavoha). A notorious spy of the '67 (Fenian) movement, whose body had to be guarded by armed policeman for many days, was interred here. Simultaneous almost with his interment, two magnificent trees, at the head and foot of the grave, withered".

EUROLINK SOUTH