

# Carrickshock

## The Tithe War

By Rev. T. J. Clohosey

**T**HE long struggle for Catholic Emancipation was not without its effects on the country. Religious feeling ran very high and the Catholics were naturally delighted with their success in gaining the great victory of Emancipation. It is not to be wondered at that their leaders continued to agitate for a removal of the grievances of which they justly complained. The Catholics were still obliged to pay tithes for the support of the clergy of the Established Church in Ireland. They were also obliged to contribute to the Church cess for the repairs of the Protestant Churches and for paying the expenses connected with the celebration of Divine worship such as the salaries of the clerk and sexton. In many of the towns, for example, Kilkenny, instead of the tithes a peculiar contribution was levied under the title of "Ministers' Money."

Originally, tithes were the tenth part of the annual produce of agriculture, being due for payment originally in kind for the support of the Church and its clergy. In later times the proportion varied. The tithes had been a source of trouble in Ireland during the 18th century. In 1735 the Irish Parliament passed the Tithe Agistment Act according to which pasture lands should be exempt from the tax, this law tended to increase the number of acres under pasturage. The Catholics held only small farms and were devoted for the most part to agriculture, and hence the burden of the tithes fell heavily upon them. Again the tax was levied unfairly. The proctors and other officials employed by the clergy to collect their revenues acted in many cases most unjustly, allowing

the better classes to pay far less than their proportion and obliging the poorer farmers to contribute far more than their due share. In Ulster the Presbyterians had been more successful. Many of the articles, such as hay, flax and potatoes were free from tithes in most of the Northern counties and even in the case of wheat and oats the tax in Ulster was far less than in any of the other provinces.

Though Dr. Doyle, or J.K.L., as he is more generally known, and Daniel O'Connell did not agree on all public questions, they were united in their opposition to tithes. The pastoral issued by Dr. Doyle on the subject was as strong in some passages as the speeches of O'Connell. In a memorable sentence for which he was much censured at the time, Dr. Doyle struck the keynote of the new agitation. "Let your hatred of tithes," he said, "be as lasting as your love of justice."

The first conflict took place in November, 1830, at Graignamanagh, where the horse of the Parish Priest was seized for non-payment of tithes. The people stood by the Parish Priest and refused to pay the tax. The forces of the Crown were placed at the disposal of the Parson, but after 600 men had been employed for two months only one-third of the amount had been recovered. In June a desperate affray took place between the Sheriff's party and the peasantry at Newtownbarry. Twelve peasants were shot down. More clashes took place at Thurles, Castlepollard and Kilkenny. And then comes the episode of Carrickshock, and here for the first time the Government forces suffer a setback.

The events at Carrickshock begin on December 28th, 1830, when a large crowd gathered around the house of Dr. Hans Hamilton, the Rector of Knocktopher, a gentleman not unpopular in the parish, though his tithes were set high and regularly exacted. They demanded a reduction in tithes. Dr. Hamilton refused to see them, but arranged to see a deputation a week later. On January 31st, 1831, a deputation of twelve very respectable tenant-farmers waited on Dr. Hamilton, who was attended on this occasion by Colonel Harvey, Mr. Greene, the resident magistrate; and others.

After some discussion, the deputation asked a five per cent. reduction, which Dr. Hamilton firmly refused. Colonel Harvey tried to arrange a compromise but failed. The immediate effect of the failure of the deputation was to throw the parish into the hands of the extreme party, led by a hedge-school master, William Keane.

In March, 1831, as there was no prospect of a settlement, Dr. Hamilton wrote to Colonel Harvey calling on him to take strong measures, but Colonel Harvey was very reluctant to move. Then Dr. Hamilton appealed direct to Dublin for assistance. Dublin Castle advised legal proceedings to be taken against the tithe payers. In November, 1831 legal proceedings were taken and the tithe processes or latitats were issued. On December 18th, Dr. Hamilton sent out his proctor, Edmund Butler, to serve the latitats. He was accompanied by a police force of 49 men in charge of Mr. Greene, R.M., and Captain Gibbons, sub-inspector. The peasants followed in small numbers, but no attempt was made to interfere. On the following day as the police force was returning in the evening, it was halted. Keane, in semi-military uniform and sash, stepped out in front of the force and told them, "things passed off quietly yesterday and they passed off quietly to-day, but they won't pass off quietly to-morrow if you begin at this work; so we warn you in time." He then marched off with his followers.

On the following Wednesday morning, December 14th, 37 policemen led by Gibbons, the sub-inspector, and accompanied by Edmund Butler, set out from Kilmogaunmy police barracks to Newmarket. From Newmarket they proceeded to Hugginstown. At both places chapel bells were rung and large crowds very soon gathered. Proceeding from Hugginstown, the police came to the top of the hill where the road widens. On this opening a monument was later erected. The monument consists of an inscribed stone slab built into a lime and sand pier, through the centre of which a round whitethorn bush grows. The stone slab was unfortunately displaced.

Here Gibbons saw Dick Walsh's (or Dick Waterford's) cottage on the border of the bog in the valley below him. This house was his objective. Wheeling to the left the road dips suddenly to another open space on which there is a large cow pond called Kylavanagh Lough. As they approached here the police heard great shouting and looking back towards the "monument" saw the fields and roads black with people. Leading the crowd was William Keane, wearing a sash and glazed cap. Gibbons here gave his men orders to load. They then continued the march to Dick Waterford's house and served the latitat or process by forcing it under the door. On turning home they found themselves surrounded by an angry crowd, fiercely demanding possession of Butler the Proctor. The parleying and threatening continued up the lane called "boreen a glough," the civilians directed by Keane and another person named Kennedy, on each side of the road brandishing all kinds of weapons. On reaching Kylavanagh Lough the people managed to get well in among the police. Gibbons saw that he could not return through Hugginstown and therefore continued on the direct road towards Knocktopher. On reaching Rockhall gate, a few perches further on, he found the road blocked by a dense mass of people. These were the men that James Treacy had invited to the Kilcurl football match, who having finished the game, came on to meet Butler and his bodyguard. Gibbons found himself trapped.

Immediately to his left was a little boreen. Into this Gibbons decided to take his men. No sooner had the police entered the boreen than Treacy passed the word to his men to enter the fields on the lower side of the road and Keane took up his position on the upper, or Kylavanagh side. Further parleying followed. Treacy saw that they were nearing an open space in the lane called Shaun na Mon's Lough. Knowing the advantage the police would possess if they reached this he determined to bring matters to a crisis. He sprang in among the police and catching Butler by the coat collar, dragged him outside their ranks. Gibbons seeing this, drew his pistol and shot Treacy dead. A wild shout of ven-

geance rose. A well-directed blow of a stone unhorsed Gibbons and he was killed immediately by means of a long-handled mallet. The police fired off the flint locks, but so close were the people to them that the volley only killed two men. The guns were wrenched from their hands and they were fiercely attacked. The affray lasted about forty minutes. Those police who were fortunate enough to escape ran in all directions and in less than fifteen minutes the breen was as silent as the grave with no person in sight and lying there were the bodies of Butler and twelve police. The bodies of Treacy and his comrades, Power and Phelan, were hidden away and later buried in peace.

Some hours later, Mr. Morris Reade, J.P., Rossenarra House, had cars provided in which the dead bodies were removed to Kilmoganny, where an inquest was subsequently held. The wounded were removed to Mr. Tomlinson's barn at Rockhall House. A large number were arrested, many of whom were defended later by Daniel O'Connell. A conviction, however, could not be obtained against even one. Keane, the leader, fled to America. The tradition is that Lady Esmonde, of Ringville, South Kilkenny, was mainly instrumental in effecting his escape on a boat belonging to her. The Rev. Hans Hamilton retired from the parish and went to live in London, appointing a curate to do the parish work. The fight affected the situation throughout the country. The Protestant Bishops issued directions to the clergy not to press for the payment of the tithes until Parliament had dealt with the subject. The subsequent history of the tithe struggle need not delay us here, except to say that the position was finally resolved in August, 1838, when the tithe Commutation Bill was carried. It provided that tithes reduced by 25 per cent. should be converted into a rent charge payable by the landlord and the arrears of tithes were to be wiped out. Thus, it must be remembered, that the tithes were not abolished, but a new method of collecting them was introduced, not so offensive as the old.

In 1924 a committee was set up to erect a memorial to the men who had taken part in the Carrickshock fight, and

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especially to the men who had been killed, James Treacy and Patrick Power, of Kilcurl, and Thomas Phelan, Killeasy. On December 14th, 1924, the foundation stone was laid by Rev. Patrick Treacy, P.P., who was a nephew of James Treacy. The site was granted by Mr. R. Leahy, and the stone work was done by Molloy's of Callan. The front panel of the monument was designed by Rev. Fr. Foran, O.S.A. On the left side is the inscription: Erected in everlasting memory of James Treacy, Patrick Power, Thomas Phelan and their faithful comrade heroes, who fell and suffered on this spot, in the ever memorable and decisive tithe fight of Carrickshock, on Wednesday, December 14th, 1831. True they proved even unto death. Pro fides (sic) et patria. May God have mercy on their souls. Amen. On the right-hand side there is an Irish version of this. On the back is inscribed the names of the committee responsible for its erection.