

Kilgory

By T. P. Lyng

PRESENT day Kilgory is an elevated townland of 363 acres that lies on the Kilkenny border of Laois. The ancient burial ground and Holy Well within this townland are approached by ascending the Mountain Road from Crettyard (Crochta Ard—High Croft) or by climbing the Funeral Path from Monteen (Mointin—Little Bog. This locality acquired the name Monteen from a local colliery called Monteen). The Red River (Abhainn Dearg, so called from the red iron deposit on the river bed) boundary of the townland is also a county boundary and the boundary between the Dioceses of Leighlin and Ossory. The hill-top overlooks Ros n-Abhall (meaning “Apple Copse” and variously named as Rosenallis, Risnowl and Rosey) and also commands a fine view of Bonegarow (Ban a Ghearrtha—Pasture of the Cutting) with its lovely old world thatched cottages, and the valleys of the Kingfisher (Ri-Iasc) and Deen (Dithin—little destruction alias Dian—fleet) rivers.

Kilgory is in Irish Cill Gabhra, i.e., The Cell or Church of Gabhair. In Red Branch and Fenian lore Gabhair is the name of the range of hills that run south and north-west from Rosmore (Ros Mor—Great Copse or Bluff alias Teamhair mBairrche—Margy Height). Kilgory is written Kilgore in Speed’s Map (1610) and the Laois-Kilkenny border is marked Ardgore in the Leinster map of Pacata Hibernia of roughly the same period. Ardgore is preserved in the present-day 1,000 ft. Knockardigur (Cnoc Airde Gabhra—Hill of the Height of Gabhair) that is in Laois at the northern tip of Co. Kilkenny.

John O’Donovan in Ordnance Survey Letters from Carlow in the year 1838 expressed the opinion that Kilgory meant the Church of Guaire where Guaire is the alleged patron of the parish of Shrule (Sruthair-Guaire)

which is north of Sleatty (Sleibhte). O'Donovan concluded that there was a Guaire tradition in Kilgory. The general and firmly held local tradition, however, regarding the meaning of Kilgory is that the name refers to a Fr. "Gory" who was "killed" in nearby Aegar's Bog in Penal Days.

The graveyard of Kilgory, covering $2\frac{1}{2}$ roods, the outline of a ruined church and the Holy Well, marked St. Longory's Well, are all marked on the Ordnance Map. No remains of the old church were evident in 1950 and only the older people could recall having heard of remains of the west wall.

About 25 years ago a stump of an ash tree was said to be the remains of a tree that grew on the spot where the Altar once stood. A simple wooden shrine was erected about this stump of tree. The shrine was crowded with statues, medals, pictures, etc., that were left as customary offerings by pilgrims to the Holy Well and Shrine. A great number of crutches and walking sticks were also left at the shrine. The Holy Well was said to be particularly associated with the curing of lameness, and many instances of such cures are recalled locally. Pieces of cloth and beads were tied on the branches of a nearby hawthorn bush, and pieces of the tree stump were taken away as a cherished souvenir. Pilgrimages are made to the Holy Well and Shrine during the month of May. It is traditionally held that petitions for favours should be made during three successive visits made on Sundays or Holydays. Older people say that it was customary to pray while circling clockwise around the well. Among the folk-lore of the well it is stated that the well formerly used to spring up within the ash tree mentioned above, but that having been abused by a disorderly person, it left the tree and sprang up outside the walls of the graveyard at its present location. As an example of the efficacy of the healing waters I was told a story of a woman whose little son was lame from birth. She carried him to the well on three successive mornings before sunrise, and on the third morning he said: "Put me

down, mother. I want to walk." He was able to walk ever after.

It is recorded that in past centuries numerous tents used to be erected to accommodate the pilgrims to Kilgory. Less than fifty years ago hundreds visited Kilgory from a ten-mile radius during May, and burials were frequent in the graveyard from places as far distant as Old Leighlin and the Butts. The path from Monteen to Kilgory is known as the funeral path. Burials are rare now. There are some tombstones in the graveyard.

There are no records of the old chapel that stood in the graveyard, but tradition says that its site was used as a Mass station in Penal Days. Tradition also says that these Masses ceased when faction disputes arose as to the Diocese to which Kilgory belonged. The wall surrounding the graveyard was built about 50 years ago.

In 1950 a committee representing the parishes of Doonane, Clogh, Castlecomer and Muckalee made an effort to preserve the antiquities of Kilgory. The forgotten site of the old chapel was excavated and the 20 x 40 ft. foundation brought to light. A new shrine was erected to replace the old one that had fallen to pieces where the ash tree stump had finally disappeared. This year, much work was done on the preservation of the Holy Well, which had become choked and silted. The stone slab inserted in base of the shrine reads:

LON GARA
I gCILL GABHRA
I SLIABH mBAIRCHE
I LIOS LONGARA
550—1950

An explanation of this inscription covers the written evidence regarding Kilgory. The wording with spelling modified is taken from O'Curry's Lectures on the MS. Materials of Ancient Irish History. Lon-Gara is the patron and founder of Kilgory. Cill Gabhra is "Cell of Gabhair," already noted. Sliabh mBairrche is the later name of the Gabhair range and is at present also the

name Slievemargy of the barony in which Kilgory is situated. Lios Longara, *i.e.*, Longara's Liss, is obviously the name of the hill-top rath where Longara founder his monastic cell in the days of Colmcille or about the year 550. The present Kilgory graveyard would mark the site of the original Lios Longara. The inscription thus reads: Longara in Kilgory, in Slievemargy, in Longara's Liss.

The inscription is part of a note inserted in Feilire Aenguis to explain the line "Longarad Grian Alaib," *i.e.*, "Longara a Shining Sun." He had a very early collection of books. The note explains that Longara was learned in classics, history, law and philosophy. The appendage "Lon" is apparently to be taken to mean "Shining." The patron is variously referred to as Lon or Gara (dh) or Lon-Gara or Lonius. His chief monastic cell was at Discart Gara, *i.e.*, Cashelgarrow, *i.e.*, Cashel near Castletown in Laois. Carrigan in his History of Ossory explains that Kilmogar near Johnstown is Cill Mo-Gara and is also named from the Saint Gara. The monastic remains at Cashel and Kilmogar are almost obliterated. In common with Kilgory, the cells at Cashel and Kilmogar stood on hill-tops. They have faded into oblivion, but the much frequented well of Kilgory keeps its history alive.

None of the now remaining inscriptions being earlier than 1750. A broken slab beside the old shrine records the deaths of Margaret and Anastatia Nash in 1755 and 1763 respectively. Other inscriptions prior to 1800 are: Thomas Kealy 1752, Elenor Brennan 1753, Bryan Collins 1762, James Kealy 1764, Ellen Brennan 1771, John Brennan 1771, Patrick Brennan 1775, Owen Murphy 1776, Mary Egan 1776, William Brennan 1778 Thomas Egan 1794, Edward Medlar 1793. In the inscription to James Kealy almost all the words except "Kealy" enjoy a capital letter thus:—

Here Lyeth y^E Body of
James kealy Who Departed This Life
y^E 5TH Apr^L 1764 Aged 56^{YR}



Owen Murphy's inscription runs thus:

Here Lies the Body of
Oawen Murphy Depd. This Life y——
of Feb. 1776.

Requicecant in Pace

Amen

Local people say that the earlier inscriptions are written on Shanakill flags which were probably taken from the floor of the old church. A great number of uninscribed graves were marked by building stones taken from the walls of the old church, Many of these were removed in a cleaning up effort about 20 years ago.

Books of Kilkenny Interest.

Two books of interest to Kilkenny readers have been published during the last year. Mr. W. J. Pilsworth published *History of Thomastown and District*. It is an excellent guide-book not only to the town of Thomastown, but also to such places in the neighbourhood as Jerpoint Abbey, Dysart, Kilfane, Tullaherin and Grennan. A guide-map by J. S. Gibb and excellent drawings by Canon Bentley add considerably to the book. With Appendices and Index, it is very good value at only three shillings.

Later in the year came *Cois Feóire*, by Owen O Kelly. This is an account of the placenames of County Kilkenny; their original Irish and present English forms. The booklet is divided into baronies, parishes and townlands. The notes of historical interest, though brief, give a considerable amount of information. The booklet is essential for anyone who wishes to have a sound knowledge of the local history of Kilkenny.

Also during the year appeared a revised edition of Dean Seaver's booklet on St. Canice's Cathedral, and a third edition of Fr. Gaffney's *Kilkenny and the Black Abbey*.