

THE TOMB OF THE BANIM BROTHERS

By MRS. T. G. LANIGAN

JUST one hundred years ago, in December, 1854, a white marble bust of John Banim was unveiled in the Tholsel, Kilkenny, to commemorate the famous novelist and playwright who had died twelve years before. The committee which erected this memorial was a representative one and the secretaries were John Reville, Editor, "Kilkenny Journal"; John Prim, Editor, "Kilkenny Moderator", and John Thomas Campion, John's Bridge.

The comment of William Carleton in "The Nation" of December 30, 1854, was a bitter one. It occurred in the course of a sad, little poem, entitled "Taedet Me Vitae" (I am weary of life).

"Pain-stricken Banim lying low,
In friendless agony of woe,
Has his sad statue duly carved—

Cold recompense to him you starved—Taedet me vitae."

Three years later, Dr. P. J. Murray published a biography of John Banim and in it complained that he could with difficulty discover the grave of John Banim in St. John's Graveyard in Maudlin Street. He went on to say: "When (John) Banim was dying, he said to Michael, 'I have only one request now, lay me so that I may be nearest to my mother with my left side next to her.' And so they buried him more than fifteen years ago and so for fifteen years and some months he has lain without stone or monument to mark his grave. Is the only memorial of John Banim to be a bust, quite unlike him, in the Tholsel of Kilkenny? Must Michael Banim drag from his own small funds the money to purchase a tombstone for John Banim's grave?"

This was, perhaps, a little unfair to Kilkenny, since already, in 1833, many Kilkenny friends had subscribed to

a National Collection to assist John Banim in his illness and to pay his debts and again in 1835, when he returned to Ireland in broken health, Kilkenny gave him a magnificent reception and presented him with a silver snuff box and £85, a fair sum of money in those days. Surely the Kilkenny folk did better in giving what they could to a live poet rather than erecting great monuments to the dead.

Seventeen years passed and in 1874 Michael Banim joined his brother in the grave in Maudlin Street, but alas for the transitory value of a literary reputation, few cared any longer whether the grave of these two much-feted writers was identifiable or not. The once famous "Tales of the O'Hara Family" was already out of fashion. Ireland was preparing herself for a great literary revival and cared little for those who had laid the first foundations.

Michael Banim's daughters left Ireland and settled abroad and the Banim grave in St. John's remained unmarked save for the inscription commemorating their mother's burial which served to identify it. Towards the end of 1956 the Kilkenny National Monuments Committee took the matter in hand and with the help of An Bord Fáilte repaired the dilapidated tomb and made an inscription to the memory of the two brothers which reads as follows:—

"Here lie also the remains of her sons,
 MICHAEL BANIM
 Postmaster, Kilkenny—Novelist
 1796—1874
 and
 JOHN BANIM
 Wind Gap Cottage, Kilkenny
 Poet, Novelist and Playwright
 1793—1842

Joint authors of "Tales of the O'Hara Family"

The Banims' tomb is now neat and tidy like that of their close friend and fellow author, Gerald Griffin, who sleeps in a simple and well tended grave in the tiny cemetery

of the Christian Brothers of the North Monastery overlooking Cork City.

OGHAMCHRAOBH AR LIAGAN

I NDEIRE FOMHAIR na bliana seo ardaíodh liagán ón ionad in a raibh sé ina lú cois sean-chaisleáin de chuid na nGrásach i mbaile fearainn Liagáin lámh le Baile Mhic