



ike many other communities, the history of the people of Park is an oral one and, except for a few brief references in

Maurice Lenihan's *History of Limerick*, little has been written about their way of life. Michael Hogan, the Bard of Thomond, went to live in Park in November 1867, but his experience there was not conducive to writing. The winter was an unusually cold one, with arctic north-east winds, heavy frost and snow. The house in which the Bard lived was a new one with only a light coating of thatch. The fresh walls wept constantly and fires had to be kept lighted day and night in a vain effort to keep the house warm. The poet was soon laid low with a severe attack of rheumatism and "burned in joint and limb" for seven weeks. With characteristic and bitter finality, Hogan wrote: "It was the first and last winter I spent in Park, right on the ecclesiastical premises of the Right Rev. George Butler, the mitred millionaire." (George Butler was the Roman Catholic Bishop of Limerick).

The Bard's memories of the Garden of Limerick were, therefore, not rosy ones. Two years afterwards, with the wintery chill of Park barely banished from his bones, Hogan wrote his fourth *Shawn-a-Scoob* pamphlet. In "The Park Deputation," one of the most scathing lampoons in this work, he tells the story of the delegation of members of the Limerick Town Council, who went to pay court on the bishop at his Park palace, on the return of Dr. Butler from a visit to London. Perhaps the poet was trying to exorcise the unhappy memories, still burning in his mind if not in his body, when he poured out his invective on the red-robed councillors. In the poem he reserves his most violent vituperation for two members, Mayor Thomas Joyce ("Tom Scoob") and the historian Maurice Lenihan ("Maurice Birch"):

*"Tom Scoob led the van of the
sycophant squadron,
Such a captain ne'er figured in old
times nor modern;
The scant bit of ermine that clothed and
crowned him,
Just looked like a gipsy's red petticoat
round him;
A Park woman saw him - she pilllued
and fainted,
For she thought 'twas the devil in oil-
colours painted..."*

*But Tom is as trained to the science of
dodging,
As a spaniel at fetching or gipsy at
cadging,
He has a devil of a coal-hole in
Patrick's Well,
As deep as the Tartarean kitchen of
hell...*

The Park Dames

PARK IN POETRY

by Jim Kemmy

*Maurice Birch, like the ghost of
MacBeth 'mid his fellows,
Looked as white as a thief on his way
to the gallows.*

*Oh, to see his fish-face, like a dim
churchyard candle,
How ghostly it shone o'er his flaming
red mantle;*

*For the spectral complexion the ermine
imparted*

*Made him seem like a corpse from
death's prison deserted".*

But another poet took a more sympathetic view of Park. Canon Ross Lewin, a minor Anglo-Irish writer who extolled the glorious victories of the British Empire in his verse, was stirred to write a poem in praise of the Parkmen's industry. The simple language of "The Men of Park" is used effectively to evoke the quiet mood and sense of timelessness of this hidden Limerick. The poem also contains some enduring images of the patient Parkmen toiling their lives away in the secure shadows of the neo-Gothic stone spire of St. John's Cathedral, beneath the gently sloping hills of Clare.

*"Shadows of the evening softly fall
On towers and spire, cathedral wall.
Sons of the earth, of toil and moil,
Delving and digging the deep rich soil,
Patiently working from dawn till dark,
Such are the lives of the men of Park.*

*I've passed them by in the early day,
When the city folk in their slumbers lay,
When the dew shone white on the
grassy lawn,
And the cocks' gan crow at the rising
dawn,
And the blithe notes rang from the
soaring lark,
And there at their work were the men
of Park.*

*And when at even the vesper bell
Is tolling, tolling - o'er brake and dell,
And the birds are speeding their
homeward flight*

*Seeking for cover ere gath'ring night,
Out in the gardens you still may mark
The toiling, moiling men of Park.*

*No time for politics labouring there
Neath those lovely, lonely hills of Clare,
Ever and always they seem content,
For hearth, and home, and a well-
earned rent,
And rest but comes when they're stiff
and stark,*

To the sturdy, homely men of Park".
Richard Ross-Lewin is long forgotten in Limerick except for "The Men of Park". His long out-of-print book, *Poems of a Clare West Briton*, published in 1907, contains many interesting verses and, for all his anti-Home Rule and pro-British feelings, his poetry deserves a higher place in Limerick literature.

Two other writers had Park connections, P.J. ("Cushy") Ryan, author of *The Fourth Siege of Limerick*, lived for many years at Cussen's house, at the railway level-crossing gates. But, as far as is known, he never wrote a line about the market-gardeners and their way of life. Michael McNamara, the son of a Parkman, lived in the district for six years between 1952 to 1958, when he emigrated to America. Born in 1940 in the Sandmall, McNamara taught creative writing and fiction at the University of Colorado at Denver. Two of his novels, *The Vision of Thady Quinlan* (1974) and *The Dancing Floor* (1978) are set in Limerick; one is based on the return of an emigrant son to a sandman's family and the other deals with the interaction of two brothers with the Provos.

Michael McNamara knew the life of the Park people intimately. As a young boy, he often helped his father in selling cabbage from a horse-and-cart at the market-place and in Broad Street. Sadly, he was never to write a novel on Park, though he was well qualified for the task. He was killed in a car accident, in America, shortly after his third novel, *The Sovereign Solution*, was published in 1980.