

# A LIMERICKMAN'S DIARY

by Observer

## Limerick author continues the Gaelic tradition of Coshma

IN his new book, "Cois Maighe na gCaor," which has just been published, the well-known Gaelic scholar, Mannix Joyce (or Mainchin Seoighe, to give him the Irish form of his name) presents in particularly captivating fashion the story of the Maigue country, so rich in poetry, history and tradition.

When I asked Mannix how he came to write "Cois Maighe na gCaor," or when he first became interested in the Maigue Poets, he pointed out that his book dealt with more than the Maigue Poets, since it covered the whole Maigue country in its many aspects—historical, literary, scenic, social and so on—from Laragh, near Milford, Co. Cork, onward by Bruree, Croom and Adare, to the Shannon.

Donncha O hArgáin, former principal of Bruree Boys' National School, was keenly interested in local history, and found an enthusiastic disciple in Mannix. In that, Mannix thinks, may have been the beginnings of "Cois Maighe na gCaor."

At school, he learned as poetry, and as a song, a sad, sweet poem called "Slán le Maigh"—"Farewell to the Maigue." This was his first acquaintance with any of the Maigue Poets, for the author of the poem was Aindrias Mac Craith, the original "Mangaire Sugach."

The title of Mannix's new book comes from the second line of Aindrias's poem: "O slán is céau dtaobh so"



uaim,  
Cois Máighe na gCaor na  
gcaobh na gcuach,  
("One hundred and one fare-  
wells from this place from  
me to Coshma of the  
berries, the shrubs, the  
ricks").

### SPIRITUAL CONTACT

The fact that the Maigue flowed

past within 20 yards of the school, and that Aindrias Mac Craith and his fellow poets were men who had lived in his own countryside quickened Mannix's interest in the poets. The Irish language he was now learning and growing to love brought him into closer spiritual contact with the poets of Coshma, whose everyday language had been Irish.

These very fine poets of Penal times included men of many callings—hedge schoolmasters, tavern-keepers, tradesmen and priests, among the latter being the learned Franciscan Fr. Nicholas O'Donnell, guardian of the broken Franciscan monastery of Adare.

Then one day Canon Tomás de Bháil, priest, patriot and scholar, lent Mannix a copy of Father Dinneen's "Filidhe na Máighe," the first published collection of the Irish poetry of the Maigue. Mannix told me: "When I opened that book it was as if I had stepped inside the door of Seán O Tuama's tavern in Croom and found myself in the company of the poets." Some years later, when he read Robert-Gibbing's delight-

ful book, "Lovely Is The Léé," the thought occurred to him: could not one write a book about the Maigue? Well, the book about the Maigue has now come—from Mannix himself.

The book is in Irish. And Mannix says that the story of the Maigue country could be adequately told only in Irish. "All the time while I was writing the book," he told me, "I found myself being led back to Gaelic sources, to a Gaelic question about ruling families like the Mac Eniryrs or the O'Donovans, to a piece of Gaelic conversation from Knockferna, to a Gaelic lament for Adare Franciscan monastery, or for a man killed in a faction fight, and so on, not to speak of the wealth of Gaelic poetry from the Maigue poets and Seán O'Donnell, of Athlaccá. There is scarcely a townland in the Maigue country that does not find mention in the Gaelic literature of Coshma, literature to which native Irish speakers were adding up to the mid-19th century. And Mannix is proud to be continuing the Gaelic tradition of Coshma.

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