

THE KILMORE CAROLS.

The Christmas Carol singing at Kilmore, Co. Wickford, is unique in the Diocese of Ferm, and because the Carols themselves and the music to which they are set have acquired a venerable antiquity, an edition of these Carols may not be unworthy of a place in *THE FAIR*.

Quoting from a lecture given by Mr. A. G. Healy to a Dublin audience. "The Irish Independent" of Dec. 26th, 1922, writes the following: "It is predominantly to St. Francis of Assisi that we owe the softening and humanizing influences which produced the beautiful Carols of the Middle Ages. St. Francis was born with the narrative of St. Luke could be dramatized so as to teach in pictorial fashion the doctrine of the Incarnation. For years he pondered how best this might be done, and at length obtained the Pope's (Honorus III) permission to introduce a stage version of the Sacred Story into the churches with which he was associated. He was to spend the Christmas of that year (1223) in the village of Greccio near Assisi. There in the little church he prepared a stable, having borrowed from a friendly farmer an ox and an ass and a bundle of hay. When the day arrived the villagers flocked to see the re-enactment of the wonderful story, and amidst by the example, reverently listening to St. Francis and his brethren sing simple Carols." This began the Christmas Carol and "thus began the medieval carol spirit."

When the singing of Carols was introduced to the Diocese of Ferm we do not know, but one hundred and fifty years after the so-called Reformation, a strong tradition established itself when, in 1667, Dr. Luke Wadding, Bishop of Ferm, published his "Finnis Garland." The "Finnis Garland" contains among other songs ten carols for the Christmas season; two of these carols are among those sung to-day in Kilmore. The fact that there was not much opportunity for carol singing in Dr. Wadding's day is evidenced by a insert which he wrote for Christmas Day in the year 1678. Here are two stanzas—

"This is our Christmas Day,
The Day of Christ's Birth;
But we are far from joy,
And far from Christmas mirth.
Oh Christmas be here in Mass
In our great Churches;
That without Mass this day should pass
Nath count us to be happy.

"The good old times are past
And now bad times are come,
And worse times shall be
And longer so we stay;
Therefore in English and Irish
These holy days we pass
In sorrow and in tears
We spend our Christmas."

"The Finnis Garland" 1667. 86.

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The hard days were slow in passing, but the carol spirit was kept alive and a fresh impetus was given to the beautiful custom in the southern barony of Co. Wickford by Rev. William Devoreux, P.F., Dringh, 1760-1771.

Father William Devoreux, with whose name the Wickford Carols are inseparably associated, was born in King, Tarramolin, in 1696. He was the second son of John Devoreux, whose family had been transplanted to the Wickford colony, south of Athlone beyond the Shannon, after the Cromwellian campaign.*

At the restoration of Charles II, the Devoreuxs hastened back to Wickford; but they failed to regain any of their former estates and they had to live as laborers on the lands that were once their own property. Not many years after the return of the exiles, John Devoreux acquired a tenancy on part of the lands of King, Tarramolin. John had a brother, Jasper, who was educated in Spain, and who was retained on April 18th, 1700, by the Bishop of Meath. On his return to Ireland, Father Jasper was appointed to the Tombaggan-Blayghan area; he resided at Tarramolin, and when he died, August 21st, 1730, he was buried in Tarramolin graveyard, where his tomb is to be seen (cf. *The Reg. Popish Priests, 1704*, Dr. G. Flood, Ferns, 208).

John Devoreux of King had two sons; the elder married and had issue—a son who died in his youth and two daughters, one of whom married a man named Keeble of Downpatrick. John's youngest son, William, was born in 1698, and in 1724 he entered the Irish College, Salamanca, Spain, to complete his studies for the priesthood. It is probable that William may have spent a couple of years at Santiago in Galicia in preparation for his theological studies at Salamanca. William Devoreux was at Salamanca from 1726 to 1737, during which time, at his various examinations, "he gave an excellent account of his business." (*Arch. Hib. iv. 22-23*). Fr. Devoreux returned to the homeland in 1739; he was in weak health and he lived at his father's house in King for two years. Tradition informs us that it was at this period that he wrote several Christmas Carols. It is recorded, too, that he had a fine rich voice and that often at evening he entertained his friends with the songs of the honey Land. In 1750, Father Devoreux was strong enough to take up parochial work and he was appointed to the parish of Dringh, which was co-extensive with the modern parish of Ferventstown. He had no chapel for his flock, and a significant entry in the list of Registered Popish Priests of 1761 tells us that he said Mass in the sheltered corner of a field

*For much of this information I am indebted to a series of letters printed in "The People" newspaper, Wickford, between Dec. 1824, 1871, and Feb. 1825, 1875, and also to a letter in the issue of Sept. 1825, 1875. The letters signed by "Banney of Fervin Man" were written by Mr. Edmund (Man) Here, whose maternal grandfather, here in 1761, died in 1871.

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with a "sacring" by the altar at which he officiated. (Arch. Hib. IV. 186). Towards the end of the year he built a small chapel—it was no more than a roof hut—on the side of the road between Drinagh and the Cross of Killane in the townland of Goolpsorb. At the same time he erected his own residence about a quarter of a mile from the Cross of Killane, on the left-hand side of the road leading to Ploverstown. The house is still standing, and cut in a stone measuring about 4 x 2 inches, set in the wall to the left of the front entrance, are the initials W.D. with the year 1731. In 1750, Fr.



Devereux is listed in the Chapter as Vice-General and Chancellor of the Diocese of Ferns (Dr. G. Flood, Ferns, 200). In the account of Dr. Sweetman's visitation of the diocese in 1750, he says that on June 14th he conferred and stated in Fr. Devereux's parish and found "all things orderly and well." (1863 315).

During his pastorate at Drinagh Fr. Devereux compiled a Catechism of Christian Doctrine which was adopted and remained in use in the Diocese of Ferns for nearly 100 years. It may be of interest to record here under this sketch of the life of Fr. Devereux all that we have been able to glean concerning the history of his Catechism. Of the year in which Fr. Devereux compiled his Catholic Christian Doctrine we have no evidence. I am inclined to think that the work was done during the early years of his missionary life. We may assume, too, that the Catechism was popularized in the first instance through manuscript copies. The Caths were certainly popularized by the making of manuscript copies—one such copy was made by a man who died suddenly in 1792. (Letter, "The People," Jan. 27th, 1872). The earliest edition of the Catechism which can be traced was that printed by William Lord, Printer, Main St., Westport, in 1805. This little publication bore the title: "A Catholic Christian Doctrine for the use of Pastors and Catechists, by Rev. Wm. Devereux." This title page was used for nearly 84½ years, the name of the printer and the year only varying. Rev. Myles Murphy, President of the Seminary opened in Michael St., Westport, in 1811, and afterwards President of St. Peter's College, 1818, used to lecture on and expound to the assembled classes in both institutions the questions and answers of Fr. Devereux's Catechism. When he was appointed Bishop in 1826, Dr. Murphy had a revised version of the Catechism printed by the "Waterford News." The new edition of the Catechism carried the following title: "Catholic Christian Doctrine for the use of Pastors

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and Catechisms, by Rev. Fr. Wm. Devereux, Vic. Gen., Diocese of Ferns, 1845, revised and corrected by Dr. Murphy.¹ The Dublin printers (Duffy) issued several printings of the *Wexford* edition through the reign of Doctor Furlong, Warren and Brewin, and each printing carried the legend of Fr. Devereux, V.G., 1845. Towards the end of the reign of Dr. Furlong, *A.* 1852), some of the older clergy questioned the assigned authorship of the Catechism and as a result of a communication from a dignitary of the diocese (believed to have been Very Rev. James Canon Bado, P.P., *Wexford*), the *Waterford* printers issued a new edition of the Catechism in 1858 and headed its advent with the following advertisement in the "*Waterford News*": "Devereux's Catholic Christian Doctrine for the diocese of Ferns, now published, revised and corrected with the approval of Most Rev. Dr. Furlong, Bishop of Ferns. For the use of pastors and catechists in order to instruct children and illiterate persons. By Fr. Wm. Devereux, P.P. of Plevinstown, who died anno dom. 1771."

As has been noted, the Dublin printers continued to use the title page of Dr. Murphy's revised edition of 1858, and as the error concerning the burial of the author decorated the title page of the Dublin editions of Fr. Devereux's work until the catechism was superseded by that of Canon Lannon (1883). A Catechism of Christian Doctrine, translated and adapted from the French of Cardinal Guillon, Archbishop of Malines, was published by Very Rev. John Canon Doyle, P.P., Ferns, in 1841 (Dublin: Brown and Nolan, Ltd.), but this work never became popular in the diocese.

The place of Devereux's "Catholic Doctrine" in the family of catechetical publications in the 18th century is outside the scope of these notes on the *Wexford* priest who wrote the catechism and who revised the card singing in South *Wexford* two hundred years ago. The source from which I have collected these notes states that Fr. Devereux's Catechism was translated into Italian and was used in Rome ("The People," Sept. 1885, 1895).

Fr. Devereux died on August 25th, 1771, at the age of 75 years; he was buried in the tomb of his uncle, Rev. Jasper Devereux, in Yaxham, and the inscription on his tombstone was read in 1878 when Miss Hove visited the place. Mr. Hove, in his letter to "*The People*," Sept. 1885, 1878, says that Fr. Devereux wrote some Christmas carols during the two years of his consciousness on his return from Spain in 1748. Local tradition in the Kilmore district attributed all the surviving carols—thirteen in number—to Fr. Devereux, but this is incorrect, for three of the carols, viz.: the fourth for Christmas Day, the song for St. Stephen's Day and the song for New Year's Day were written by Bishop Luke Wadding (1676-1691). They were printed in his "*Præcæ Cantabrigiæ*," published in Ghent in 1684 and also in the London edition of 1726 and 1771. "*Jerusalem*" is an English song dating from the end of the 16th century; versions of it will be found in R. Palmer's *Book of Præcæ*, p. 185, and in R. Dunstan's *Second Book of Christmas Carols*, p. 28.

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I have been unable to trace to any printed source the remainder of the Kilmore Carols, and, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, we may assume on the strength of tradition that some of these carols were written by Fr. Devereux. What songs we can attribute to him it is now impossible to determine. From internal evidence it is clear that a cleric or someone very familiar with the liturgy and church history wrote these carols (cf. The Song for Twelfth Day, where the last part of the first stanza is a paraphrase of the " Benedictus " for Epiphany; see also The Song for St. Sylvester). We may say then that Fr. Devereux made a collection of Carols, some of which he wrote himself, and he incorporated the collection in a manuscript which he called " A New Garland containing Songs for Christmas." He called his collection the " New Garland " to distinguish it from Dr. Luke Wadding's " Pious Garland." The carols were first sung in the little chapel at Kilmore, and tradition seems to indicate that the choir consisted of six men who divided themselves into two groups of three to sing the alternate stanzas. The carols had a wide appeal: they were being sung by men who not long since had assisted at Mass in the open fields; they were being sung by men who were marching out of the night into the light of day. You can hear the sound of the marching but in a song like " Jerusalem ":

" Jerusalem, our happy home, when shall we come to thee!

When shall our sorrows have an end, thy joys when shall we see!

The carols had a wide appeal; manuscript copies of the " New Garland " were multiplied and the songs were introduced to the neighbouring parishes of Ballymore, Mayglass, Lady's Island, Tarramolin, Kilmore and Rathangan. The earliest manuscript of the carols is that mentioned by Mr. Edmund Hore, who states that the first copy of the carols he saw was written by a man who died suddenly in 1758 (Letter, " The People," Jan. 27th, 1872). I believe the copy Mr. Hore saw belonged to the parish of Lady's Island. The earliest manuscript copy I examined had the title page missing, but the owner assured me that it bore the date 1823. The manuscript is now in the possession of John Devereux, Inch, Kilmore. The late Very Rev. Thomas O'Byrne, F.P., Parsonstown, made transcripts of the Carols while he was curate in Tarramolin in 1828. He had then in his possession two old manuscripts, one from Kilmore dated 1818, the other from Tarramolin dated 1822. The title of the Kilmore copy was: " A New Garland, containing Songs for Christmas, composed by Rev. William Devereux." On the last page was inscribed the following:— " Richard Neill of Rathangan his Carol Book, printed in February, anno Christi, 1818." The Tarramolin copy had the following title page:— " A New Garland containing Songs for Christmas, composed by Rev. Wm. Devereux, in the year of Our Lord, 1822." Both manuscripts " were handsomely ornamented with hand drawn figures and both were the work of the same artist." The Tarramolin manuscript was given to Father O'Byrne by Martha McGrath, who was old when she died about 1830; she was a relative of James Broom, one of the

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lost of the Taranaki singers. Other late survivors of the Taranaki Carol Singers were John Barry and James Mallard of Millbrook.

In this edition of the Carols I have followed the transcript which Fr. O'Byrne collated from the Kilmore and Taranaki copies which he had in his possession. I have compared Fr. O'Byrne's transcript with the old Kilmore (1800) manuscript, and with the modern copy used by John Devereux, the leader of the Kilmore choir. Eight of the carols (i.e., I, II, V., VI., VII., VIII, IX, XI) were printed in "The People" in December-January, 1871-1872; these I have also compared with the manuscript copies in existence, and in all cases I have found the most extraordinary identity on the part of the copyists.

It has been mentioned that the carols were formerly sung in Ferrisburgh, Ballymore, Mayglass, Lady's Island, Taranaki and Rathangan. An old man named Joe Howlin, whom Father O'Byrne interviewed in 1858, remembered the carols being sung in Ballymore and Mayglass (i.e., i. 1850). Writing in "The People," Dec. 1871, 1872, Mr. Matt Howe says that the carols were sung in Lady's Island up to the last illness of Very Rev. Patrick Walsh, P.P. (died 1855), and in a letter, January 26th, 1872, to the same paper, he writes: "I shall never forget what I often heard in my young days from a friend now nearly fifty years dead. 'I have stood,' he would say, 'within many of the grandest Cathedrals of Europe and under the dome of St. Peter's itself, but in none of them did I ever feel the soul-shaking, rapturous sensation that I did on a boy listening to six aged men on a frosty Christmas morning sing the carols beneath the low, straw-thatched little chapel of Rathangan.'"

To-day the carols which were once popular all over the Barony of Fethk are to be heard only in Kilmore. It is a fine boast for the people of a parish to be able to say that a voluntary choir of six of their men have handed down from generation to generation the traditional words and music of the religious songs of the parish for one hundred and seventy years. The attachment of the people to these songs is illustrated by the story of Nicholas Devereux of Kilmore who, about 1845, emigrated with his family to the Rio Grande. He took with him into exile a copy of the carols which as a boy he had sung under the direction of Very Rev. Clement Fethk P.P. (died 1857). Nicholas Devereux intended to sing the "Worked Carols, as he said," in the southern far-off regions of America." ("The People," Feb. 26th, 1872).

The Devereux family have played a notable part in keeping alive the beautiful custom surviving in Kilmore. Tradition tells us that it was Father Peter Devereux who introduced the carols to Kilmore between 1735 and 1784. A hundred years later, in 1871, a Mr. Peter Devereux had succeeded his father as leader of the Kilmore choir; singing with him that year were John Devereux, Patrick Sharpe, Stephen Whelan, William Simcox and James Howlin. The present leader of the choir is John Devereux, grandson of the above-mentioned Peter. To John Devereux I am very greatly indebted for help in

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gave me in making the collection of Carols. He has a true appreciation of good music and his intelligent rendering of the beautiful style in which these carols are sung made the difficult task of taking down the melodies a pleasure. With the name of John Devereux I must link the name of John Butler, his nephew, and that of Robert Whelan; for these men in amount of trouble was too great in the help they were prepared to give to ensure that the carols would be correctly recorded. I am indebted to the Misses Kathleen and Mollie Grattan-Pleed and to Miss Kathleen Hammett for taking down the airs, and to Mr. Geoffrey M. Palmer, Mus. Soc. Choro. A.R.C.M., who helped in editing the music. Mr. Palmer writes: "These beautiful Carols belong to an age that is fast leaving us. The air of the Carol for New Year's Day, in the Dorset mode, is extremely very old and should be carefully observed. The Carols should be unaccompanied and they should be sung in free tempo, rubato style, dwelling on certain notes quite apart from the final signature, as the singers feel inspired at the time."

The Sisters of the Presentation Convent, Ennisceorthy, kindly transcribed the music from which the books were made. I am also indebted to the Sutton family of Kilmore and to Mr. Shay Simcott of Wexford for help kindly given.

Thirteen Carols survive from Father Devereux's "New Garland." They are—

- I. The Darkest Midnight in December (1st Carol for Christmas).
- II. Christmas Day is Come (2nd Carol for Christmas).
- III. Song of the Sons of Men (3rd Carol for Christmas).
- IV. An Angel this Night (4th Carol for Christmas).
- V. Song for St. Stephen's Day.
- VI. Song for St. John's Day.
- VII. Song for the Holy Innocents.
- VIII. Song for St. Sylvester's Day.
- IX. Song for New Year's Day (The first day of the year).
- X. Second Carol for New Year's Day.
- XI. Jerusalem (1st Carol for Twelfth Day).
- XII. Now to Conclude our Christmas Mirth (2nd Carol for Twelfth Day).
- XIII. The Virgin Queen of Bethlehem.

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