

The Munster News and Limerick and Clare Advocate

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THE ARDNACRUSHA EVICTION

PROSECUTION UNDER THE CRIMES ACT AGAINST MICHAEL LANE AND WIFE AND THOMAS O'GRADY. THE SENTENCES.

(FROM OUR REPORTER)

A Special Court was held at Clonlara, yesterday before Mr. J B Irwin RM (Limerick) and Mr. John Rollerston, RM (Newcastle West) under the provisions of The Criminal Law and Procedure (Ireland) Act to investigate charges preferred against Michael Lane, his wife Johanna Lane and his brother in law, Thomas O'Grady of resisting eviction at Ardnacrusha, on 27th September last and assaulting District Inspector John Reilly, Captain E Crocker, Sub Sheriff of the County Clare, Mr. R Mead, County Inspector RIC Eastland and some constables.

The prisoners were detained in custody, since the date of eviction. Bail for their appearances having been refused.

At 10 O'Clock, yesterday morning, the prisoners were conveyed to Clonlara, from Limerick in a brake, driven by a policeman, under armed escort of about a dozen police, a long cavalcade of side cars followed the vehicle in which the prisoners were seated, and along the road were collected large numbers of country people who cheered heartily as Mr. and Mrs. Lane and Mr. O'Grady drove by.

Evidently some kind of demonstration in Clonlara was anticipated by the authorities, a large number of extra police, in charge of Inspector Claude McDonnell had been drafted into the village. A great deal of interest appeared to be manifested in the cases as large numbers having collected in the vicinity of the courthouse, admission to which was reserved.

Amongst those present were the Rev. Luke Gleeson pp Parteen, Rev Father Crowe & Mr Stephen Omer, TC.

Mr. JB Irwin and Major Rolleston, RM's, took their seat on the bench at 12 O'clock the former presiding.

Mr. Irwin stated the charge which was as follows:-

"That the defendants Michael Lane, Johanna Lane and Thomas O'Grady, did, on the 27th September at Ardnacrusha, in the County of Clare, being a proclaimed district under the 50 and 51 Vic, cop 20 assault and unlawfully resist and obstruct Captain Crocker, the Sub Sheriff of said County, and certain constabulary offices, constables and bailiffs in the execution of their duties respectively."

Mr M Leahy, SCS, Newcastle West, prosecuted.

Mr PS Connelly, Sol, Limerick, defended.

Mr. Leahy stated the circumstances of the case for the prosecution, and said it would be the duty of the defendants to show what palliation or excuse they intended to make for their action and then it would devolve on the bench to mete out justice and deal with the case as it deserved.

Evidence was then called.

Captain E W D Crocker was then examined and in reply to Mr Leahy, he deposed he was Sub Sheriff of County Clare, and he produced the deputation appointing him as such; that as Sub Sheriff he got this writ of possession (produced) against Michael Lane and others to execute.

On September 27th, 1887 he proceeded to put it in force.
He was accompanied by bailiffs and by an escort of police and military on the occasion.
He went up the road opposite to the house of Michael Lane, and found that the door of the house was shut and the windows blocked with large stones.
He went up to the door and demanded possession, producing the writ entitling to such.
A voice inside shouted out - "Come on, we will give it to you".
He tried to open the door with his hand but he found it was fastened inside and that he could not open it.
He then ordered two of the bailiffs to bring up their instruments to loosen the framework of the door with the view of getting in.
They had just began to work at the door when it was suddenly opened from inside and he saw the three prisoners now before the court.
They were standing in a very defiant manner inside the doorway shouting to him to come on; he saw a large stick in Lane's hand; O'Grady had another stick with what appeared to be a lump of lead at the end of it; almost immediately the whole three rushed out and O'Grady rushed at him (witness) shouting out "Crocker, I never rack a man yet but I'll strike you".

He then attempted to strike witness who guarded himself with a shield he held on his left arm; a regular scuffle then ensued between them and the police joined in; he should say it lasted for five or ten minutes but it was difficult to say as it went on a long time; finally O'Grady was arrested after a struggle; he was unable to see what became of the other two defendants during the struggle, being engaged in defending himself from O'Grady; ultimately the other two were also arrested, and he saw them in custody; he was able to take possession, and did so, and handed it over to the agent.

When he got into the house he saw an old woman sitting by the fire who took no part in the proceedings. As soon as he got out of grips with O'Grady he took possession.

By Mr. O'Connelly.

He was accompanied that day by 100 Military and 150 Police; he thought it was more madness on the part of the defendants to resist arrest against such a powerful force; he did not ascertain who the old woman was, or that there were 10 children in the house, but he knew Lane had a family; he understood the execution was on title and he had not heard it was for a half years rent; the door was thrown open for him and he only found one chair inside.

Major Rollerston,

Did O'Grady strike you at any time?

No, I saved myself with a shield.

But during the struggle did he strike in any way?

I got a blow I think.

It was from his elbow.

By Mr. O'Connelly.

I was watching that sir, and Captain Crocker to the end did not say that he struck him.

Mr. Leahy.

Did he hold you at all?

He held me.

Mr. Irwin.

Did he make any attempt to strike you?

He made three or four attempts.

Major Rollerston.

If you hadn't the shelter would you have got a stroke?

I would sir.

Mr. Connelly.

Did he injure the shield?

I didn't look at it; He did not break it.

Alexander Heard, County Inspector for the Co. Clare, deposed that he went to protect the Sheriff on the 27th of last month at an eviction near Ardnacrusha; when they got there he saw the sheriff advancing to the door and demanding possession; he did not know what answer was given but he saw the sheriff bringing his rifle to force in an entry at the front door; while they were in the act of doing it, the door suddenly opened from the inside and there were two men standing in the doorway and a woman behind them (prisoners identified).

The two men were flourishing sticks and calling on Croker to come on; he ordered some of the police to fix swords, and he himself advanced toward the door; just as he did Michael Lane rushed at him (witness) and struck him two blows on the helmet with a large stick.

The stick now produced was the one with which he had been struck.

He made a third blow at him but witness caught the stick in his hand and held it; some police then seized Lane and a struggle took place.

Lane was finally over powered and arrested.

In the meantime did you see what was happening to Captain Croker?

No I could not see what was going on; I caught hold of the stick and there was a struggle between us; the other struggle was going on at the same time.

Mr. Irwin.

We're the blows violent blows/

Well not very violent; just on my helmet; they did not hurt me in the least, but my hand was slightly hurt.

Mr. Leahy

Did he knock off your helmet?

No.

Major Rolleston.

Did he cut through it?

No.

Did he dinge it?

There is a dinge in my helmet, which I saw after going home, but I don't know whether it was there I got it.

Mr. Connelly.

Did you see Lane struck afterwards?

I didn't see him struck, but I saw him bleeding.

Did you ascertain that he was struck with the end of a gun?

I didn't see anyone striking him.

Detective Inspector John Reilly deposed -:

I am District Inspector in Abbeyfeale, in the County of Limerick;

I remember being on duty at Ardnacrusha, in charge of the Sheriff on 27th September last.

Describe the appearance of Michael Lane's house?

The windows had been taken away and the window holes were built up with large stones, and the door was closed.

After some parley between the sheriff and the people inside, the door opened and those three persons were standing just inside the door, Mrs. Lane being in the centre and the other two defendants at either side; their demeanour was threatening and each of them had a stick or what appeared to him to be a stick; immediately they rushed out and O'Grady made an assault on the Sub Sheriff striking at him twice with a stick; he struck the shield that he was holding over his head with his left arm.

I immediately arrested O'Grady; a sort of struggle ensued between the two of us, and whilst I was struggling with him Mrs. Lane struck me with an ordinary parlour poker (PRODUCED) on the left temple; I was wounded by the blow and blood flowed at once.

I held onto O'Grady until Colonel Turner relieved me.

Major Rolleston.

We're you knocked down?

No.

Mr. Irwin.

Was your helmet on?

My helmet was on. And singular to say the helmet was not cut it was merely dinged; there is a button inside the helmet, and it was quite likely that the fact of it being there assisted the wound.

To Major Rolleston

O'Grady did not strike at all; he did nothing beyond the resistance; my chief difficulty was keeping O'Grady from assaulting the Sub Sheriff.

Sergeant O'Sullivan were also examined and gave similar evidence.

Mr. Connelly then addressed the court and was proceeding to dwell on the hardships of Mr. Lane's case and the provocation he had received when Mr. Leahy objected to his being allowed to go outside the charge of assault.

Mr. Connelly urged that all the surrounding circumstances were usually considered to show palliation and in mitigation of punishment.

The Court ruled several times against Mr. Connelly on the point.

Mr. Connelly then addressed the Court, and impressed on them that what occurred was entirely unpremeditated and in reality very little damage was done and not much resistance was offered. Lane was at first disposed to give up quiet and peaceable possession although he owed only a half years rent, and had expended over £400 in improvements, but when he found the reward of all his labor and industry was to be lost, he also was carried away by the impulse of the moment, exasperated at being driven from his home.

He saw his wife, as fine a specimen of a young woman as ever adorned a country, drive forth, and who could blame him for losing his self control.

The extenuating circumstances were certainly of the strongest character but he did want to dispute the facts of the case.

They were broad and patent,

The incident suddenly arose, and subsided as suddenly.

The defendants bore the highest character.

They had been badly and brutally treated by their landlord, and they tried to test the case by resisting the sheriff and they failed.

Mr. Connelly after an eloquent address, concluded by saying that all the circumstances would warrant the court in dealing in an equitable, merciful and just manner, and that a mild and lenient sentence would meet the requirements of the case. (APPLAUSE)

Mr. Leahy was about to reply when Mr. Connelly objected.

Mr. Leahy said the facts were admitted, and there was therefore no necessity for his saying anything.

The Magistrates then retired, and after returning into court Mr. Irwin said -:

"The accused were liable for a very severe sentence.

But as Mr. Connelly had forcefully urged, there were none of these incidents attending other evictions which aggravated resistance as such.

The worst feature was Mrs Lane's outrageous attack on the Sub Inspector of Police.

He was sorry to see such a respectable woman in this position.

The sentence was that the accused should go to gaol for one month with hard labor each."

Mr. O'Grady and Mr. Lane offered to take Mrs. Lane's sentence on their own shoulders, so, as to allow her to go home to her children.

The court not accept this arrangement and the defendants were removed to prison, the crowd cheering them as they were driven off.