

The Slaughter of Altnaveigh



Lest We Forget Series

The Slaughter of Altnaveigh

By

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ON JUNE 17TH 1922, THERE TOOK PLACE IN THE TOWN LAND OF ALTNAVEIGH, a blood-thirsty massacre of defenceless Protestant people, as the Roman Catholic, Irish Republican Army sought to strangle at birth the new State of Northern Ireland, by these and other acts of genocide. As it is vital that our people, especially our young folk, remember the facts of his story and what fate would await us in a Roman Catholic-dominated, all-Ireland statelet, we issue this the first in a series of "Lest We Forget" pamphlets.

Newspapers of that time reported the massacre with the following headlines:-

"RED DAWN NEAR NEWRY"
"BOMB DROPS IN CRADLE"
"HOUSES BURNED TO THE GROUND"
"HARROWING STORIES TOLD BY SURVIVORS"

Rev. P. McKee who conducted the funeral services of the victims, had this to say:-

"From this congregation, a young lad, a man in the prime of life, and his wife have been done to death in ways that leave un-manifested no form of bestial cruelty and fiendish malice—the marauders have left us a bloody mile of roofless houses, and blood and fire on what was once a beautiful country road. I shall never forget the sights I saw, or the narratives told to me by the survivors. God give me strength to remember that lesson and to interpret it.—even in warfare there is a certain limit to atrocity, a certain code of honour is practised by all but the vilest savage. In this, those who wrought Saturday's deed of shame have no share—When the victims asked their assassins, "What have we done?" they got the answer — **"YOU ARE PROTESTANTS"**.

Here is a full account of the slaughter in the town lands of Altnaveigh and Lisdrumliska, in which six innocent Protestants were cruelly done to death in the presence of their families, amidst circumstances of the utmost ferocity.

At 2.15 a.m. on Saturday 17th June 1922, landmines were exploded on the Dublin Road near Newry, thereby isolating Altnaveigh and Lisdrumliska from all police help. The Roman Catholic terrorists were dressed in semi-military uniform with bandoliers and rifles, some being masked, thereby indicating that they were known to, and possibly the neighbours of, their Protestant victims. Those slain by the terrorists were:—

1. Thomas Crozier — farmer — aged 67
2. Elizabeth Crozier — his wife
3. John Heslip — farmer — aged 59
4. Robert Heslip — his son — aged 19
5. James Lockhart — aged 23
6. Joseph Gray — aged 20

The victims were all members of the local Presbyterian and Non-Subscribing Presbyterian churches, and four of the murdered men were members of the Orange Order. None of the victims were members of the Security Forces.

The Crozier family consisted of Thomas and Elizabeth, a son-in-law and several daughters. Shortly after 2.00 a.m. there was a loud knocking at the front door of their farmhouse. Thomas Crozier, upon opening the door, was confronted by several armed men who pointed revolvers at him and shot him dead. When Mrs Crozier ran to her husband lying on the doorstep, she recognised one of the killers and said, "I wouldn't have expected this from you". Two shots were fired at her and she died a half-hour later from her injuries. The Papists then threw an incendiary bomb into the house, and fired more bullets through the windows. Rev. P. McKee states "Crozier and his wife appealed for mercy from the killers, and with oaths and obscenity it was refused".

Adjacent to the Crozier homestead was that of James Little, whose family escaped in their nightclothes across the fields, pursued by the terrorists

who kept firing, and who wounded Mr Little in the foot. Their house was burned to the ground.

A second unit of terrorists meantime attacked the home of John Heslip, who resided there with his wife and two sons — Robert aged 19, and William aged 16. Without warning, incendiary bombs were thrown into their home, accompanied by a fusillade of bullets through doors and windows. The family escaped via a back door and took refuge in a barn where they were discovered by the assassins, who took Mr Heslip and Robert down a lane and shot them, despite Mrs Heslip's pleas for mercy. As she knelt, weeping, over the bodies of her husband and son, the Papists fired another volley of shots into the bodies, and then proceeded to burn the Heslip home to the ground.

About half a mile away were two houses occupied by Protestant families — William Lockart, his wife, son James and three daughters, and Edward Little, his wife and nine children. Without warning, a bomb was thrown into the Little house, landing in the cradle of a baby which, fortunately, was not in it at that time. The two Protestant homesteads were set ablaze whilst the families were made to stand at the roadside in night attire and watch them burn.

When Edward Little tried to re-enter his burning home, believing one of his children to be missing, the Papists forced him back, saying — "You have enough children already". The gunmen then selected Jim Lockart for murder, and as the youth turned to his mother for the last time one of the Papist scoundrels accused him of disobeying orders, and shot him dead at her feet.

The terrorists then moved on to attack the home occupied by John Gray, his Protestants, selected Joseph Gray and shot him. As he lay dying, other assassins pumped bullets into his body, although he survived some eight hours before dying in hospital. His father was wounded in the leg. Of this outrage, Rev. McKee stated:-

"At this house the little children of nine and ten prayed to Jesus to make them ready for death, as they stood in their nightclothes, holding up their hands".

Writing of these vile deeds in the Morning Post newspaper, Lord Edward Hamilton stated:-

"The fiendish massacre of inoffensive country people in County Armagh is reminiscent of the horrors of 1641".

Sixty-four years have passed since these dreadful deeds were done, and many would like us to forget. However, the war of genocide still continues with a renewed ferocity over the last fifteen years. It is in this same South Armagh area that Orangemen were slaughtered as they knelt in prayer in Tullyvallen Orange Hall, where 12 workers were taken from a works bus at Whitecross, and 11 shot in cold blood by the roadside simply because they were Protestants. It is in the self same area that in November 1982, members of the Catholic Reaction Force attacked Mountain Lodge Pentecostal Church, Darkley, killing three church elders and wounding many in the congregation, which they sprayed with automatic gunfire as worshippers sang the Gospel hymn "Power in the Blood". Rome never changes — she is still that system so accurately described in Revelation 17 as being "Drunken with the blood of the saints and the martyrs of Jesus".

May God give us the strength to remember Altnaveigh and the lesson of events there, for a people who forget their past are condemned to relive it again.

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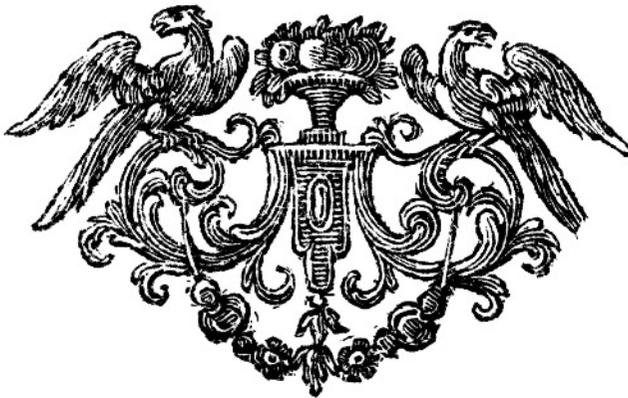
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