

Michael Murphy and James Loughran with a hay-rope pack-saddle from Ravensdale.

Photo courtesy of National Museum.

HAVE you ever met a girl called Afric and did she come from Donegal?

I'll admit it's an unusual question to ask. Myself I've never heard "Afric" used as a girl's name and I've heard almost everything from Amanatha to Zelda.

"Afric" I like. It's sweet and simple and makes one think of winsomeness and freckles and happy days in June. On some such day I'd say H. G. Tempest, the Dundalk publisher was walking by Port-na-Blagh in Donegal and asked a little girl her name and "Afric" she told

Patrick Lagan

him. It turned out that she was a daughter of Dermot Walsh, the proprietor of the Port-na-Blagh hotel, who told H. G. Tempest that the name had been in his family for a long time, and prominent also in a group of interconnected Donegal families. So the publisher started making enquiries about the name and here are some of the things he found out:

In Donegal he traced the name to the family of Dennison of Drimdutton, or Drim, Carrigart, a family who are there since 1770 and who may have come over from Scotland. The present owner of Drim, Mr. Manus Dennison, told H. G. Tempest that there was a family tradition that there was a Protestant curate, the Rev. John Dennison, of Grey Abbey, County Down, who got a grant of lands around Drim. This clergyman while at Grey Abbey must have read about its foundation by Africa, wife of John de Courcy, and he fancied the name and brought it with him to Drim. Mr. Tempest thinks this quite likely.

From the Dennisons the name spread to Wilsons in Atlantic City, Sheridans in Rathmullan, McGettigans of Glenree, Divers of Glenree, and to Harkins in Massinass; and McGinleys of Carrigart. Mr. Dermot Walsh's mother was Afric Harkin, and from the

Walsh family the name spread to Colls of Massinass, McGinleys of Falcarragh; McGettigans, Sheridans and Divers of Glenree, Glen and Rathmullan, to a McKeogh, and to a McGlade in Belfast.

A fascinating piece of long-tailed family history and there's a lot more to it even than that. H. G. Tempest has dealt exhaustively with the matter in the current issue of the "County Louth Archaeological Journal."

Here are a few of the points he raises:

There were two Abbesses of Kildare called Affraic; one died in 728 and the other in 833. Then about the beginning of the twelfth century, Affrica, daughter of Fergus of Gallesway married Olaus the Swarthy, Thane of Argyll and Lord of the Isles. The best-known Affrica of all is of course, the one already mentioned: Affrica, daughter of Godred, King of Mann, who married John de Courcy, Earl of Ulster and who founded Grey Abbey in County Down. And the pursuit goes on by way of Glen Affric in Scotland (Aithbhreac or Very Freckled or Speckled) to "Norway, to Norway, to Norway over the foam."

All of which goes to show what can happen when a

scholarly man on a Donegal road stops a little girl to ask her what her name is.

GOOD FRIEND

The "County Louth Archaeological Journal", a most valuable production, is published by Tempest of Dundalk for the County Louth Archaeological Society and the price is fifteen shillings. From a photograph reproduced in it I am delighted to see staring back at me the face of my good friend Michael J. Murphy, formerly of Slieve Gullion's foot, and now of Clontarfleece, near Warrenpoint.

Michael is playwright, storyteller, folklorist, a close observer of the countryside and as I have said before, the only druid I know. I'm always afraid to go near an oak-grove in his company — just in case.

With him in the photograph is James Loughran of Anaverna, Ravensdale, County Louth — what a musical address! Between them is an odd object, an ancient Layrope packsaddle and James Loughran, a man in his middle seventies, was familiar with these contraptions in his boyhood and must be one of the few men who can still make one.

The picture illustrates a fascinating article by A. T. Lucas on this method of transport and carrying in the land our fathers knew and the photograph is published by courtesy of the National Museum.

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June