THE BRIDGES OF LIMERICK.

The New Thomond Bridge is a plain structure, but bold and massive. It spans the Shannon with seven arches and is erected exactly on the site of the old historic bridge. During the taking down of the old bridge, and building of the new, a temporary wooden bridge for foot passengers was formed about a hundred yards higher up the river, nearly opposite the Widows Alms House, which gave convenient access to both sides of the river.

The new Thomond Bridge, which took about two years to build, was finished in the early part of 1840, and on its completion a stone was set in the Eastern parapet with an inscription thereon stating the bridge was completed A.D. 1840. Sir Richard Franklin Mayor, Robert Hunt and Thomas Sexton, Sheriffs. Thos. and G. R. Payne, Architects.

However, in three years after the old Corporation ceased to exist, and what was termed the Reform Corporation came into office, one of their first acts was improperly to remove this stone and place another in its stead, stating the bridge was built in 1840 at the expense of the Corporation and that this tablet was there placed by an Order in Council, A.D. 1843. Martin Honan, Mayor; John F. Raleigh, Town Clerk; Francis John O’Neill, Treasurer.

The reason assigned by the Corporation for this act was very miserable. They admitted the bridge was built by the Old Corporation, but said the new would have to pay for it. This was not the case. The bridge was paid for by the citizens at large, it merely having devolved on the New Corporation (as an ordinary duty) to declare the rates and have them levied for payment.

The Wellesley Bridge, which is the finest in Ireland is a noble and handsome structure, connecting the city with the North Strand on the Clare side, and consists of five arches of equal span crossing the river, as also a swivel bridge for the passing of ships, and two land arches for the convenience of quay traffic. The foundation stone of this bridge was laid by the Earl of Clare on the 25th of October, 1824, and had hermetically sealed in
it a parchment relative to the laying of the stone, and the naming of the bridge, after the then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland; as also a copy of a Limerick newspaper; and a gold, silver and copper coin of the Realm of that period. The procession on this occasion was of great pomp and very imposing. The troops of the garrison took part in it, which comprised Major General Sir John Elly and his staff, two troops of the 3rd Dragoon Guards, two infantry regiments (one of them the 19th) and the Artillery (84 (?) guns) in command of Colonel Thornhill. There was also present the President and members of the Chamber of Commerce, six Protestant and twenty Roman Catholic clergymen of the City, The Free Masons with their attractive decorations, and the different Guilds of Trades with banners and badges. The leading gentry of the surrounding counties also attended. In the procession was carried a beautiful model of the intended bridge, and on a crimson cushion was borne before Lord Clare, a silver trowel with an inscription.

The proceedings terminated with a volley from the infantry and a salvo from the artillery at the North Strand, where the stone was laid. This bridge which took eleven years to build was opened for traffic by the Earl of Mulgrave, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, on the 5th of August, 1835, and cost nearly £90,000 for its construction.

The designer was Alexander Nimmo, an eminent engineer who also designed the beautiful pillar in the centre of Pery Square, on which the statue of Lord Montagle stands.

The parapet of the bridge at the West side was originally much handsomer than at present, being then in uniformity with the parapet at the east side. The change was consequent on the terrific and disastrous storm of the 6th of January, 1839. Some of the vessels made fast to the quays broke loose from the storm posts. One of them, light in ballast, was lying on her beam ends in the centre of the river opposite the ferry slip, partly water-logged, and others drifted to the Wellesley Bridge, completely destroying a great portion of the Western parapet and breaking a great number of the handsome balustrades, the cost of repairing which led the Commissioners to adopt the more economical plan (which is to be regretted) of supply their place with was is termed sparrow-picked stone. This bridge, which was subject to toll, was named after the Marquis of Wellesley, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1824, who used his important interest in getting the grant of money for its construction from the Government.

In 1883, very much through the influence of parties unconnected with the Corporation of Limerick, this bridge was made free of toll.

On this being accomplished, the Corporation held an irregular meeting of their Council, and assumed the power of changing the name of the bridge, subsequently placing a tablet in the centre of the east parapet, styling it Sarsfield Bridge, giving also the year it was freed from toll with the following names: — Jerome Counihan, Mayor; William Boyd, High Sheriff; Alfred C. Wallace, Town Clerk.

I think I may add that both the acts referred to with regard to the Thomond and Wellesley Bridges were not creditable to the Corporation many of whom are of the National League and Home Rule type, who desire a severance of the Union.