LIMERICK'S CAMPAIGN FOR A UNIVERSITY: 1838 - 1845

by Pat Kearney

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was but one university in Ireland, the University of Dublin, with its one college of Trinity. Elizabeth I granted it a charter in 1592, and the foundation stone was laid by Thomas Smyth, Lord Mayor of Dublin on 13 March, 1593. However, by this time, the absence of university institutions suited to the needs of the majority of the people became very apparent. Consequently, the Bill to establish the Queen's Colleges was passed in 1845.

With Limerick's early reputation in the area of higher education, together with its geographic position and economic standing, it was not unnatural to expect that there should have been a demand in the city for one of the proposed colleges. William Smith O'Brien worked earnestly towards this end. In spite of his endeavours and the efforts of many others, Limerick's claim was unsuccessful. Cork, Galway and Belfast were the cities chosen as the locations for the new university colleges.

However, the case which was then prepared and presented left little doubt that there was a genuine aspiration in the city to a university college.

In 1841, the inhabitants of Limerick City numbered 48,391. It would appear that it was a progressive city with regard to the provision of facilities, since it was lighted with gas under a contract made with the United London Gas Company in 1824, and works for supplying it with water were commenced in 1834. The Limerick Corporation was most active, and existed both by prescription and charter, and its authority was confirmed and regulated by statute. However, there were social problems, and these were of the order that existed in all cities of the period, as Thackeray observed: 'After you get out of the Main Street the handsome part of the town is at an end, and you suddenly find yourself in such a labyrinth of busy swarming poverty and squalid commerce as never was seen.' Poverty, poor housing conditions and lack of adequate educational facilities were indeed prevalent. These problems were foremost in the mind of William Smith O'Brien, who was M.P. for the County of Limerick in the period 1835 - 1845. Both the city and county of Limerick sent two members to the imperial parliament at that time.

Smith O'Brien was born at Dromoland Castle, Co. Clare, on 17 October, 1803, and was educated at Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he graduated.

George (now O'Connell) Street, 1842.
The committee that the Wyse committee proposed the setting up of county academies and provincial colleges the report stated: educational needs of the middle classes. report was the emphasis it placed on the improving conditions and laid down a scheme. Wyse was appointed chairman. December, 1837. After each on 9 August, 1836, and on 5 December, 1837. At each re-commissioning, Wyse was appointed chairman.
The committee presented their report on 9 August, 1836, written by Wyse, which was returned to the House of Commons, and a modified version was presented on 27 October, 1838. It has been stated that O'Brien's main argument for Limerick, as against Cork, was that it could serve the West, as well as the South, in case only one college should be established. It is well to realize that this was January, 1838, and that the Report of the Select Committee was not presented until August of the same year. If there were more than one college to be established, O'Brien suggested a district rather than a provincial distribution. However, Wyse was opposed to this, and was quick to point out that the distribution adopted by the committee was by provinces. He elaborated further on the advantages of the province in that same letter: 'it is particularly fitted for large objects of public administration, is well distinguished by historical and moral characteristics, and is especially adapted to educational arrangements'. In the summer of 1838, the citizens of Cork city took the initiative and organized what they referred to as the 'Munster College Committee'. James Roche, a Catholic and native of Limerick, was chairman and it was from his offices at the National Bank of Ireland that circulars were sent to prominent men of all classes and creeds, requesting their support and their attendance at a meeting in Cork. A copy of the circular appeared in a Limerick paper under the heading 'Irish Provincial Colleges': Sir, The Committee appointed in this city for the establishment of a College in the South of Ireland, particularly direct your attention to the accompanying abstract from the Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons (Education) Ireland. If the leading object proposed in this document meets your approbation, the Committee hope to be permitted to affix your name to the Requisition, and to request that you will attend at the Public Meeting to be held in this city, on Thursday, October 15th., at one o'clock, to petition the legislature for the establishment of a Provincial College in Munster, and to adopt such proceedings as may appear best calculated for giving immediate effect to this important object.

The circular was also sent to all of the influential people in Limerick City and County. William Roche, who was a brother of the aforementioned James, was at this time M.P. for the city of Limerick. He forwarded to their respective addresses many circulars sent to him by his brother. He was very favourable to the scheme, as is evident from the text of a letter to James Roche, published in the Limerick Chronicle. As a representative of a most respectable section of this province, I feel myself the more strongly called upon, to express my sentiments and I believe I may fearlessly add those of my constituents at large in approval of this excellent and valuable idea. With regard to the Limerick College it must be stated that he was giving his support to a provincial college in Munster and, at that stage, there was no question of location. William Smith O'Brien also received the circular from James Roche. In fact, he received two circulars. The second circular was accompanied by a letter from the chairman requesting that he (O'Brien) allow his name to be annexed to the requisition. O'Brien apparently considered that Limerick should have the opportunity to make similar preparations and declined to attend the Cork meeting, which was to be held on 15 November. His reply read 27 October, 1838, which he considered to
The Old Limerick Journal

be of a public nature, was published in the Limerick Chronicle. In reply to your obliging communication respecting the project of establishing a Provincial College in the South of Ireland, as it will ever be a source of gratification to me to have it in my power, I will not say to assist, for he needed no assistance, but warmly and perseveringly to support my friend, Mr. Wyse, in his Parliamentary labours in the cause of national Education, as well as to give an almost unqualified concurrence to all his views with respect to Education, both of the upper and middling, and of the lower classes of society in this country. My sole reason for delaying to unite with the operations of the friends of education in Cork, has been the opinion long entertained, that Limerick is the centre most favourably circumstanced, with reference both to the South and West of Ireland for the establishment of an institution of this kind. Perhaps too I have sufficient local pride to make me anxious for the revival of the ancient reputation of Mungret as a seat of learning. I shall therefore do all in my power to stimulate the enlightened minds of this district to urge the claims of Limerick to the endowment of a Provincial College.

It is clear from this letter that O'Brien assumed that the Cork committee was pressing the claims of that city for the Munster Provincial College, though they make no mention of this in their circular. Indeed, events proved him to be correct, because at their meeting of 15 November (at which he was attended by Thomas Wyse), the following resolution was proposed: That Cork, the most populous and commercial city in the South of Ireland is the most appropriate site of such an establishment as in addition to many other advantages, there already exist several scientific and literary institutions which present a suitable basis for the formation of a Provincial College for Munster.

This resolution was proposed by Morgan John O'Connell, M.P. and seconded by Thomas Lyons. The Cork committee, which by its prompt action, now titled itself the Munster College Committee, still bore for the support of William Smith O'Brien and requested him to join a deputation to await upon members of her majesty's government. They were aware that the Cork resolution which aimed at precluding Limerick as a possible site may have alienated O'Brien and tried to make amends when their secretary, Dr. Bullen, wrote anxiously: There is not sufficient foundation at present in Connacht for a College, and if the new establishment were found to work in a satisfactory manner in Cork an irresistible case would then be made out for giving a similar Institution to the West of Ireland, and Limerick ought to be the place selected.

This letter in suggesting Limerick as the site for the western college was indeed tactful, but there was little hint of diplomacy in the letter which Roche dispatched to O'Brien on the same day: I take the liberty of observing that the question of its locality may be considered as determined. Of the six counties, four constituting the third and fourths of the population - Cork, Kerry, Waterford and Tipperary, are in favour of Cork, and a claim, therefore, on behalf of any other site, at a moment when union is our surest ground of success, would, I fear, be injurious to our common object.

It is also evident from this same letter that O'Brien had decided to call a meeting in Limerick to press the claim of that city, or as Roche rather contemptuously put it, 'the pretensions of Limerick'. He organised a public meeting to be held in the city of Limerick. He was helped by his local organiser, Dr. R. Brodie, and the present circulates influential persons all over the southwest of Munster. He received many very favourable replies, though some few were discouraging. It was to be expected that the reply from M.J. O'Connell, M.P. (Killarney), would be unfavourable. While on the other hand, Lord Listowel's letter was definitely encouraging, although he had committed himself to Cork, he wrote from Convamore in a most friendly way: I assure you that I shall feel most interested in your proceedings, and tho' the first object of my wishes is to see a Collegiate Institution in Cork, I sincerely hope everyone, and the people of the whole world is large enough for us both, and that Limerick equally with Cork may be successful in obtaining a College for herself.

Barron Dunally wrote from Kilboy, Co. Tipperary, and said: I feel desirous to give any assistance in my power towards obtaining the establishment of a Collegiate Institution in Cork, I sincerely hope everyone, and the people of the whole world is large enough for us both, and that Limerick equally with Cork may be successful in obtaining a College for herself.

The meeting was held on Saturday, 5 January, 1839, at the County Record Courthouse, and 'was attended by several of the influential and respectable residents of the city and county, together with a crowded attendance generally of the citizens.' The bench, that day allotted for the members of the committee, High Sheriff James D. Lyons proposed that Sir Aubrey De Vere, Bart. (who resided at Curragh Chase, near Adare, Co. Limerick), should occupy the chair, and this was approved of by the meeting. He gave a short address, in the course of which the following words were well received and then William Smith O'Brien addressed the meeting. He spoke at some length and dwelt on the steps that had led up to the requisitioning of the meeting. Since he had been a member of the parliamentary committee which had studied the question, he gave, in a general manner the views of that committee. He was conscious of the fact that there might not be unanimous approval for the proposed measures and tried to bring

sought. He wrote: I can only repeat to you what I have already written to the Munster College Committee of Cork. That title has I believe already appeared in print. I am very solicitous to see a really efficient Academical Institution established in the South of Ireland; but I regret much that the selection of any particular site should have been mixed up with this great national question. The tendency of this cannot but be to create disunion and to excite local jealousies.

Under the heading, 'Provincial College for the South West of Ireland', a prospectus was published in the Limerick Chronicle, drawn up, no doubt by William Smith O'Brien. Part of it read: Considering the important position which Limerick occupies with reference to the South and West of Ireland, a similar expression of opinion, on the part of those districts of which it forms the centre, cannot fail to carry with it a due influence. The purpose then of the proposed meeting is to unite with the Cork meeting in claiming for the South of Ireland and the establishment of one or more collegiate institutions.
together the diverging views. He said: "Upon other occasions we have been too much separated by party differences, but among the names attached to the present requisition, I find the signature of persons entertaining almost every possible shade of religious and political opinion. We are met, too, for the purpose of laying the foundation of an institution, which itself will tend, by uniting in youth persons of opposite creeds, to soften the asperities which at present exist in society amongst us, to teach us to respect the feelings and opinions of those who differ from us, and in youth to cement friendships which in age will not be disunited."

These are sentiments which could well be applied even to modern Ireland. However, as events were to prove, they fell on deaf ears at that particular meeting. He dwelt on the need to extend the facilities for the education of the more affluent classes. When he posed the question, whether or not the opportunities at present available for this purpose were adequate, he was answered by loud cries of 'yes, yes' on the one hand and 'no, no', on the other. It was clear from this on, that the meeting was divided. The group in favour of the establishment of college institutions consisted of the more liberal-minded Protestants and Catholics, while those against were predominantly Protestant. O'Brien spoke of the select committee of which he was a member and gave high praise to Thomas Wyse, its chairman, 'a man who, with energy and perseverence, laboured to promote the education of his fellow-countrymen.' When he came to the question of whether Cork or Limerick was the more eligible site for the establishment of a provincial college for Munster, he was of the opinion that any 'disinterested judge' could not fail to pronounce in favour of Limerick. He was, no doubt, aware that the claim of Cork was very strong, so he could not fail to pronounce in favour of Cork. O'Brien's speech was well balanced and wide-ranging, and in his final remarks he spoke of that time when intellectual darkness covered every other country of Europe, saying that Ireland was then pre-eminent for its learning and that amongst its schools Limerick was not the least famous. This obvious reference to the old abbey of Mungerat was met with loud cheering. He then proposed the following:

That whilst we duly estimate the advantages of communicating to the poor classes the instruction most suitable to their condition, we, at the same time, regard it as of equal importance that adequate provision should be made for affording to the more affluent orders of society the means of obtaining such a description of education, as is best calculated to fit them for the duties which belong to their station in life."

High Sheriff, James D. Lyons, seconded the proposition. It is of interest to note that while Smith O'Brien was a Protestant, the High Sheriff was a Catholic (residing at Croom House, Croom, Co. Limerick). It was immediately after the proposal of this resolution that the difference of opinion became more evident. The chairman read the resolution to the gathering and sought its approval. The majority of those present were in favour of its adoption but there was a strong influential and vocal group who were not so inclined. The members of this group included Lords Clara and Adare, William Monsell, William W. Maunsell, Archdeacon of Limerick, James W. Forster, Vicar General, Archdeacon of Aghadoe, the Rev. Mr. Elmes and a number of other members of the Established Church. In reply to those who favoured a local college, William Monsell, later Baron Emly, contended that the principle upon which such an institution was sought to be founded was erroneous and contrary to the principles of the Protestant Church. He continued:

Now it was worth while to consider what principle those who brought forward the proposition of the Collegiate system of education in Ireland, proposed, or why they had made that proposition. We found their principles already set forth and called into operation in the new Education Board, to which the Clergy of nearly all the Protestants of the country objected - therefore he now, and those who acted with him objected to the plan brought forward by Mr. O'Brien.

He added that there were some, including himself, 'who could not conscientiously dissociate religion and education.' He very clearly expressed conservative Protestant fears when he remarked that in such an institution as that proposed by Smith O'Brien and others, 'the prevailing religion of the district might be found to preponderate' and thus exercise a power over the young minds of the minority. Indeed, his rhetoric carried him even further when he saw such an institution 'as an engine to overthrow the Established Church in this country'.

Monsell's speech drew instant reaction from O'Brien's supporters, and there were charges that he had used language which was offensive to the Roman Catholic religion. Others present spoke in support of Monsell's position, notably Archdeacon Maunsell and the Rev. Mr. Elmes, Vicar of St. John's, Limerick. After unsuccessfully trying to have O'Brien's resolution amended, Monsell and his supporters eventually withdrew from the meeting. The motion was then put and carried unanimously.

It is interesting to note that it was some members of the Established Church who reacted strongly against the non-denominational aspect of the proposed colleges. Whether they acted out of religious zeal or not is debatable. Their attitude could only help to maintain the existing position in higher education, where Catholics were almost totally restricted. In 1794, Catholics were allowed to proceed to degrees of Trinity College (34 Geo. III), but they were, nevertheless, excluded from scholarships and fellowships. Few Catholics, however, availed themselves of this partial concession between the years 1794 - 1839.

After the withdrawal of Monsell and his supporters from the meeting, the remainder of the resolutions were then put and carried, together with an address to the queen and petitions to both houses of parliament. One of the resolutions, proposed by Sir Lucius O'Brien (Baronet, elder brother of William Smith O'Brien), and seconded by Caleb Powell, read as follows:

Resolved - That the City of Limerick, being the most central point that can be selected, with reference to the Province of Munster, and to a portion of the Province of Connaught, is peculiarly well adapted to become an eligible site for such an institution.

This resolution was similar to the resolution adopted at the Cork meeting concerning the location of the proposed college there. William Smith O'Brien must have had a hand in the framing of the resolution since his elder brother, Sir Lucius, proposed its adoption. By having Sir Lucius propose and Caleb Powell second its adoption it may be assumed that he treated the matter of location as being of the utmost importance. Caleb Powell (Clon-shavoy, Murroe, Co. Limerick) was himself a man of some standing in the community. He was subsequently returned as M.P. for Co. Limerick 1841 - 47, and was high sheriff in 1858.

At the close of the meeting, Sir Aubrey De Vere left the chair and the high sheriff was called thereto. It was
proposed by Sir David Roche, M.P., and seconded by William Smith O'Brien, M.P., that the best thanks of the meeting be given to Sir Aubrey for his dignified conduct in the chair. At a late hour, the meeting finally ended.

The address to the queen, and the petitions to both houses of parliament were placed at the Limerick Institution rooms, where those persons who were favourable to the project were able to affix their names thereto. The address to the queen stated concisely their reasons in favour of collegiate education:

We have, with regret, to inform your Majesty that there is not at present, in the South or West of Ireland, any Collegiate Establishment, in which instruction can be obtained in very many of the most useful sciences, more especially in those which tend to qualify for occupations in which industry requires to be guided by superior intelligence; and that in consequence, many young men of the fairest talents and of the best intentions, whose parents cannot afford the means of sending them to reside at distant universities, are deprived of the advantages of intellectual culture which in other countries are afforded thro' the means of Collegiate Institutions.

There is a certain social concern evident in this part of the address. However, it is very necessary to state also that in all the agitation for collegiate institutions in Cork and Limerick the idea of a class-based society was evident, the inference being that the National Board, which was established in 1831, catered for the poorer classes, but that the more affluent classes, but that the more affluent classes, were interested in the proposed collegiate institutions. Wyse's reply, however, reflects the common-sense approach that had sprung up between the petitioner and the Limerick meeting. O'Brien joined the discussion at last. In the autumn of 1842, the government was tottering and a dissolution of parliament was expected.

Much happened in Ireland in the years that followed. O'Connell's Repeal agitation had begun to gather momentum at last. In the autumn of 1842, the National newspaper was established by a group of young men who brought a new impulse into public life. O'Brien joined the Repeal Association in October, 1843. It was then over a year since the last of the 'monster' meetings had been banned at Clontarf, and O'Connell and his principal lieutenants in the Repeal agitation had been imprisoned on charges of sedition.

Thus, Wyse rejects the arguments of those opposed to a provincial college. He says in that same letter that Limerick's requisition list is a proud array of signatures with Cork. I am glad to see it so well and honourably filled. However there was still disagreement between them regarding location. Further, Wyse made it clear that there should be more than one institution, the importance of their academic status should be stressed: I read your speech very attentively, but am not yet brought over to your way of thinking. At the same time, your request is only reasonable. I suspend my judgement until we meet in London. If we can have so many interested, but I am for colleges, remember, and not institutions between Colleges and Academies.
Thomas Spring Rice, Lord Monteagle.

Peel further observed that at an early period of next session, the government would strive to increase the means of academical education in Ireland. These declared intentions were heartily welcomed in Cork and the committee there organised a meeting for 13 November, 1844. They again had a circular printed and again titled themselves 'The Munster Provincial College Committee'. They sent a copy of the circular to many of the more influential people both in Cork and in the neighbouring counties. They also sent a copy for publication to the editors of newspapers in the South of Ireland. James Roche was still their chairman while William Clear and D.B. Bullen were joint-secretaries and the circular itself was dated 26 October, 1844.

A letter from James Roche and a copy of the circular was forwarded to the Limerick Corporation and was discussed by Mayor W.J. Geary and the members of the Town Council at their Quarterly meeting which was held on 1 November. It was at this stage that the mayor and members of Limerick Town Council became actively involved in the campaign to have one of the proposed colleges established in Limerick. Roche sought the co-operation of the Town Council; however, it was agreed that the mayor should return an answer to the effect that the extention of collegiate education was most valuable and desirable, but that in applying to parliament, it was hoped the interests of the city of Limerick would not be overlooked. It was unlikely that Smith O'Brien received a circular in view of his previous attitude, but it is clear also that he did nothing to bring together the Limerick Committee of 1839 or to organise a meeting in the city. The truth was that he was now totally occupied with the affairs and business of the Repeal Association. However, Lord Monteagle did reply to Roche from Mount Trenchard:

If I possibly can I shall attend your meeting as I consider the object to be one of the most interesting and important questions to which the attention of the Government can be called, and from the very satisfactory and liberal statements made by Sir Robert Peel during the past session I feel we may entertain the most sanguine expectations of success.

Monteagle's support must have been most welcome to the Cork Committee, as he was one of the most influential Limerick men of that period, and though retired from active politics, he still enjoyed immense respect.

Another who gave support to the proposed scheme was the Catholic Bishop of Limerick, Dr. John Ryan. His letter, which was published in a local newspaper, was most favourable, 'concurring in every sentiment put forth in the circular'. He regretted his inability to attend the meeting due to the fact that he had to attend the annual meeting of the bishops in Dublin on 11 November. Nevertheless, he gave them permission 'to make any use of my name in connection with this undertaking you may deem useful to the end in view'.

Dr. Ryan's concurrence may be interpreted by some as being hasty, since he would have had an ideal opportunity to discuss the matter at the forthcoming episcopal meeting.

The meeting went ahead at Cork and the principal speaker was Thomas Wyse. In his speech, he reviewed the whole course of his fourteen year campaign. It is clear that he fully expected Cork to be the site of the proposed college and indeed he went on to advise the people of Cork as to how their educational institutions should be administered.

Limerick remained inactive until after the bill for the establishment of academical institutions was introduced into parliament by Sir James Graham on 9 May,
1845. Graham stated that there would be three colleges and that Cork would be a natural site for the college for the South of Ireland. Though he would not pledge himself to the precise spot, he further thought that Limerick or Galway would be very proper places for the establishment of another of these colleges.\(^{56}\) Cork, then was safe, and it was then to be either Limerick or Galway. A special meeting of the Limerick Town Council was held on 12 May\(^{57}\) at which Dr. William Griffin adverted to the bill introduced by Sir James Graham. He regretted that the honourable members did not intimate his intention of having four instead of three academies. He proposed that a memorial to the government be prepared praying that one of the collegiate institutions now contemplated for this country be placed in the city of Limerick.

It was also proposed that prominent gentlemen in the city and county be requested to assist, notably the Marquis of Lansdowne, the Earl of Clare, Lord Monteagle, the Earl of Dunraven and the Earl of Limerick, together with the county and city members of parliament. The fact that Dunraven was asked to support the claim of Limerick is interesting in the light of his earlier stand.

An editorial comment of the following day explained that Limerick had a far greater claim for a college than Galway, being a city with commerce, revenue and population far beyond Galway, ‘a town situate upon a point of the extreme western coast and remote from general access.’\(^{58}\) The editorial further stated that Mayor W.J. Geary and Bishop Ryan waited on William Smith O’Brien, but they found that he, ‘originally the eager advocate for such an institution, declined moving in the business without the sanction of Mr. O’Connell’.

O’Connell, meanwhile, made his position clear at the meeting of the Repeal Association in Dublin on 12 May.\(^{59}\) He condemned the colleges, in a phrase borrowed from Sir Robert Inglis, as ‘a gigantic scheme of Godless education’. Although O’Brien failed to act for the establishing of a college in Limerick, he disagreed with O’Connell and the others who were against the establishment of the colleges. He wrote a letter to this effect to the secretary of the Repeal Association in which he stated: ‘I have no hesitation in saying that I regard the extension of Academical Education as a benefit, the value of which to Ireland cannot be exaggerated’.\(^{60}\) He was in agreement also with the non-denominational aspect of the proposed colleges. He had reservations, however, which were genuine and deeply held. He voiced both these objections in later debates in parliament.

The Limerick Town Council and other interested parties advanced the campaign for a Limerick college. The Commissioners of St. Michael’s Parish, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Limerick Institution forwarded memorials to Sir Robert Peel and Sir James Graham, requesting that Limerick be determined upon as a location for one of the colleges about to be established in Ireland.\(^{61}\) The Limerick Town Council met on 27 May and adopted the memorial to Sir Robert Peel. They appointed a deputation consisting of the mayor, Sir Richard Franklin, the Town Clerk, J.F. Raleigh and F.J. O’Neill, to proceed to London, to confer with the noblemen and gentlemen of the county and city at present there and to wait on Sir Robert Peel with the memorial.\(^{62}\) The memorial dwelt on the desirability of selecting Limerick, as the centre of an immense population, whose inhabitants were most anxious for academical education.\(^{63}\) It mentioned the facilities for science, medicine and agriculture which Limerick already possessed. In an obvious reference to Galway it stated:

\textit{It is far from the desire of your Memorialists to deprive other localities of those educational advantages for which they are so exceedingly anxious themselves, but they submit if Government are not yet prepared to establish a fourth College in Ireland, which is generally thought to be necessary, the claims of Limerick are on every account too pressing to be postponed. They therefore pray...}
The people of Galway and Connacht in general were active in the matter also. In the Limerick Chronicle on 28 May there is a report of a deputation, headed by the Marquises of Sligo and Clanrickarde, having an interview with Sir Robert Peel to impress on him the necessity of establishing a college at Galway.

The deputation from the Limerick Town Council proceeded to London, where they were joined by the city and county noblemen and gentlemen. They had an interview on 4 June with Sir James Graham on the subject of the selection of Limerick. The members of the deputation were: The Marquis of Lansdowne, the Earl of Clare, the Earl of Dunraven, Lord Montagle, Col. The Hon. R. Fitzgibbon, the Mayor of Limerick, John O'Brien, M.P., Samuel Dickson, F.W. Russell, Mathew Barrington, Charles W. Williams, James Harvey, and the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce. The petitions and memorials having been presented, Lords Lansdowne, Clare and Montagle and Mayor Geary fully brought before him the claims of Limerick. Sir James replied that, though the claims of so considerable a city as Limerick could not escape the attention of the government, it was premature in the present state of the question to hold forth anything approaching a promise. In answer to a suggestion from John O'Brien, that a fourth college might be necessary, Sir James stated that the sum required from parliament would, in the opinion of the government, be inadequate for the establishment of more than three colleges. The deputation retired quite pleased to them by Sir James Graham and were, to use his words, sanguine of ultimate success.

To the deputation the interview appeared to have been very satisfactory and we may at least draw the conclusion from it with some certainty, that under any circumstances the claims of Limerick to a college, cannot be deferred to any distant period.

Sir Robert Peel (1788-1850).

The Catholic bishops had, at this stage, met in Dublin. This meeting took place on 21 May and was presided over by Dr. Murray, Archbishop of Dublin. A minority, led by Archbishop Crolly of Armagh and Dr. Murray, which also included Dr. Ryan on Limerick, were inclined to accept the colleges. The majority, under Archbishop MacHale of Tuam, favoured a demand for purely Catholic colleges. The outcome was a compromise. A memorial was forwarded to the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Heytesbury, accepting the colleges, but with some radical proposals which would alter their non-denominational character.

William Smith O'Brien spoke in the House on 13 June. Sir James Graham moved that the House should resolve into passing a resolution on which to found a grant necessary to the formation of colleges in Ireland. While agreeing with the proposed measures and avowing himself an advocate of the system of mixed education, he (W.S. O'Brien) had grave reservations concerning the appointment of professors and the lack of provision for religious instruction. He further stated that his constituents were extremely anxious about the subject and were desirous that such an institution should be established. He confessed, however, that he would rather forego all the advantages which these institutions promised to the country, should his objections go unheeded. He felt he spoke for the majority of the Irish people on these issues. O'Brien's reservations were noted by the House, but he was verbally attacked by some of the more extreme members, notably Colquhoun and Sir Robert Inglis. The former was particularly vindictive when he spoke of O'Brien as 'He, who came fresh from Conciliation Hall - He, who had abandoned his duty in that House in order to carry on that most mischievous agitation in Ireland.' O'Brien's defence was able and controlled. However, the personal nature of the debate lessened the influence of his views on the House.

O'Brien delivered a fine speech to the House on the same subject on 30 June. On this occasion he reiterated his objections to the bill, while at the same time putting forward positive suggestions to make it more acceptable. He suggested that the government might well consider the opinion of the Catholic bishops with reference to the appointment of a Catholic chaplain in each of the colleges, as expressed in their memorial. With regard to the appointment of professors, he thought it desirable that the initial appointments be made on the recommendations of a board, whose members should be named in the bill and a majority of whom should be Catholics. For future appointments he said that the professors of each college might, after public examination, recommend the appointments. In this speech, he also urged the government to bring forward a measure for opening the fellowships and scholarships of Trinity College to Catholics.

Limerick still persisted in its efforts, and a memorial from Samuel Dickson was presented by Captain Gladstone, M.P., to Sir James Graham. Dickson had been a member of the deputation who interviewed Graham. The memorial stated the advantages Limerick had over Galway and highlighted the diverging views held by Dr. MacHale, Archbishop of Tuam and Dr. Ryan Bishop of Limerick.

Memorialists refers you to a recent letter from Dr. MacHale, R.C. Archbishop of Tuam, to Sir Robert Peel, denouncing those colleges, and showing clearly, that should one be established in Galway, his district, it must be a decided failure there whereas Dr. Ryan, the highly respectable R.C. Bishop of Limerick, was not only one of the applicants for such a college in 1839, but still is a great advocate to have one in Limerick where its success is certain. A further memorial was transmitted to Sir Robert Peel during the first week of September which was titled, 'The Memorial of the Inhabitants of Limerick and its Vicinity.' It set forth the advantages possessed by Limerick in much the same sequence as the first memorial of the Limerick Corporation. It made a further point, when it mentioned the building of railroads.
The Old Limerick Journal

The approaching speed of railroads, too, Sir, will evidently render even the most remote parts of Connacht within three or four hours drive of Limerick, in fact to be accomplished between bedtime and breakfast.

The people of Galway were by this time very active in the matter. A public meeting was held on 7 August, and a deputation met the Lord Lieutenant on the subject. The people of Tuam 'under the nose of its formidable archbishop' also supported the claim of Connacht for a college.

However, time was fast running out on the matter of location. The bill itself received the royal assent on 31 July. Two inspectors from the Board of Works, Radcliffe and Owen, inspected several sites in Cork on Monday, 25 August, and then left for Galway. They did not visit Limerick and it must be assumed that by this date the choice as to the location of the colleges had been made. In the Limerick Chronicle there is a report of a letter written by the Marquis of Clonricarde to a friend (not named) in Galway, stating that he had interviewed the Lord Lieutenant on the subject of the claim to the site of a provincial college. The Marquis briefly observed that 'I think His Excellency's language gives every reason to be confident that Galway will be the site'. This confidence was not misplaced since, by 1 October, 'the Government had no longer any serious doubt about Belfast, Cork and Galway as the seats of the three colleges'. Thus, Limerick's claim failed in the end. The campaign for a college had endured for seven years, (1838 - 1845), and although the outcome was unsatisfactory, nevertheless, it must be concluded that the noblemen, politicians and citizens who were actively associated with the campaign endeavoured gallantly to achieve their goal. It would appear that the government was guided, in their final choice, by the report of the select committee, that 'one college at least of the description, in each of the four provinces of Ireland ... be so established'. Since, in fact, only three colleges were provided for, and, since Cork and not Limerick secured the Munster site, it was only fair, under the terms of the report, that Galway should have gained the Western college.

APPENDIX

To the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel, Baronet, First Lord of Her Majesty's Treasury.

The Memorial of the Corporation of the Borough of Limerick.

Sheweth,

That your Memorialists have learned with great satisfaction the intention of Her Majesty's Government to establish Provincial Colleges for the education of the upper and middle classes in Ireland, and they cannot too strongly express their sense of the necessity of such a measure, and its important and lasting advantages of this Country.

That they have already perceived with much satisfaction that Limerick has been named as a site for one of those Colleges.

Your Memorialists can assure you that in no district or City of Ireland is such an Institution more needed than in Limerick, being in the centre of an immense population, its inhabitants are just sufficiently instructed to feel the want of an Academical Education, and yet too limited in their means to take advantage of any distant collegiate establishment.

As some evidence of this your Memorialists may mention the great anxiety which has always been evinced by the inhabitants of this City on this subject; with very inadequate means they have already had in existence for some time two literary and scientific institutions each of which has a museum, one the Limerick Institution, founded in one thousand eight hundred and forty and nine, and devoted to the encouragement of science and literature, the other the Philosophical and Literary Society and they have since the period of their formation memorialled every successive Government in this Country for some grant, to enable them to keep up the systematic prosecution of the objects of the proposed College.

In this letter written by the Marquis of Clonricarde to a friend (not named) in Galway, stating that he had interviewed the Lord Lieutenant on the subject of the claim to the site of a provincial college. The Marquis briefly observed that 'I think His Excellency's language gives every reason to be confident that Galway will be the site'. This confidence was not misplaced since, by 1 October, 'the Government had no longer any serious doubt about Belfast, Cork and Galway as the seats of the three colleges'. Thus, Limerick's claim failed in the end. The campaign for a college had endured for seven years, (1838 - 1845), and although the outcome was unsatisfactory, nevertheless, it must be concluded that the noblemen, politicians and citizens who were actively associated with the campaign endeavoured gallantly to achieve their goal. It would appear that the government was guided, in their final choice, by the report of the select committee, that 'one college at least of the description, in each of the four provinces of Ireland ... be so established'. Since, in fact, only three colleges were provided for, and, since Cork and not Limerick secured the Munster site, it was only fair, under the terms of the report, that Galway should have gained the Western college.

Your Memorialists beg further to state that the City of Limerick offers every facility for carrying out the proposed College, and giving a comprehensive system of instruction in all the sciences, even as regards anatomy and surgery may be mentioned. It has two large Infirmaries (one of which has one hundred and twenty beds) where pupils are instructed and clinical lectures given, and the certificates of attendance on which are recognized by the Colleges of London, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

It is hardly necessary to say, that as the inducement to determine the site of any Collegiate Institutions, must be the existence of the largest and least instructed population within the smallest area. Limerick as the centre of four of the richest and most populous Counties in Ireland, possess peculiar claims. Those Counties present a variety of soils capable of vast improvement which would make the application of science to agriculture of inestimable advantage, and its increasing commerce as well as the importance of its central position and facilities of communication generally renders the diffusion of scientific knowledge essentially necessary to its future advancement.

It may possibly be suggested that as one of the proposed Colleges is to be established at Cork a second at Limerick would be unnecssary.

Your Memorialists however beg respectfully to suggest that one College such as that proposed is wholly inadequate for so large a Province as Munster containing a population of nearly Two Millions and an half, and in fact little more than proportioned to the wants of the City and County of Cork alone, containing a population equal to that of all Wales.

It is far from the desire of your Memorialists to deprive other localities of those educational advantages for which they are so exceedingly anxious when you will be pleased to fix on that City as a site for one of the proposed Colleges.

Your Memorialists further desire to state, that there can be little doubt, the vast majority of the students in the proposed Colleges must be contributed by their immediate localities and the surrounding districts with which those localities are intimately connected. The expense attendant on sending pupils to distant Provincial colleges in fact amounts to that attendant on sending them to Trinity College, Dublin, as to operate altogether in favour of the latter among the class of persons who could afford it; a residence in Dublin and education in Trinity College offer many advantages to young men intended for the learned professions who form in fact the only class likely to be sent far from home at a heavy expense to procure an education which necessarily secure them for the children in preference to lesser advantages in the provinces at nearly the same cost.

Looking at those Colleges therefore, as Institutions mainly adapted for the Academical instructions of the youth of their immediate localities, the consideration of their central situations and the density of the population around them in every direction, is one of the utmost importance and your Memorialists would humbly suggest ought to form an essential element in determining the several sites.

William J. Geary,
Mayor of Limerick.

REFERENCES

9. Report from the Select Committee on Foundation Schools and Education in Ireland, H.C. 1837 - 8 (701), viii. 345-436.
10. ibid., pp. 75-76
11. ibid., p. 80
15. Denis Gwynn, 'James Roche 'Father' of Q.C.C.,' Cork University Record, No. 13, Summer 1948, pp. 18-21
17. ibid., 21 Nov. 1838. The date for the meeting is incorrect in this circular. The meeting was, in fact, held on 15 Nov.
Sheweth That your Memorialists have learned with great satisfaction the intention of Her Majesty's Government to establish Provincial Colleges for the education of the poor and

culture and your Memorialists would hereby suggest
ought to form an essential element in determining the

Memorial of the Corporation of the Borough of Limerick to Sir Robert Peel, signed by Mayor William Geary.

21. ibid., 21 Nov. 1838
23. Bullen to O'Brien, 24 Nov. 1838 (ibid)
24. Roche to O'Brien, 26 Nov. 1838 (ibid)
26. Listowel to O'Brien, 3 Dec. 1838, (ibid)
27. Dunally to O'Brien, 19 Dec. 1838, (ibid.)
28. Dr. Egan to O'Brien, 19 Dec. 1838 (ibid)
29. Spring Rice to O'Brien, 18 Dec. 1838, (ibid.)
31. ibid. 9 Jan. 1839 'Provincial College Meeting'.
32. ibid.
33. ibid.
34. ibid.
35. ibid.
36. ibid.
40. Limerick Chronicle, 7 Jan. 1839.
42. Limerick Chronicle, 16 Feb. 1839.
43. Hoare to O'Brien, 14 Jan. 1839, (W.S. O'Brien papers)
44. Brodie to O'Brien, 12 April, 1839 (ibid)
45. Wyse to O'Brien, 26 Jan. 1839 (ibid.)
46. ibid.
47. O'Brien to Bryce, 8 Jan. 1839, (ibid)
51. Limerick Chronicle. 2 Nov. 1844.
52. Ibid.
53. Montagle to Roche, 29 Oct. 1844, (Limerick Chronicle, 6 Nov 1844)
54. Ryan to Roche, 28 Oct. 1844, (Limerick Chronicle, 2 Nov 1844)
55. James Johnston, Auchmuty, Irish Education, Dublin, 1937, p. 113
56. Hansard, third Series, Vol. LXXX, 356-410. The original title of the bill was 'Academical Institutions, Ireland, Bill', but at the Committee stage it was altered to 'Colleges, Ireland, Bill' ibid., Vol. LXXXI, p. 1037.
57. Minutes of Meetings, Limerick Town Council, 12 May, 1845, Limerick City Archives.
59. F. McGrath, Newman's University, Idea and Reality, Dublin, 1951, p. 44.
61. Limerick Chronicle, 21 May, 1845.
62. Minutes of Meeting, Limerick Town Council, 27 May, 1845, Limerick City Archives.
63. Memorial of Limerick Corporation, 1845, (British Museum, Add. MS. 40567, P188)
64. Ibid., for the full text of the Memorial see Appendix 1.
65. Limerick Chronicle, 7 June 1845.
66. Ibid.
67. Minutes of Meetings, Limerick Town Council, 24 June, 1845, Limerick City Archives.
68. McGrath, Newman's University, pp. 45-47.
70. Ibid., 484
71. Ibid., 495
72. Ibid., 1350-1353.
73. Limerick Chronicle, 2 Aug. 1845
74. Ibid., 6 Aug. 1845.

With reference to Dr. Ryan, Begley says: 'Dr. Ryan was ever an advocate of progress in religion and education, and always supported a moderate guide like Dr. Murray of Dublin rather than the more uncompromising policy of Dr. MacHale, the great Archbishop of Tuam' (Begley, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 504).
75. Ibid., 6 Sept., 1845.
77. Limerick Chronicle, 27 Aug. 1845.
78. Ibid., 10 Sept., 1845.
80. Report, from the Select Committee on Foundation Schools and Education in Ireland, H.C. 1837-38 p. 76.