

# Reminiscences of Old Limerick

This article was first published as a pamphlet under the auspices of the Limerick Literary and Economics Society in 1936. A second edition was published in 1940, and a third, enlarged, edition in 1951. The author, a member of an old Limerick Quaker family, was prominent in the Old Limerick Society in the 1940s and 1950s. He died in 1956.

**L**imerick is one of the oldest and most interesting cities in Ireland. Its old lanes, alleys, squares and ruins, now rapidly disappearing before modern progress, are alive with history and romance if we went to the trouble of unravelling their stories.

To study a map of Munster we will easily see what a strategically important position Limerick held. It was situated at the apex of a great wedge of the sea that penetrated inland for 60 miles and formed an impassable barrier between Thomond and Desmond, i.e., between the great Dalcassian clans of the O'Briens, O'Deas and MacNamaras on the north side, and the McCarthys and Geraldines and others on the southern side. Limerick was the first ford or crossing-place in this long estuary, hence its importance. Though geographically the capital town of County Limerick, it is interesting that it was much more connected with Thomond, i.e., County Clare, than with County Limerick, many of the O'Briens being Kings of Limerick. Its important position made it the goal of many invaders and well merited its motto on the City's Arms: "Urbs antiqua fuit studiisque asperrima belli."

The first of these invasions was by the Danes in 812 and they continued in Limerick off and on for about 300 years till subdued by Brian Boru and finally driven out by Donald Mor O'Brien. But during those years many of the invaders had surrendered their roving life for more peaceable occupations and had inter-married with the native Irish. Two of these settlements continued after the final expulsion, and it is said that the inhabitants of the fishing village of Coonagh, and the agricultural district of Park are their descendants and that like their modern cousins in Denmark, the residents of Park can, by similar thrift and industry, live comfortably on quite small plots of land. From these they supply a large proportion of the potatoes and vegetables consumed in Limerick.

In studying the history of Limerick we will notice that the effect of various invasions was to divide the City into two separate towns, thus when the Anglo-Normans took possession of original Limerick, which was built on an island round which the Abbey River made an important moat, they drove the native Irish across the Abbey River, and the island became known as the "English-town". Among the many changes which show how completely the Anglo-Normans endeavoured to eradicate all that was Irish was the altering of the names of the lanes

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by Ernest H. Bennis

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in the Englishtown to such English names as Rosemary Lane, Stag Lane, Prison Lane, Red Lion Lane, Churchyard Lane, and Gridiron Lane. Nevertheless, one leading thoroughfare has maintained its original Irish name right down to the present day. This is Creagh Lane, and was called after a leading family, who, in this part of the city, helped to drive out the Danes. The Creaghs claim great antiquity, being a tribe of the O'Nials, who came from Ulster to assist the citizens of Limerick in expelling the Danes. The Northerners are said to have been successful, and, having worn green boughs in their hats on the occasion, were called O'Nial-Creagh (creagh being Irish for green bough) which name was also given to the lane and gate near where they fought. This lane bounds the new St. Anne's Vocational School. In course of time the family became known by the abbreviated name of "Creagh" and for centuries were leaders in the development and administration of the City of Limerick, the office of Mayor having been filled 33 times by a "Creagh." Broad Street, once a leading and prosperous thoroughfare, contains a well-chiselled archway, formerly the entrance to the "Old Bear Inn," having on the keystone the inscription "Pierse Creagh 1640, rebuilt by John Creagh 1767." This Pierse Creagh, when Mayor in 1613, was deposed for refusing to take the oath of allegiance, and in 1615, when Christopher Creagh was Mayor, he was fined £100 for the same offence.

The native Irish, who were driven out of their town, settled in the district about Mungret Street, which became known as the "Irishtown," and soon developed into such importance that it was the Irishtown that bore the brunt of the Williamite Sieges.

After these terrible times, when peace and prosperity once again returned to Limerick, a third town was developed, known as "Newtown Pery," comprising the chessboard district of George Street (renamed O'Connell Street) and The Crescent and the side streets off them.

The cramped condition of life in a walled city may be easily realized by looking at the narrow lanes and alleys of the English and Irish towns, and their high narrow houses with their cellars, these cellars having been used for both business and residential purposes. Perhaps one of the first steps towards slum clearance in Limerick was about 30

years ago when the Corporation passed a bye-law forbidding cellars to be let for living in. Some of these cellars, locked by order of the Corporation, are still in existence (1936).

These invasions left their mark in name and structure on many of the old buildings and landmarks, thus the Tholsel and the Lax Weir are Norse, and the many gabled houses, once a prominent feature of both the English and Irish towns, distinctly Flemish as a result of the Williamite occupation.

A Norse custom in connection with Limerick fairs existed up to about 150 years ago. "To the August fair a privilege is annexed, that for fifteen days after, no person can be arrested in the city or liberties on any process issuing out of the Tholsel Court of Limerick."

Prominent among the citizens who took an active part in the development of the city was the Arthur family, no less than 46 times was an Arthur Mayor of Limerick.

Great jealousy existed between the traders of Limerick and Galway, reaching such a pitch in 1524 that hostilities commenced between the City of Limerick and the Town of Galway, and great depredations were committed both by sea and land, until the people of Limerick dispatched two leading citizens, Christopher and Nicholas Arthur, to Galway, to "pacyfiat and put away all manner adversitye, rancour and inconvenyents that have rysen or insurged between the City and town habitantes of the same." "Upon their arrival (in Galway) the Mayor, Adam Farrut, bailiffs and commonality assembled in the town house, and, with one consent, concluded a perpetual peace and concord with the deputies of Limerick."

To develop their property and improve the facilities for their trade the Arthurs built the harbour and quay called after them, "Arthur's Quay," and built the fine row of old Georgian houses on the Quay and in Francis Street. Francis Street and Patrick Street are called after Francis and Patrick Arthur, and Ellen Street after Ellen Arthur. The houses on Arthur's Quay and in Francis Street were occupied by fashionable Limerick families, and a military band used sometimes to play on the Quay. With the building of Wellesley Bridge, now renamed Sarsfield Bridge, and Newtown Pery, prosperity left that end of the town for the newer houses, with the result that these fine old Georgian houses in Arthur's Quay and in Francis Street were now all let in tenements. These were all pulled down in 1951.

Baal's Bridge was the only bridge over the Abbey River, and like many other bridges, had a row of houses built on it. The last of these was occupied by three maiden ladies named Purdon, who never married, because they thought no man good enough for them. This gave rise to the old Limerick proverb "as proud as a Purdon."

Travelling in those days was both tedious and uncomfortable, as unless by the private vehicle, the mail coach was the only alternative, but it is interesting to see what broad level roads the old coach roads were, such as Limerick to Dublin, to Waterford, to Cork, etc. About 1760 the mail coaches to Dublin were faced with competition, for about this time the Canal to connect Limerick with Dublin was begun, and it was expected that this would be a more attractive form of travel. The boats conveying passengers were called "fly boats," and certainly allowed more room for moving about in, but took three days to do the journey. The old maps prepared showing the various levels from Limerick to Killaloe were practically identical with those prepared more than 100 years later in connection with the Shannon Hydro-Electric Scheme.

It was in anticipation of the expected popularity of this route that the high houses in Clare Street were built, the great house on Canal Bank, nearly opposite the ruined Canal Brewery, was built to be a hotel, as well as one at Robertstown, Co. Kildare, and Portobello Harbour, Dublin. All these anticipations were frustrated by the introduction of railways, which soon put an end to travelling by canal. The last occupant of this house on the canal at Limerick was named Harold and was of Danish descent.

In medieval Limerick, commerce, industry, and finance were well catered for, and many present day problems, social amenities, industrial developments, etc., were undertaken, and undertaken successfully by enterprising citizens (without any government help) not afraid of being dubbed eccentric, but possessed of initiative and indomitable perseverance. Finance must always hold an important place in any community, and so did private bankers in the years prior to the joint stock banks. Maunsells, Roches, Bruce, etc., are names still remembered. The great houses known as "Bank Place" are so called, not because they are built on the bank of the Abbey River, but because they were the headquarters of Hedges, Maunsell & Co., one of Limerick's leading banks, and even now curio collectors treasure some of the notes issued by this firm. But, as well as being successful in their business, the Maunsell family had a high sense of their responsibility to their less fortunate fellow-citizens, and readily gave time and money to such useful institutions as the House of Industry and the Savings Bank.

Roche's Bank at 96 George Street, and the celebrated Hanging Gardens which William Roche erected in 1808 are described in most guide books of

Limerick. Bruce had his bank at 6 Rutland Street at a time when that street was one of the most prosperous business streets in the city, and which house is still conspicuous by what must have been one of the finest hall doors in Limerick. He had only one leg, the other was an iron stump, and to help himself about he carried a thick blackthorn. It is told of him that when any of his clients, unable to meet payments for money advanced to them, begged of him clemency he would put out his iron stump and whack it with his blackthorn, saying "That is the softest part of me," not much encouragement for defaulters. In his old age he was able to buy Hermitage at Castleconnell for £5,000, and spent his last years in that beautiful spot.

His house in Rutland Street had an interesting connection with John Bright. When this great British Cabinet Minister, known as "the People's Tribune," was at the height of his power, he came to Castleconnell for a quiet holiday from his arduous duties. But even in such a secluded spot he could not be left at peace, for while there a Cabinet Crisis developed and some local gentlemen supporters of his party persuaded him to meet them in Limerick for a private consultation; it was in a room in Bruce's Bank that the meeting took place. A youth of about eighteen happened to be in Limerick at the time, who was a great admirer of John Bright, and was most anxious to meet him. Though refused again and again, nothing daunted, he persevered till he was given permission to be in the same room with the great man. This young man was the late T. P. O'Connor, who sat in the House of Commons for the greater period of his long life, and when he died was "Father of the House."

John Bright, accompanied by his friend, George Peabody, the millionaire philanthropist, came more than once for a fishing holiday to Castleconnell. One morning they went to try their luck at Killaloe, and took a boat and man for the day on Lough Derg. Not knowing how much they were to pay when they returned, there happened to be an R.I.C. on the landing place whom they asked. He told them 7/6 was the legal fare, so Peabody handed the boatman three half-crowns. The boatman held out his hand with the half-crowns in it, and assuming the quizzical look that only an Irishman can, in a good broad accent remarked "Begorra they call ye Mither Paybody, but I say ye're Mither Pay nobody."

Flour milling and the corn trade has always been Limerick's leading industry. Many an engineer and scientist has spent time and money on seeking a device for harnessing the infinite power in the rise and fall of the tides. Yet, as far back as 1672, a mill was built on Curraghgour rocks, in the middle of the river, worked by the rise and fall of tides. I have no record as to who the original owner of this mill was, but, about 1840, it was owned by "Fisher & Quinlivan" (James Fisher and

Larry Quinlivan) and a contemporary describes it as "a splendid mill with great waterpower." That it did a prosperous business can be gauged from the fact that once Larry Quinlivan was Mayor of Limerick, at a time when, to occupy the civic chair, a man had to be in a big way of business. Unfortunately the mill was burnt down about 1850 and never re-built. Quinlivan continued in the corn business in Upper William Street, and Fisher went to Dublin, where he became Secretary of the Patriotic Insurance Company, one of Ireland's oldest Insurance Companies. Under his guidance it prospered, and though still doing so, is now owned by one of the great English Insurance combines. James Fisher's father was Joseph Fisher, of Richmond, whose death in June, 1830, is thus referred to in the *Limerick Chronicle*: "We are concerned to announce the death of Joseph Fisher, Esq., at his seat, Richmond, near this city, after a very few days' illness. Mr. Fisher was many years a principal of one of the first mercantile houses in Limerick, and universally esteemed as a man of strict probity. He was a Director of the Irish Provincial Bank in this city, and Treasurer to the Wellesley Bridge Commissioners and the County Infirmary." It should be of interest to Limerick people to know that Gerald Griffin, the poet, generally submitted his articles to Mrs. Fisher at Richmond for her revision and approval before publishing them. The "mercantile house" referred to in the *Chronicle* was the very old established corn business of "Fisher, Mark & Fisher" in Francis Street. In 1786 Joseph Massy Harvey, a young man from Cork, came as assistant to this business, and in due time married Miss Mark, and eventually took over the business, which prospered under his ownership. "They (Harveys) built and lived in a fine house called 'Summerville,' in a country road called Summerville Avenue, but so influential were the Harveys that most people called it Harvey's Avenue."

Joseph Massy Harvey was pioneer in importing baulks of timber and sawing them into planks. This he did between where the Imperial Bakery and McBirneys (now Roches Stores) now are. The vessels discharged the timber into the river and by means of horses the baulks were drawn up an inclined platform into the yard. The business was later taken over by Francis Spaight & Sons.

Joseph M. Harvey had the Irish characteristic of always answering a question by asking another. In those days the mails came by coach to the recently opened Post Office in Rutland Street (the building now used as the Custom House), where the letters had to be called for. The time of the coach's arrival was not as certain as that of mail trains. One day a citizen met Joseph Harvey coming from the Post Office, and thought now he would surely get an answer out of him, so he asked the direct question: "Is the Dublin mail in?" "Is thee expecting a letter?" came the quick reply, and though there

have been no Harveys in Limerick for many years, old citizens still associate their name with this incident. Joseph Harvey's eldest son, Reuben, took from Robert Maunsell the splendid cut stone flour mill at Plassy and went to live there with the idea of being well removed from his workmen, who were to live in Limerick, and to come to and from the mill every day in a launch. This arrangement soon came to grief as the time taken travelling was so long that the workmen insisted on being paid for it, but Reuben Harvey would only pay for the time they were in the mill, with the result that the mill soon closed, and with the exception of a very short time when worked by J. N. Russell & Sons, has remained closed ever since. This, I think, is the first instance of "a strike" in Limerick. His store and offices were in Francis Street, and as this was long before telegraphs or telephones, he communicated between the two places by means of carrier pigeons. The old pigeon house is still to be seen in the yard at Francis Street.

The youngest son, William Henry Harvey, M.D., F.R.S., who was born in 1811, became Professor at Trinity College, Dublin, "and author, traveller, and botanist of world wide fame in his own line, especially seaweeds."

The old mill in Francis Street is still one of Limerick's prosperous industries in the enterprising hands of Messrs. Martin McGuire, Ltd., the present proprietors.

Passing along Upper William Street there is an archway bearing the name of "Pike Bow." This is called after James Martin Pike, another prosperous corn merchant, who had his store and residence inside this Bow. The family left Limerick for Dublin in 1803 and made the journey by coach. On arrival in Dublin, when driving along High Street (near Christ Church Cathedral) they felt a bump and were informed that they had driven over the body of Lord Justice Kilwarden, who had just been assassinated in connection with the Emmet Rising.

As well as the city mills, throughout the surrounding country on every small river or good-sized stream, there stood small country mills worked by water power. Situated in a lovely glen called Ballycorney, at the foot of the Broadford Mountains, was one of these mills owned by William Bennis. Unfortunately, raiders and gangsters were common at that time. Terryalts and Whiteboys used to go around at night raiding and robbing. "Whiteboys" were so called because they wore white nightshirts over their clothes to frighten the superstitious people and as a means of recognising each other in the dark. One Friday, at midnight, they broke into Ballycorney House to steal the week's wages of his men, and in the scuffle which



**Mrs. Lydia Fisher of Richmond, to whom Gerald Griffin submitted his articles for revision prior to publication.**

Painting in the Friends' Historical Library, Dublin.

ensued William Bennis was badly stabbed though not fatally. He had to give up the mill, and came to live in 26 William Street, where he lingered for three years. This was the time of the fearful cholera visitation of 1832, when the family used to hear the dead cart going round in the mornings calling out "any dead here, any dead here," and taking the dead away to be buried in a great pit with quick lime, at Corbally. After William Bennis's death seven Whiteboys were brought to justice, but at the trial Mrs. Bennis, the principal witness, refused to state which man had stabbed her husband, as she knew that if she identified the guilty one he would be hung, and as she did not approve of capital punishment, would only state that they all took part in the raid. They were all sentenced to transportation to Botany Bay, Australia, a punishment even worse than present day penal servitude. A few years ago the grandson of one of these transportees, a useful and prosperous citizen of Australia, came to Limerick to look up the home of his ancestors.

Another miller, or rather mill manager, named Davis, came a stranger to Limerick. A couple of his friends one day offered to show him round the old parts of the town. Passing along Pump Lane, in the Englishtown, they saw a small crowd, the cause of which Davis discovered to be a

man lying on his back with an amazon kneeling on his chest and pounding him for all she was worth. Horrified, Davis pushed forward and remonstrated with her, when a voice came from the prostrate man, "If you don't allow us to settle our family affairs in our own way, I'll change places with you." Davis did not accept the offer.

For several generations members of the Alexander family were prominent in Limerick in both business and philanthropic pursuits. A young man, Edward Alexander, from Moate (Offaly), opened a shop in one of the tall houses on Barrington's Mall, and was succeeded by his son, William, who, as well as the shop, developed a thriving corn business. With shrewd business instinct and foresight, though it caused much laughter and ridicule at the time (1779), he put all his profits into "building houses in the green fields" at the edge of the City, and opened a grocery and ship's chandlery business in premises that soon formed the corner of George Street and William Street, and for very many years this centre of the City was known as "Alexander Brothers' Corner." Business flourished with them and attracted another Limerick citizen to open a shop at the opposite corner. This was Joshua Hill, known from his autocratic commanding manner as the Great Commander. Once a hand-bill

was posted on Hill's premises, which displeased him mightily, and resulted in the following lampoon:-

*"Post no bills on Joshua Hills,  
For he's the great Commander,  
But post them on the opposite side,  
On Snuffy Alexander."*

Besides building up a prosperous business, the Alexanders (there were three brothers) took an active part in the House of Industry, the Savings Bank, Barrington's Hospital, Temperance, Abolition of Slavery and other reforms. Edward Alexander had a keen telepathic instinct. About 1830 he was convinced of an impending disaster, whether it was due to the insanitary or slovenly ways of living or not, after warning the authorities of the need of reforms and failing to impress them, he had posters printed, at his own expense, and posted about the City. But even this failed to rouse the people to improve conditions. Then, in 1832, the City was devastated by the fearful cholera plague already referred to. Some of these posters are still preserved.

On another occasion, when visiting some relatives in the Queen's County, he suddenly felt he should return to Limerick in spite of the persuasion of his friends to finish his visit. After arriving in Limerick,

he was crossing the Wellesley Bridge (now Sarsfield) on his way home, when he saw a man leaning over the balustrade. He stopped and spoke to him and found that the man was going to commit suicide by jumping into the river. He talked to him of the evil of such a proceeding and persuaded him to return home. The saving of this man's life (who lived for many years after) he felt to be the cause of the sudden premonition to come back to Limerick.

The building of the Wellesley Bridge was finished about 1830. The district that it led into on the Clare side was grassland with scarcely any houses and a landlord who was not inclined to sell his property. The Alexander Brothers, with the same shrewd foresight they had exercised in their business, now applied it to their private affairs. By dint of perseverance they obtained a grant of land about a mile from the bridge, on the Clare side, now known as the North Circular Road, and here they each built a handsome residence. Samuel Alexander built "Evergreen," William built "Bellevue," James built "Beechlaw." As pioneers of suburban residences their example has been followed ever since. I might almost go so far as to say that it paved the way for present day slum clearance.

In those days, when to own a barometer was much more uncommon than nowadays, Samuel Alexander had one at "Evergreen," which he often optimistically referred to, but not so the general public, whose verdict was that "When the 'Evergreen' barometer goes up, it's a sign of rain, and when it goes down, it's a sure sign of rain." Conditions that we often think have not altered very much since.

But, undoubtedly, the greatest public service they took part in was the Famine Relief work of 1848, when several Alexanders joined with other leading citizens in forming Relief Committees, and devoted their time and energies to coping with this awful calamity, and organising the distribution of food, clothes and seeds throughout the large district of which Limerick was the centre. Several English and American sympathisers, besides subscribing liberally to the relief funds, came to Ireland to help at the work of relief. Among these was a young Englishman, William Edward Forster, afterwards Chief Secretary of Ireland. In recent years our hearts have been stirred by some of the fearful accounts of famine that resulted in various countries in Europe after the war of 1914-18, but none were worse than occurred in our own fair land more than 100 years ago.

Finally, emigration was the panacea officialdom devised for Ireland's misfortunes. But if the miseries and horrors of the famine were bad, the horrors of the emigrant ships, known as "coffin" ships, were, if possible, worse, when men, women and children, half starved and half clothed, literally packed like sardines in the holds of those little wooden schooners, were tossed for weeks on the Atlantic Ocean, often decimated by

dysentery and typhus, and finally landed on a strange shore, no friends, no home, no means. No wonder that nerve and sinew that endured so much were largely instrumental in building up the great nation of the United States of America.

When enjoying holidays at Kilkee, how many people know that the rocky headland known as Edmund Point is called after the "Edmund," one of these emigrant vessels that on a dark and stormy night was driven into Kilkee Bay and dashed to pieces on these rocks when scores of these unfortunate emigrants were drowned.

Charlotte O'Brien, of the royal lineage of the Kings of Ireland, being descended from Brian Boru, stimulated by her association with the relief committees, and encouraged by the results of their efforts, herself undertook to remedy these awful emigration conditions. First, from her beautiful home in Foynes, which was then a port of emigration, and afterwards in a larger way at Queenstown (now Cobh), she devoted her time, her influence, and her ability to the amelioration of the hardships of these wretched emigrants, and after years of hard work had the satisfaction of seeing her efforts crowned with success.

Of the enterprising Alexander family there is not one left in Limerick to-day. After years of obscurity, Douglas Alexander, one of their descendants, is making a name for himself by his beautiful paintings of the West of Ireland. A fine example of his work is on show in the Limerick Art Gallery.

A hundred years ago, Rutland Street was a prosperous business street, and among other shopkeepers there was a linen draper named Benjamin Clark Fisher. His private residence was Lifford, S.C. Road. He heard that a curious new invention had been produced in London called an "umbrella," and anxious to be the first to possess one, he ordered one from London. This was sent by direct steamer, and when he heard that the steamer was coming up the Shannon, this staid, methodical business man, became so excited that he hired a boat to go to meet the steamer and secure his purchase.

Soon after the building of George Street, Thomas Grubb opened a tailor's shop at number 120, just opposite the Club House. He had the reputation of being possessed of a most placid temper. One day his temper was the subject of discussion at the County Club, and one gentleman made a bet with another for £100 that he would cause Thomas Grubb to lose his temper.

Accordingly, one busy day, when Thomas Grubb had been delayed from getting to his lunch, just as business slackened off a bit, this gentleman walked in and asked to see some cloth. Very genially Thomas Grubb took down a roll, but no, it would not suit, so roll after roll was exhibited and looked over again and again, and still without pleasing the would-be purchaser. At last the gentleman decided on one, and asked him to cut off

as much as would fit on a penny. This he did, carefully wrapped it up and with a smile handed it to the purchaser, saying, "Thank thee, friend, and the next time thee calls, I hope thy order will be for a larger amount." Thus the gentleman lost his bet, and the tailor enhanced his reputation.

But "Ye Olde" shops had greater difficulties to contend with than dealing with troublesome customers. The unwritten law dealing with shop hours was much more drastically enforced 300 years ago than by the carefully defined laws of the present day. The following are some recorded examples:

*"James Slater, the elder, of Limerick, Shoemaker, for opening his shopp on the day called Christmas day and his son James, being therein at work was hailed out thence by Thomas Horton, gaoler and Edward Bond, a beadle, and by the order (as they alledged) of John Burne, Mayor, was put in prison where they remained six daies without trial or examination, 1671."*

*"Peter Peacock of Limerick, shoemaker, the same day being in his shopp was hailed thence by the aforesaid Jaylor and Barrett and Thomas Atkinson the Mayor's sergeants and put in prison where he remained."*

*"Henry Bloodwick, having his shop open on the day called Christmas the rhude boys being encouraged by Samuel Horon called a Justice, cast much mire and dirt and much abused his wife and the goods in his shopp, 1674." etc.*

But worse still was their treatment by the harassing tithe proctors as will be seen by the following incidents:-

*"Henry Blowick for ye repairing the worship house St. Maryes had taken from him by Peares Stritch and Hugh Phillups linen cloth worth two shillings, 1674."*

*"Nicholas Gribbell for sixpence demanded for the said use had taken from him a pound and a half candles. 1674."*

*"John Mathews for three shills demanded for the repairs of ye worship house called St. John's Church had taken from him by Christo Waldram and James Carr called wardens, two dozen and a half of wooden heels worth three shill 9d. 1681."*

*"Thomas Pearse hath taken from him for tythe by Samuel Broister, proctor (and his assistant) to George Story, Dean of Limeric, ten bundles of hay worth about £0 5. 0. 1711."*

Coming back to more recent times we find that the great Waterford firm of Malcomson Bros. had large interests in and around the city, though none of them ever resided in Limerick. It was this firm who promoted and owned the Limerick Steamship Company, whose steamers they built in their own yards at Waterford. They introduced the screw propeller and persuaded the P. and O. Company to adopt it, which they did in their first screw

vessel the *Himalaya*. One day Joseph Malcomson, their chairman, coming into the boiler shop at the Neptune Works, in Waterford, said to the foreman boiler maker "Davy, the next boat we are going to build is to have a screw." "A screw, sir! a screw? a screw is not worth a God d—n." "Well," said Joseph Malcomson, "I think it's worth a God's blessing, and with God's help we will make it such." Davy evidently thought nothing but the old paddle wheel any good.

In 1857 they purchased from the representatives of the late William Gabbett, deceased, their interest in the Lax Weir and Fisheries Stent at Corbally, for the sum of £9,250, subject to a rent of £301 per annum. There was a further covenant "to supply 10 salmon, 10 to 15 lbs. weight each, free of charge to the Mayor, and one salmon of the same weight to each member of the Common Council yearly on demand."

These figures give an idea of what a valuable fishery it was 80 years ago, but from almost prehistoric times the fishery was valuable, the very name "Lax" being Norse. Previous to 1857, fishing rights had got into a very loose way, and poaching was freely carried on, and the Malcomsons had to take legal proceedings to insist on their rights. The case was appealed from court to court till finally, in the House of Lords, it was given in favour of the Malcomsons. Up to that time, 1863, this was the most expensive private lawsuit engaged in by anyone in Ireland. A rising young Limerick Solicitor, D. Doyle, who had charge of instructing Counsel for Malcomson Bros. was highly commended by the presiding judges. Members of his (Doyle's) family have always taken an active part in educational art, and philanthropic movements in Limerick. The weir remained in the possession of the firm, until the firm was wound up in 1877. Now it looks as if history is repeating itself. The weir, is again getting into a careless and neglected condition, and the fishermen causing much litigation, this time due to the changed conditions brought about by the Ardnacrusha Hydro-Electric Works. As well as sending salmon to London from the Lax Weir "in flood time, they (Malcomsons) often sent two or three truck loads a day of eels in boxes for the London market." They appointed Joseph Robinson as manager of the weir. As was the custom of those times, men wore nightcaps, his was scarlet, and he had a scarlet dressing gown. Once, in the very early hours of the morning, he thought he would pay a surprise visit to see if the men were at work at the weir. Without delaying to dress, he simply put on his dressing gown, and left on his nightcap. When the men saw this vision in scarlet approaching towards them at such an unearthly hour of the morning, they shouted "the devil! the devil!" and ran for their lives.

To-day we hear a great deal about the efforts of Dail Eireann to develop the bogs of Eire, but, about 1865, Malcomson Bros., on their own initiative, took the

extensive bog of Annaholty, near Castleconnell, and erected a large factory for the purpose of making compressed peat briquettes. The turf was pulverized, mixed with a little coal dust, and compressed into briquettes, which people who used them said made excellent fuel. They brought over a German and a French specialist to instruct the workers. For their workmen they built a row of cottages covered with Malcomson's patent tarred felt roofs, which, though still standing, are completely derelict. When the firm was wound up in 1877 the fine factory buildings and machinery, including a chimney shaft, 70 to 80 feet high, were all sold, and the purchaser disposed of every iota, so that in a couple of years there was nothing left of this once thriving industry except the row of workmen's cottages.

In 1660, George Pease, a Dutchman from Amsterdam, settled in Limerick and became a "prosperous merchant." He moved out to Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare, where, on the Oulgarney River he established an oil crushing mill for crushing flax seed and producing linseed oil. He also erected a stone quay at the mill, where barges could load at high tide and proceed via Bunratty to the Shannon. Though this proved a successful business, flax took so much out of the land that in the course of time farmers could not produce enough to keep the mill going, and the Peases sold out in 1770 and went to England. The pair of large granite querns are still in the position in which they stood when working, a silent monument to this once thriving industry.

A young man, named George Geary Bennis, opened a tea and coffee shop opposite Cruise's Hotel. He had no taste for shopkeeping, so, in 1822 he went to Paris, where for many years he edited *Galignani* (*The Times* of Paris). He also conducted a Circulating Library and News Room, and printed and published books, including an *Illustrated Guide to Paris*, *McGregor's History of Limerick*, *Rise and Fall of the Irish Nation* by Sir Jonah Barrington, with woodcuts of the leading politicians mentioned in it. In 1848 he saved the life of King Louis Philippe in a street fracas, for which he was awarded the title of "Chevalier." He died in Paris 1866. His large collection of books he bequeathed "to his native city of Limerick for the free use of the citizens," so that Limerick was one of the first cities to have a public Free Library. In 1868 Limerick Corporation sent their Town Clerk (John Ellard) and the donor's nephew, Edward Bennis, to Paris to bring back these books to Limerick, and for about 40 years they lay in the Athenaeum, though few of the citizens knew of their existence, till the opening of the Carnegie Library, when many of them were transferred to that building in 1905.

In the latter half of the 18th century Joseph Barrington had a pewter works on Charlotte Quay and lived on the premises. He became Crown Solicitor for Munster, and purchased the Glenstal Estate, in the

grounds of which he built Glenstal Castle. In 1829 he and his sons founded Barrington's Hospital and presented it to the city, and to fulfil the dual purpose of helping poor people and benefitting the hospital, he built in the ground adjoining it (now the hospital garden) a pawn office called the "Mont de Piete," on the lines of similar establishments on the Continent. The idea was to charge a very low rate of interest to borrowers, and any profits made were to go to the funds of the hospital. But it was not a success, and for many years it stood in a ruinous condition in the hospital grounds.

Another allied trade was that of coppersmiths, and as there were several breweries in Limerick at that time, it was an important industry. One of the last of the coppersmiths was Heffernan, who had his works opposite the Courthouse. Once, when the Court was sitting, Judge Ball sent word that he could not hear the witnesses with the noise of the copper hammering. Heffernan sent back the message - "Tell the judge that he gets paid for talking and I get paid for hammering." However, he closed his works for two days and sent the judge a bill for the loss this entailed. A characteristic of the guild of coppersmiths was that they wore tall hats.

Another common trade, long extinct, was that of hand-made nails. Many of these half-starved, under-paid workers, lived and worked in the cellars already referred to, and it was surprising, amidst gloom and griminess, how expert they became in turning out 6d. and 10d. "clouts" as hand-made nails were called.

In those "good old times" there was no such help available for poor people and unemployed such as we know to-day, as the "dole," home assistance, or even the City Home. But many of those citizens who prospered in business realized that they had a duty and responsibility towards their less fortunate fellow citizens. Thus was established the "House of Industry" which was helped in its useful work by the energetic efforts of Alderman Andrew Watson, who for many years acted as its treasurer. The foundation stone bearing the date 1774 is still clearly visible. By means of voluntary subscriptions and a Grand Jury grant this house was built on the North Strand for the very poor, the sick, and the unemployed. Those of the inmates who could work were given weaving, winding, oakum picking and other employment to do, and were paid small sums in addition to their keep. Alderman Andrew Watson who for many years acted as its treasurer, was unceasing in his exertions to promote its interests. When Elizabeth Fry, the well-known reformer of that den of misery, Newgate Prison in London, visited Limerick with her brother, Joseph John Gurney, the wealthy English banker, in 1827, she wrote - "Visited this useful institution and we are much pleased with it. It appears extremely desirable that the worthy Alderman Watson's efforts should be yet more extensively supported by the

liberality of the citizens." They also visited the City Gaol, and wrote- "There was a great appearance of order and cleanliness in every part we had the opportunity of inspecting." High praise for Limerick Institutions from authorities of such experience and travel.

The development of aeronautics is the most prominent movement of the present time. Limerick was an early pioneer in this. "On 27th April, 1786, the citizens of Limerick were gratified by an aeronautic exhibition, when Richard Crosbie, Esq., ascended in an elegant balloon from the square of the House of Industry, and after travelling over the Counties of Limerick, Kerry and Clare, descended neat Newmarket-on-Fergus, to the great terror of the country people, who fled with affright from the supposed supernatural visitant. He was, however, hospitably entertained by Sir Lucius O'Brien, of Dromoland, and on his return to Limerick was chaired through the city and the enthusiasm of the people was unbounded."

The pure food campaign is nothing new, as in 1813 the *Limerick Chronicle* reported- "This day the Right Worshipful T. F. Wilkinson, Esq., Mayor, gave £1 to the House of Industry, being a fine levied on a woman persisting in selling bad milk. The milk His Worship sent to the House of Industry." When the Union Workhouse was built, the House of Industry was taken over by the British Government and for many years was occupied as the headquarters of the Limerick Militia. During the construction of the Shannon Hydro-Electric Works the premises were used as the headquarters of Siemens-Schuckart, the contractors.

No account of Old Limerick would be complete without reference to Sir Henry and Lady Hartstonge, who were ever ready to give their time and influence and money to the promotion of benevolent and helpful institutions. Her work in connection with the founding and extending of St. John's Hospital is a striking example. "Amidst the ruins of these fortifications, which, in 1690, drove back the tide of war from the gates of Limerick, and nearly on the spot where Sarsfield and his brave followers so heroically defended the breach against the vigorous attacks of King William's troops, stands the first fever hospital that was founded in the British Empire. The design was originated by the excellent Lady Hartstonge, of whom it has been justly said, that 'her life was one continued stream of benevolence, and her days were spent in visiting the wretched habitations of the poor and administering solace to their afflictions.' Having obtained the use of John's Barrack in 1781, Lady Hartstonge set up two or three beds in it, and thus commenced an institution, the advantages of which have been so happily felt in subsequent years, by checking the progress of contagion amidst a dense population, and rescuing tens of thousands from a premature grave." "Lady Hartstonge continued her unwearied

attention to the wants of its unhappy inmates till her death in 1793, and undeterred by the dread of infection, this angel of mercy was frequently by the bedsides of the patients, inspecting the situation, and soothing their woes." In 1814 W. H. Baylee was appointed treasurer, and of him has been written "W. H. Baylee, Esq., passed through the trying years of 1818 and 1819 (cholera epidemic) with an indefatigable zeal and undaunted courage, which nothing but the strongest feeling for suffering humanity could have infused." These are extracts from accounts written about 1820. From this tiny beginning has grown the modern St. John's Hospital.

Members of the Baylee family took a quiet but helpful share in the promotion of useful institutions. Henry W. Baylee was one of the founders of the Lying-in Hospital, originally founded in Nelson Street. Perhaps the name is best known in connection with early educational efforts. John T. Baylee, nick-named "Terrible" for his severe dealings with his pupils, though he was mild compared with the methods of those times, had a school at 45 Cecil Street and many a successful citizen had to thank him for whatever education he had received. There are many stories, humorous and otherwise, of John T. Baylee and his pupils.

His son, Joseph Tyrrel Baylee, migrated to Birkenhead, where he took out his clerical orders and founded St. Aidan's College. He was such a linguist it was said he could speak 67 languages. When Queen Victoria married the Prince Consort they received congratulatory addresses from many foreign countries. One of these the official interpreters could not translate and it was sent to Joseph Tyrrell Baylee, who translated it. The Queen was so pleased that she offered him a bishopric, but he preferred to remain the simple Rector of St. Aidan's.

The Pery and Jubilee Loan Fund, founded 1810, was another useful institution for helping people to help themselves. The idea originated with George Smyth, Recorder, who, with the help of the Pery family (Earl of Limerick) and a number of citizens, raised a fund, the income from which was to be lent to poor artisans in sums of £1 to £5 at a very low rate of interest, to enable them to buy tools and material necessary for carrying on their trades. Quietly and unobtrusively it continues its work, and is as useful and as much appreciated to-day as when it was founded more than 140 years ago.

Another equally useful institution was the Limerick Savings founded in 1820 by Henry Maunsell and Isaac Unthank, for enabling poor people to save small sums from 1/- and upwards. Started in a small room, in Cecil Street, it soon became so popular that larger premises had to be found, and so the dignified building in Glentworth Street was erected from the design of the well-known architect, Payne, in imitation of a Grecian temple and is popularly known as the "Sore Bank." Similar Savings Banks were founded about

the same time in Cork, Waterford, Dublin and other towns, and it was after their model and with the benefit of their experience, that the Government decided on establishing the Post Office Savings Bank. Now the Joint Stock Banks have also entered the field, but in spite of these competitors the "Stone Bank" continues to secure its full share of deposits.

The name of Unthank, now forgotten in Limerick, was at one time well known both in business and medical circles, especially about Mungret Street and John's Square. The present premises used by the Corporation as a yard for their scavenging vehicles is still known as "Unthank's Garden," which at one time was the pleasure ground at the rear of the residence and business of a well to do Unthank family in Mungret Street.

A name remembered in more recent, rather than in old Limerick, is that of Joseph Fisher Bennis (1839-1928).

About 1860, he and his brother opened a shop at 26 Patrick Street, later removing to George Street. As young men they took a keen interest in the study of "phrenology," and got permission from the Governor of Limerick Gaol to examine the heads of some of the criminals. One evening, after closing their shop at 7 p.m., they walked to Quin Abbey, 15 miles, collected about a dozen skulls, and with these in a sack over their shoulders, walked back to Limerick. For over fifty years at lectures on phrenology by Joseph F. Bennis these skulls were exhibited, and many a man had his "bumps" told by Joseph Bennis, deciphering characters with extraordinary accuracy. He also was an ardent astronomer, and a look through his telescope was appreciated by both rich and poor, and considering the gloominess of our atmosphere, it is surprising how many were able to avail of this privilege.

During the unrest of 1921, when bullets were flying, one evening, about 11 p.m., he placed his telescope out of the top window of his house in George Street to have a look at the planet Jupiter. Very soon there was a thundering knock at the hall door, and a demand to know what that Lewis gun was doing at the window. He offered to show them the planet he was studying, but Black and Tans took no interest in planets, and told him that if he did not take it in at once the house would be burned down.

When a young man, he went to London, and brought back, as the latest novelty, a few bananas, which he expatiated on to the wonder and admiration of his Limerick friends.

As we wander round we see the great houses, once the residences of the proud Anglo-Norman conquerors, now crumbling to dust, so that "the place thereof doth know them no more." Yet, out of their dust we see rising up such nobler buildings as Technical Schools, Model Dwellings, new Factories, and modern useful Institutions. Let us hope that the spirit of self-reliance, industry and enterprise will still continue to maintain old Limerick well in the van of progress.

