

# Opposition to the Boer War, Limerick, 1899-1902

1899

by Des Ryan

**W**hen Britain went to war against the South African republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State in October 1899, Ireland was still part of the British Empire. So, when Britain tried to impose her will on the Boer republics, there was a great deal of sympathy in Ireland for the Boers. Riots in central Dublin created a no-go area for British soldiers on the streets. Posters showing the Boer generals De Wet and Botha were plastered onto walls and lampposts and the flag of the Transvaal Republic was to be seen in many Irish villages.<sup>1</sup> As war clouds gathered over South Africa in the autumn of 1899, the newly-elected Limerick City Council, known as the Labour Council, led by John Daly, passed a resolution expressing the hope that the Boers would defeat Britain.<sup>2</sup>

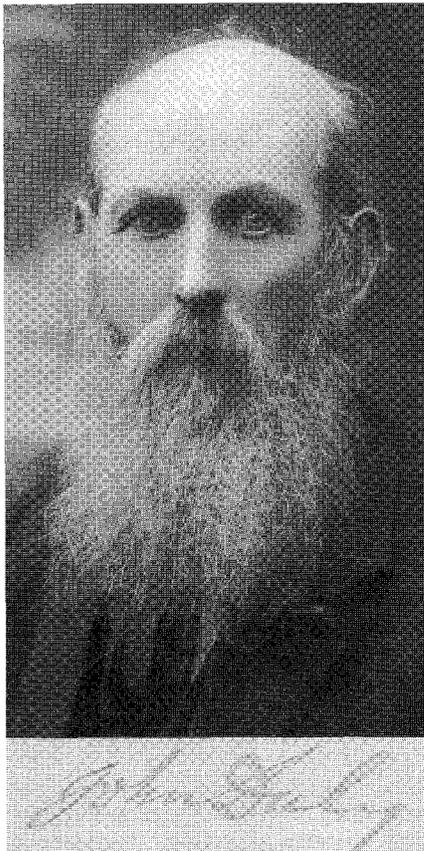


Photo and autograph of  
John Daly in later life  
(Limerick Museum)

Limerick at that period had eight electoral areas, or wards, each of which elected five councillors, so in all there were forty councillors representing a population of about 38,000 people.

The war between Britain and the Transvaal Republic, which was supported by its neighbour, the Orange Free State, was allegedly over the voting rights of foreigners, mainly British, in the Transvaal, but Britain had her eyes on something more lucrative than votes – the gold and diamond mines of the Transvaal. The war began on October 11th, 1899, two days after President Kruger of the Transvaal had demanded that British troops pull back from the borders of his country. Between then and December 1899, the British suffered a number of humiliating setbacks at the hands of the Boers. Three towns were under siege – Ladysmith, Kimberly and Mafeking, and in December 1899, in what was known as 'black week', "the British lost the battles of Stromberg, Magersfontein and Colenso."<sup>3</sup>

The Boers, descendants of Dutch settlers, came from a farming background and when the war began, they fielded an army of less than 100,000 men. The Boers were not a regular army in uniform, but were made up of commando units. To defeat them, the British Army in South Africa, at one stage 450,000 men, burned Boer farms, crops and villages. They divided the countryside into zones with blockhouses and barbed wire fences and put Boer women, children and captured commandos into concentration camps. When the war ended, 22,000 British soldiers had died, more from diseases they had caught than from bullets. Just over 1,000 of these were Irish.<sup>4</sup>

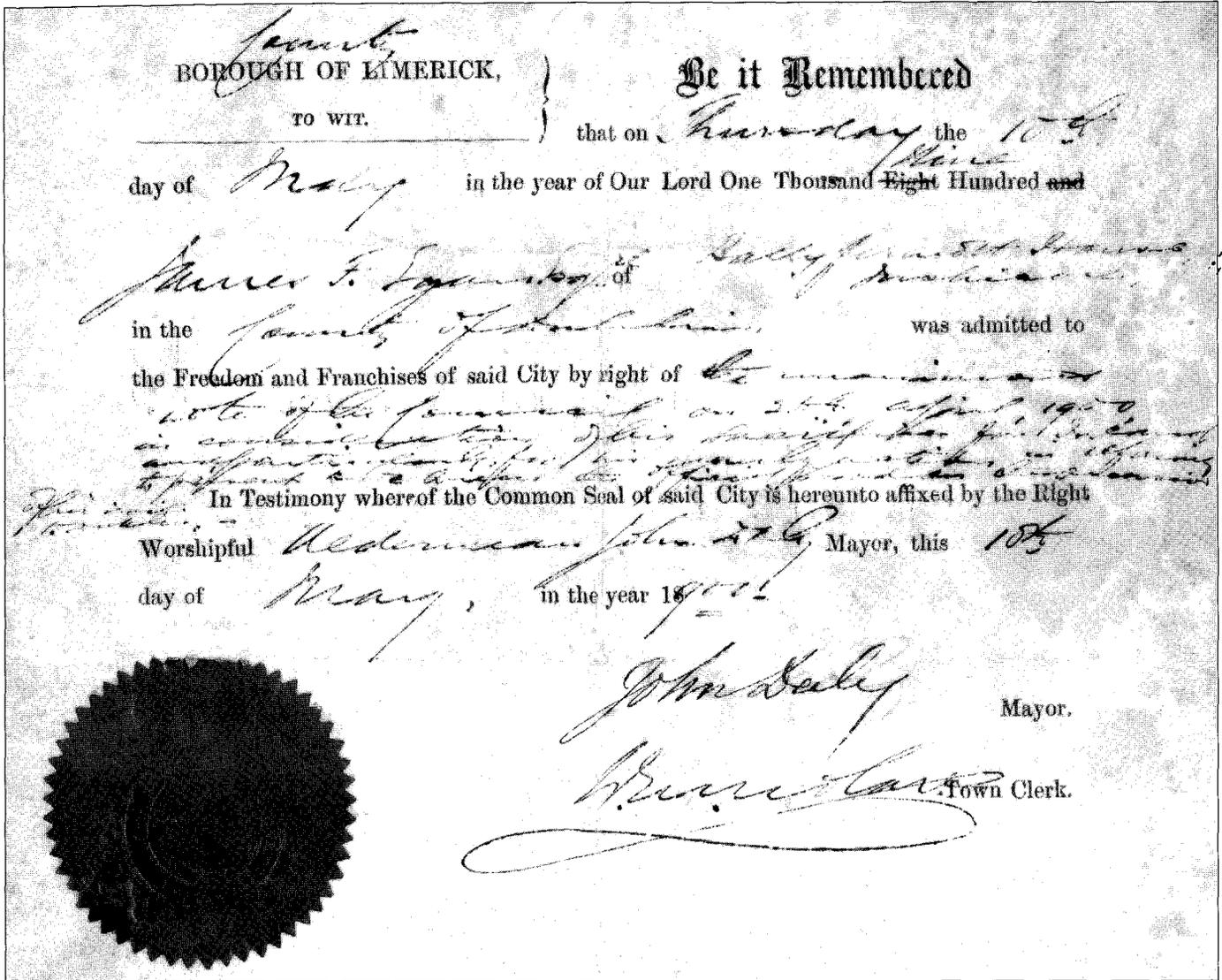
In Limerick, a few days after the war had begun, four soldiers belonging to the Cheshire Regiment were returning to the Castle Barrack when eight or nine civilians came out of a laneway off Nicholas Street and attacked them. The soldiers took off their belts to defend themselves and then made a dash for the Castle Barrack. As they ran through the street, they were pelted with a barrage of stones.<sup>5</sup> On Saturday night, 22 November 1899, three more soldiers from the Cheshires were assaulted on Merchants



Emily Hobhouse, daughter of an English archdeacon, drew attention to the conditions in British concentration camps in South Africa. Kitchener referred to her as 'that bloody woman.'

(Cape Town Archive)

Quay. The three men had been at a shooting gallery in the Potato Market when an argument had broken out. They were firing at bottles when someone in the crowd said: "You couldn't do that with the Boers." The assailants gave the excuse that the soldiers were drunk and that every time they hit a bottle they said: "There's another Boer down and we'd do that to Kruger" (President of the Transvaal). There was also an allegation during the court case that the soldiers did not pay for one of the shots. On the following night, Sunday, eight people, including Michael Canty and Michael Charley and his wife, were involved in a fracas at Watergate. Apparently Canty's son was a reservist and was going to South Africa the next day. There was a wedding party on and some remarks were passed



Certificate of Freedom of Limerick awarded to James F. Egan, swordbearer to Dublin Corporation, 10 May 1901, for refusing to act as swordbearer during the state visit of Queen Victoria

(Limerick Museum)

about the younger Canty going out to fight the Boers. A riot erupted on the street, with sticks and stones being thrown. Michael Canty rushed out with, as he put it, a weapon (a soldering iron) in his hand to rescue his son. Mr Canty seemed to be a bit confused as to where exactly his son was going when he said that his son would "never be able to walk to the Holy Land" (if he didn't help him). The Charleys seemed to have come out the worst in the row: when they appeared in court they had several decorative pieces of sticking plaster on their heads.<sup>6</sup>

On Edward Street, the Limerick Clothing Factory was one of the most modern factories in Western Europe for the making of mens clothing and uniforms for the armies of the British Empire. Two weeks into the war, the company placed advertisements for extra workers in the local newspapers. In early December, a reporter with the *Munster News* visited the factory, where nearly 1,000 workers were employed, to see the new khakis uniforms being made for the British soldiers in South Africa. He was disappointed to find that the khaki uniforms took up only a small part of the production line and that production was not confined to Limerick,

but also at LCF branches in Dublin and at other centres.<sup>7</sup>

#### 1900

In early January, the British forces got another hammering at the battle of Spionkop, a mountainous area in the British colony of Natal. After these early defeats, Field Marshal Lord Roberts and General Kitchener took command of the British Army in South Africa and within a few months the Boer capitals, Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State (in May) and Pretoria in the Transvaal (in June) were captured. Many people thought that the war was over, but for the Boers, it was just entering into a new phase – they now saw the hit-and-run tactics of guerrilla warfare as their only hope. To counteract this, the British Army adopted a scorched earth policy when they started burning Boer farms and interning the occupants, mainly women and children, in concentration camps. This led to many deaths and there was an outcry when the conditions in the camps were made public knowledge by an Englishwoman, Miss Emily Hobhouse. By October 1900, President Kruger was in exile in Europe

and was never to return to his country. He died in 1904.

The streets of Ennis, Co Clare, were covered with snow and frost on Monday, 12 February 1900, as the men of the Clare Militia, who had been called up for service in England, gathered in the town. As they walked around the streets, groups of them came together arm-in-arm, singing and shouting and occasionally giving a cheer for "Old Kruger." The roads were very slippery and many of the warriors slipped and fell on the snow. At around 4.00 pm they made their way to the barracks and quickly got into their uniforms. Some of the men, ducking their officers, made their way to a nearby public house. At 5 o'clock, the men were ordered to fall in and a start was made to get them to the railway station, the route being around the town rather than through it. On the way the men were heard giving loud cheers for "Old Kruger." One volunteer was heard to say: "What men to be sending out – if Spion Kop was put up in front of us, we wouldn't hit it." As the men were getting onto the train, Mr John McInerney JP, of Cratloe and chairman of the Limerick (No.2) District Council, who had taken a few drinks, was heard to shout: "Don't

shoot the Boers" and then he called for three cheers for Kruger.<sup>8</sup> As the order was given for the train to pull out, the officer on board gave a cheer for her majesty, Queen Victoria, which was feebly taken up by some of the British supporters in the crowd. Then, as the train chugged its way out of the station, the men could be heard cheering repeatedly for Kruger.<sup>9</sup>

As for Mr McNerney, he was pounced upon by the police, the RIC, who were among the crowd at the station. He was arrested, but then allowed to go home, and when his case came up for hearing on Friday, 2 February, it was adjourned until a later date.

In Limerick on Friday, 3 March, William Murphy, a gunner with the Royal Garrison Artillery, was standing at one of the corners in Upper William Street when three men, two of whom he knew, the McMahan brothers, attacked him because he was a soldier in the British Army. Murphy fell to the ground and received a kick in the face, which left him with a black eye. Some time later on in the evening, Privates Walsh and Healy, of the Cheshire Regiment, were walking towards the Artillery Barrack in Mulgrave Street when they were approached by the McMahons, who said they wanted to talk to them about the war and the Boers. The soldiers decided to keep going and, as they did, they were struck from behind. As Walsh fell down he had his ear split with a kick to his head and he was also kicked in the ribs. Private Healy was also knocked to the ground and fell against the doorway of a shop, where he was able to take refuge. A police constable arrived on the scene and took Walsh to the hospital.

The McMahan brothers were arrested and charged at the petty sessions. The magistrate, Mr Hickson, made out that the row had been caused by pro-Boer feelings and said that there had been other cases arising out of the same cause. In a previous case, he had sentenced a man to six months for singing pro-Boer songs, which he felt were seditious. As a result of intercessions on behalf of the man the sentence had been reduced to three months. "The magistrates," he said, "were determined to protect all those wearing the Queen's uniform." He sentenced the McMahan brothers to a prison term with hard labour.<sup>10</sup>

In the meantime, the country was getting ready for the state visit of Queen Victoria. It seems that the old queen was being sent over on a propaganda visit. Officially, she came to thank the Irish soldiers for their loyalty and their actions in the war. In recognition of their services, it was announced that Victoria had agreed to the formation of a prestigious regiment to be known as the Irish Guards and that in future Irish regiments would be allowed to wear the shamrock on St Patrick's Day.<sup>11</sup> The first recruit for the Irish Guards was James O'Brien, who was from Limerick and he enlisted on 21 April, 1900. Lord Roberts was made the first colonel of the regiment.<sup>12</sup>

At a meeting of Limerick Borough



Maude Gonne (1866 – 1953)

Council on Thursday, 23 March, it was agreed that the mayor, John Daly, should attend a meeting in Dublin which was being held to oppose the presentation of an address to the Queen by Dublin Corporation when she visited Ireland. The mayor reminded his listeners in city hall "that 12 months ago it was imprisonment to wear the shamrock and now today it is a royal order, because the government want the men to wear the shamrock. Those who have judged the fighting qualities of the men say that, were it not for the skilled Irish soldiers, the Boers would have driven the English into the sea and they never would have reached halfway to Pretoria." "The Queen," he said, "was asking them to forget the past and come now to her rescue because the gallant stand of the Boers had enlisted the sympathies of Germany and other continental countries." "Would," he asked, "the Irish people be justified in supporting the brutal power of England in stealing the two glorious republics that know how to die for their land."<sup>13</sup> Mayor Daly did not think so.

Victoria arrived in Dublin on Wednesday, 4 April. In Limerick, the only visible signs of the Queen's imminent arrival was the Union Jack, which flew over the prison and some other government buildings. Later that evening, the Post Office Band came out on parade and played in front of the police barracks on William Street. When they struck up *God Save the Queen* it was met by hisses from the indignant spectators, while a few loyalists among the crowd gave a cheer. The band then proceeded into the police station.<sup>14</sup>

Three girls from the Limerick Clothing Factory who had gone to Dublin that day

were hassled when they turned up for work the next morning wearing Union Jack badges.<sup>15</sup> The other girls in the factory objected to this slight to their national feelings. One of them, a Miss Donnelly, who was wearing a new green dress, tore parts of it into strips, which the nimble fingers of her fellow workers fashioned into pretty green badges.<sup>16</sup> At finishing time that evening, the three girls had to be given a police escort to protect them from the hostile crowd that followed them home.<sup>17</sup> At a meeting of the City Council the same evening, Mayor Daly presiding, a decision was made to offer congratulations to Mr J.F. Egan, sword-bearer to Dublin Corporation, on his refusal to act as sword-bearer to the Queen's visit. Mr Moran, solicitor, proposed that Mr Egan be given the freedom of the city.<sup>18</sup> The following day, Friday, the police came across posters which had been put up around the city in reference to a proposed excursion of Limerick girls who were to take part in the ceremonies in Dublin. The message on the posters advised the girls "not to allow themselves to be paraded before the Saxon queen and tyrant – England – as abject slaves and traitors to their country's aspirations. The police took immediate action when the posters were placed in prominent positions on the streets. In their fury, they kicked at or tore the posters to bits so that no one could read them.<sup>19</sup> On Saturday, there was another incident when a factory girl named Kate Morrissy, who had also been in Dublin, was treated in Barrington's Hospital for a slight scalp wound. It appears that she arrived at work wearing a red, white and blue ribbon, to which her fellow workers objected, but she refused to take it off and was then struck on the head by another girl.<sup>20</sup>

In the meantime, the *Limerick Leader* reported that it had been asked by leading nationalists to open in its columns a subscription list for the purpose of buying and presenting a new green dress to Miss Donnelly. The mayor, it was pointed out, would give the dress to Miss Donnelly on the same night that Mr Egan would receive the freedom of the city.<sup>21</sup> On 10 May, Mr and Mrs Egan, accompanied by Miss Maude Gonne, arrived in Limerick on the 6.45 train from Dublin. They were met by Mayor Daly and several members of the City Council. A large crowd of onlookers had gathered at the station and when the Egans and Miss Gonne appeared, there was loud cheering. As they were driven off to the mayor's residence, the cheering became louder.<sup>22</sup>

At 8.30 that evening in the council chamber, the mayor addressed the assembled guests. He related how, a few years earlier, he and Mr Egan had been manacled prisoners of the British government and now, here, he was giving his old comrade the freedom of the city. He also praised Miss Gonne for her contribution to the cause of Irish freedom. Mr Egan, in his reply, thanked the mayor and the corporation for the great honour

## RULES

1.—That the Name of the Society shall be the "LIMERICK YOUNG IRELAND SOCIETY," and its objects shall be—To foster and sustain a healthy National spirit, and to stimulate National effort amongst those who believe in the right of Ireland to Independent Nationhood.

2.—To promote these objects the Society shall endeavor—

- a To secure the union and co-operation of all who subscribe to the foregoing principle.
- b To restore the Irish language to its rightful place as the language of the nation.
- c To popularise Irish music and song.
- d To extend the knowledge of Irish history and Irish National literature.
- e To foster and revive, as far as possible, the National manners and customs and to counteract the growing tendency to Anglicisation.
- f To encourage and support native industry and talent. All persons becoming members of the Society thereby pledge themselves to support Irish manufactures as far as in their power lies, by refusing to purchase articles of foreign manufacture, when similar articles of Irish make can be obtained.

3.—The Society shall be strictly non-sectarian.

4.—The Officers of the Society shall consist of a President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Secretary, to be elected at each half-yearly general meeting.

5.—The Committee shall consist of five members, also to be elected yearly, with the officers as *ex-officio* members.

6.—That one-third members of the Society shall form a quorum with power to call a special meeting for any particular purpose by a requisition signed in the presence of the Secretary at least one week before such meeting is to be held.

7.—That five members of the Committee shall form a quorum. The Committee to meet every Wednesday, at 8-0 p.m.

8.—That a General Meeting of the Society be held monthly, when new members shall be enrolled and any special matter affecting the welfare of the Society be discussed.

9.—That the Subscription be One Shilling per month, payable in advance, and that the first monthly payment serve as entrance fee.

10.—That the Chairman, for the time being, shall have power to determine and adjudicate upon all points of order, and shall have one vote and a casting vote in case of a tie.

11.—That candidates for membership shall be proposed and seconded by members of the Society at any ordinary night meeting and the names submitted to the Committee at their next meeting, when, if approved, the candidates will be formally enrolled at the next monthly meeting.

12.—That no member shall be eligible for officership unless he be clear on the Society's books.

13.—That these Rules cannot be altered or amended except at a Half-Yearly General Meeting or at a Special General Meeting called by the Committee for the purpose.

### Rules of Limerick Young Ireland Society, c.1900

(Limerick Museum)

that they had bestowed upon him. When he had finished, the mayor asked that the order of business be suspended to allow Miss Gonne to address the gathering. This gave Miss Gonne the opportunity to address the council and the invited guests on the conflict in South Africa. Earlier that evening, she had seen the drunken soldiers of the 7th Royal Munster Fusilier, Militia Regiment, as they made their way to the railway station. "Many of these men," she said, "did not know what they were doing when they joined the militia reserve. They were (going) to fight against a cause which was true and noble — the independence and liberty of the South African republics. She went on to say that Irishmen in the British Army could "be called upon to fight against their own motherland, for every Irishman who raises his hand — with England — against the South African republics or any other country, is striking a blow against his own motherland. They (the people) should watch the recruiting sergeant and reason with any poor boy whom he might try to enlist. If this was done, it would not be very long before there would be no more Irishmen wearing the red shame of the English uniform."<sup>23</sup>

Councillor John O'Brien (Irishtown Ward) proposed that Miss Gonne be also given the freedom of the city in recognition of her advocacy of Irish national rights and in the sacred cause of liberty. He went on to say that Miss Gonne's name was a household word throughout Ireland. Mayor Daly, it would appear, had already discussed this proposal with Miss Gonne because, he said, it was her intention to come especially to Limerick at a later date to receive the honour.<sup>24</sup> At a meeting of

the United Irish League, held in Limerick in early September, Michael Davitt (a founding member of the Irish Land League in the late 1800s and who had also received the freedom of the city in 1884) said that "the Boers would never be beaten. They might be scattered by overwhelming force, but they would always be ready to strike a blow at England's authority." He was disappointed to see so many Irish Catholics serving in the British Army.<sup>25</sup>

An article in the Daily Mail, an English newspaper, reported that many people in Ireland believed that Charles Stewart Parnell and the Boer general, Christian De Wet, were one and the same person. The simple Irish folk, the paper went on to say, did not believe that Parnell had died and that he was now leading the struggle against the British in South Africa.<sup>26</sup>

When Michael Coffey, a publican on Edward Street, applied to have his licence renewed on Friday, 28 September, it was opposed by Mr P.E. O'Donnell, who was acting on behalf of Mr William Leahy, crown solicitor. In the court it was said that Mr Coffey's landlady had refused to serve a soldier of the Yorkshire Light infantry in March of that year. The military authorities had reported the matter to Sir Patrick Coll, chief crown solicitor, who gave instructions that when the licence came up for renewal, it was to be opposed. The soldier in question, L/Cpl. Windpenny, related how he had been out for a walk and was on his way back to the barracks around 11.00 pm when he decided to call in for a drink. He had asked for a pint of porter, but was refused. Then he asked for a bottle of lemonade. The landlady said she didn't

want to be bothered with soldiers. District Inspector Hetreed said that he had never known of a soldier in Limerick not being served a drink because of his uniform. Mr O'Donnell, on behalf of the crown, said that since "the war broke out in South Africa, soldiers had been refused in several towns in Ireland."<sup>27</sup> The objection was overruled and Mr Coffey got his licence.

Two weeks later, in mid-October, and just before the end of a meeting of the city council, Mr Whelan (Dock Ward) proposed that a vote of thanks should be sent to the Queen of Holland thanking her for her kindness to President Kruger by offering him protection.<sup>28</sup> By that time, Kruger was in Europe looking for help for his beleaguered country. Mr O'Brien (Irishtown Ward) refused to associate himself in any way with the Dutch monarchy, or any royal family for that matter. Councillor O'Brien, from the Abbey Ward, said that they sympathised with Kruger but disagreed with presenting any address to a crowned head of state. But the objections were not strong enough and, after a show of hands, the resolution was passed.<sup>29</sup>

Private Manning of the Yorkshire Light Infantry boarded the 4.45 train at Limerick on his way to Dublin to begin a months leave. In his compartment in one of the carriages were a clergyman, an off-duty policeman, Constable Kenny, and another man, Patrick Hayes. As the train pulled out of the station, Pte. Manning and the clergyman were engaged in a conversation about the situation in South Africa. A few miles out the line, Mr Hayes tried to start up a conversation, but Pte. Manning told him he did not wish to discuss the war. In

a hostile reaction, Mr Hayes told the soldier that any Irishman who wore the queen's uniform should be ashamed of himself. Hayes made a go for Pte. Manning and caught him by the throat. Constable Kenny, who was getting off at Dromkeen, made no attempt to stop the argument. In the court case which followed, Constable Kenny told the court that when he got off the train he reported the matter to the guard on duty in the train. The guard, Mr Fox, denied that the constable had asked him to stop the train at Dromkeen and told the court that he had come across the two men fighting and had asked the soldier to go to a different carriage. Mr Hayes got off with a fine for the assault on the soldier.<sup>30</sup>

On Sunday night, 4 November, at a meeting in their rooms at 55 Thomas Street, the Limerick branch of the Young Ireland Society announced that Maude Gonne had consented to give a lecture to the society during her visit to Limerick to receive the freedom of the city. Miss Gonne had founded a women's organisation, known as the Daughters of Erin, and a letter from the Daughters was read, asking the Limerick Young Irelanders to get as many female signatures as possible for an address that was to be presented to President Kruger by the Daughters. On a proposal from one of the members of the society, the secretaries were instructed to write to Limerick Corporation asking them to confer the freedom of the city on Kruger. Amidst all this nationalist fervour, the meeting ended with the singing of *God Save the Queen*. At the last meeting of the city council for that month, Mayor Daly alluded to the reception given to President Kruger in France and how the citizens of our capital city and also those of Cork were prevented from extending sympathy or honour to Kruger or a brave nation in its struggle for liberty because it was illegal. Mayor Daly was having none of that – if any member of the council was prepared to hand in a notice of motion that the freedom of the city be given to Kruger, he would accept it and hoped that it would be passed at the next meeting of the council. Councillor Whelan felt that there was no need to have a notice of motion, whereas Councillor O'Brien (Irishtown) felt that they should follow the proper procedure. With that, Mr Whelan handed in a notice of motion that the freedom be given to President Kruger. Councillor Stokes (Market Ward) said that he was not happy with the notice of motion and that he might not be at the next meeting. He did not want to fall out with anybody, but whenever this matter was brought forward, he would oppose it.<sup>31</sup>

Maude Gonne arrived in Limerick on Wednesday, 12 December. Later that evening, at the Athenaeum, she gave a lecture on "Ireland and her foreign relations." Miss Gonne felt that Ireland should develop her own foreign policy and that Irish manufacturers should send their goods directly to those countries that were friendly to Ireland, notably Spain and France, then the English middleman



President Steyn of the Orange  
Free State  
(Cape Town Archive)

would be cut out. What was stopping this, she said, was that the Irish business community was lacking the capacity and energy to do so. She then referred to the Irish Brigade, which had been fighting for the Boers in the Transvaal. She praised John McBride, one of the organisers of the brigade, and said that he had saved Ireland's honour. The English press and news agencies, all over the world, she went on to say, were publishing the fact sixteen thousand Irishmen were fighting in the Transvaal against the Boers and liberty. Towards the end of her lecture, she said that the connection between Ireland and England was ruinous both politically and commercially. A government agent, who was listening to all this, took notes as she spoke.<sup>32</sup>

The highlight of the visit for Miss Gonne was on the following evening, when she was awarded the freedom of the city. Out of the forty-strong council, only twenty-four members turned up for the meeting, but the hallway outside the council chamber was packed with people. Mr James Egan was one of the invited guests. The mayor, in announcing to Miss Gonne the decision of the corporation to present her with the freedom of the city, remarked that it was a distinction she had earned. Miss Gonne, in her reply, said that the best way for her to thank the mayor and those present was to go on working for the national cause. At the conclusion of her address, she signed the roll of honour.

The proceedings then moved on to the question of whether or not President Kruger should be conferred with the freedom of the city. The mayor said that, in giving this honour to Kruger, they would also be honouring President Steyn of the Orange Free State. Mr Stokes, who had originally opposed the motion, now wanted to know if they were acting legally in offering this honour to a man who was at war with this kingdom and would they

be enhancing the value of the freedom by giving it to Kruger. When the mayor in reply said "Yes", the majority of the councillors and the crowd joined in to support the mayor. Mr Stokes, still not satisfied, pointed out that Kruger would never be able to exercise the franchise. He felt that it was not right that the corporation should vote the freedom of the city to Kruger and he proposed to the assembly that the offer be withdrawn. When Councillor Hayes made it known that he also supported Mr Stokes, there were shouts from the crowd to "put him out." The mayor, addressing those people who had interrupted, said: "You can not find fault with Mr Stokes. When a man stands up and expresses what he feels, then we know where we are, better than pretend friends whom we never know." Councillor Whelan then intervened to say that "it was not impossible that Mr Kruger could receive the freedom. When the honour was conferred on Mr Gladstone (British prime minister in the 1880s) the mayor and the town clerk went to England with the roll of honour to get his signature." When Mayor Daly called for a show of hands, there were twenty-two for and two against. Of course, Mr Stokes was right. President Kruger was never able to take up the offer.<sup>33</sup>

## 1901

The year 1901 in Limerick began with strong criticism of the British religious journal, *The Tablet*, and its editor by Bishop Edward Thomas O'Dwyer. The journal related a story of how a Boer prisoner of war who had surrendered had been killed by a soldier of an Irish regiment, the Connaught Rangers. What had angered the bishop was the fact that a religious journal should take such pleasure in publishing such a story. The bishop's purpose in writing to the editor was "to undo, as far as one ecclesiastic may, the scandal which I believe you are giving as the editor of a journal which is almost officially Catholic by the savage and ruthless tone which you have taken towards the brave men who are making as glorious a stand for freedom as the history of the world records."<sup>34</sup>

Two weeks later, on 22 January, Queen Victoria died. A memorial service was held in Limerick on Saturday, 2 February. Most of the big businesses in the city, the drapery stores, the condensed milk factory, the bacon factories, the banks and government offices, with the exception of the post office, were closed as a mark of respect. The Union Jack, in some instances fringed with black crepe, floated at half-mast from St Mary's Cathedral, the County Club, the PYMA, and the Limerick Boat Club. While no memorial services were held in the Catholic churches, it was noticed that many who attended masses wore emblems of mourning and in some churches in the city, the bells were tolled during the hours of the memorial services which were being held in England at Windsor.

By 12.30 that day, over 300 officers and men of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, a party of the 17th Lancers and a large detachment of the 126th Battery, Royal Artillery, all in their colourful uniforms, had gathered in St Mary's Cathedral. The cathedral itself was draped in black as members of the congregation from the city and county arrived for the memorial service. The band of the YLI was also in attendance, as well as representatives of the RIC. At the end of the service, the troops performed on the cathedral grounds, where *God Save the King* was played. Finally, the royal colours, which had been at half-mast on the tower, were hoisted to the full. A memorial service was also held at the Methodist church in Bedford Row (in later years, the Grand Central cinema).<sup>35</sup>

Bishop O'Dwyer was in the news again when, in his Lenten pastoral, he made another reference to the war. "There is sorrow in many an Irish home," he wrote, "for poor fellows who have fallen on the field of battle, or perished by disease, but what are these losses, sad and painful as they are, compared with the immeasurable calamities of every kind – death, disease, ruin of homes, devastation of whole countrysides, destruction of the fruit of generations of labour and industry, which have come as a withering blight and curse upon the unhappy lands where the war is waged. The poor Boers are our fellow countrymen. They pray to our God. They have not the blessing of our holy faith, and in many respects they are an unattractive people – but they have hearts as we have – and death, and pain, and disease, find in them the capacity to suffer, as they do in us. Therefore we can pity them, as (we) pity all the victims and sufferers on both sides of this cruel war."<sup>36</sup>

If the people in South Africa were suffering, so were some of the soldiers wives nearer to home. When the soldiers and reservists were called up for service, the British War Office provided the families with a separation allowance. Some of the wives spent the money on drink and neglected their children,<sup>37</sup> while others couldn't manage on it and had to be admitted to the workhouse, not just in the city but also at the one in Kilmallock. In Limerick, the clerk at the workhouse was instructed to write to the War Office on the situation. In London, Alderman Michael Joyce (Dock Ward), who was also an MP, wrote home to say that he would try to have the matter raised in parliament. It was hoped that he would tell the British government "that having deprived the women and children of their breadwinners, it was their duty to see that they were not reduced to absolute poverty."<sup>38</sup>

The War Office, in their reply, informed the clerk that the separation allowance of soldiers wives and children who are maintained in Unions (workhouses) cannot be issued to the Unions in aid of their maintenance. It is considered that with the aid of this allowance and the regulated contributions from the husband's pay, a soldier's wife should be



Postcard of Bishop O'Dwyer  
(Limerick Museum)

able to keep herself and her children out of the workhouse. As regards soldiers who weren't married, the secretary of state regrets that he has no funds at his disposal from which allowances can be made to the mothers of soldiers.

At a meeting of the workhouse administrators, the Board of Guardians, the reply from the War Office was noted. Alderman Joyce also submitted to the Board a similar letter which he had received. The chairman now felt that the relieving officers should not help the wives of soldiers or, for that matter, allow them into the workhouse or to put them on outdoor relief. "The letter," he said, "states that they are not destitute." One of the relieving officers who was present pointed out that in the case where the medical officer ordered relief, they were bound to give it. The chairman, in summing up the situation, made it clear that the relieving officers should take care that they do not give relief to persons in receipt of an allowance from the War Office.<sup>39</sup>

It was in late March when a letter addressed to John Daly arrived in the town hall in Rutland Street. The letter, from Ernest G Lambe of Natal, South Africa, congratulated Mr Daly on his being re-elected as mayor. "Your action," wrote Mr Lambe, "in presenting the freedom of your city to President Kruger shows plainly the energy with which you have opposed the disgraceful war now raging in this country." Mr Lambe explained that it was impossible to get any newspapers from Limerick, and the bits of news that he got on Limerick came from *The United Irishman*. "I noted with the keenest satisfaction," he wrote, "your action in ordering the removal of the royal arms from the town hall, and trust to see this example followed throughout Ireland. In

the Transvaal and the Orange Free State the British still continue their atrocities on the unfortunate Boers and are still burning and looting homesteads and turning women and children out to starve on the veldt" (open countryside). He informed the mayor that he had been told by Michael Davitt that there was great sympathy in Europe, and especially in France, for the Boers. Mr Lambe had contact with the Boers, and they told him that they would fight to the finish or until they regained their independence. He wished the mayor every success in his official and public duties.<sup>40</sup>

During the summer months there were a few cases where soldiers were assaulted. One incident happened at Loughill, Co Limerick, when a soldier, who was just home from Africa and was having a drink in his local pub, got into an argument about the war. The soldier, who threw the first punch, was struck on the face and cut when a glass was thrown at him. The wound required several stitches.<sup>41</sup> In the city, some soldiers were attacked by a man who had a few drinks taken.<sup>42</sup>

The military band of the newly-formed regiment of Irish Guards (Mr C.H. Hassell was the first bandmaster) arrived in Limerick on Thursday, 1 August, to, as one newspaper put it, "a cool reception." Posters had been put up prior to the band's arrival announcing that they would play in the Garryowen Athletics grounds. Protesters opposed to the visit were not allowed to put up any notices objecting to the visit of a band who were going to play foreign "tra-la-las" in the historic grounds of Garryowen. The "Tommies", who were supposed to arrive at the railway station at lunch time, didn't arrive until around 7.30 pm that evening. There was a large gathering of spectators around the station when the musicians arrived and, as the band made its way to the Markets Field, they were met with cheering for the Boers and for the Boer general, De Wet. At the Markets Field, a small crowd gathered to hear them play. Meanwhile at the Peoples Park, where the Boherbuoy Band was playing, and at Lansdowne, where the Workingmen's Band was giving a recital, large crowds of men and women were on hand to hear selections of "healthy national music." The much publicised visit of the gold-laced musicians was, as the paper put it, a miserable fizzle.<sup>43</sup>

An editorial in the *Limerick Leader* condemned the British policy of repression in South Africa, the farm burnings, the "refugee" camps, court-martial and sentencing to death, in some cases, of captured Boers. The final act of disgrace, in the *Leader's* eyes, was the arming and employment, by the British, of the native blacks to fight the Boers. This, the *Leader* made out, was a step entirely in violation of the rules of civilised warfare, and all this was done under the command of the brutal Kitchener.<sup>44</sup> Of course, the Boers, in what was considered to be a white man's war, shot out of hand any armed native blacks that they caught.

Field Marshal Lord Roberts returned

to a hero's welcome in London on November 1900. Queen Victoria bestowed an earldom upon him and a grateful parliament voted him a gratuity of £100,000.<sup>45</sup> When this grant came up for discussion in the House of Commons in August 1901, Alderman Michael Joyce MP objected to it. In his speech to the house, Mr Joyce said: "I would not be doing justice to my constituency, and I would not be doing justice to myself, if I did not oppose this grant, representing, as I do, a city which shall go down in history as an example of English treachery and bad faith; and what England was then – more than two centuries ago – she is today – a pirate and a robber. I have no hesitation in calling this enormous sum we are asked to vote to Lord Roberts – blood money. It is blood money granted as the price of the bloodshed and misery entailed on South Africa during this nefarious and unjust war on a free people, whose crime is that they have goldmines which you want to rob them of. The great majority of the Irish nation had condemned this war from the beginning to end – and the end has not yet come. The government has plunged into this war in the most reckless manner and carried it on so cruelly that it has not even the thin veneer of twentieth century civilisation to hide its horror. We were asked to vote this large sum to Lord Roberts, but there was nothing asked for the soldiers who fought your battles. Why was the money due to them withheld, and why had the maimed and wounded, in some cases, to go into the workhouse to be supported at the expense of the ratepayers when it was proposed to grant so much to one man? The honourable members at the other side of the House are impatient, they do not like to hear the truth, but I have stood up here to tell them the truth, and whether they like it or not, they shall hear it. The Irish Nationalist members had no desire to come here at all, and if England does not want us, the sooner you cut the cable that binds us to you, the better, and leave us to manage our own affairs, and we shall do very badly indeed if we do not do much better than while we are tied to you. We wish to be allowed to do our own business, and the sooner you realise that the better. We were not sent to this House for any other purpose than to fight you, and we shall fight you and beat you here, as the brave Boers are beating you in South Africa. And now, Sir, in conclusion, I have raised my voice against this grant and, please God, I shall vote against it too."<sup>46</sup>

## 1902

In South Africa, the war was entering its third year. Kitchener had already offered the Boers peace proposals, but negotiations with the Boers had broken down. Within another few months, Boer resistance would collapse.

In early January 1902, Private John Roberts of the Yorkshire Light Infantry was charged with being drunk and smashing a plate glass window at Cannock



Michael Joyce MP

& Co, O'Connell St.<sup>47</sup> This was not the first time that British soldiers had been charged with such an offence: there had been similar incidents on other occasions. In March that year, the Limerick branch of the Young Ireland Society elected Major John McBride to the presidency of the society. McBride was a veteran of the war, having fought with the Irish Brigade on the side of the Boers. McBride was from County Mayo, but was living in Paris at the time. He sent a letter to the society thanking them for the honour they had bestowed on him.<sup>48</sup>

The last assault on British soldiers before the war ended took place on the afternoon of Sunday, 30 March, at the National Hotel on Bedford Row. Two soldiers from an artillery regiment had become involved in an argument in the bar of the hotel with a man from Coonagh. Around 6.15 pm four soldiers from the YLI arrived to have a drink. When they entered the bar, the Coonagh man was heard to remark: "here comes the bloody Redcoats." After a few more remarks were passed, he left, but returned after a while with a group of men. The row restarted and then ended up in a general scuffle during which the soldiers were assaulted. The soldiers reported the matter to the police and shortly afterwards three men from Coonagh were arrested.<sup>49</sup> At their subsequent trial at the petty sessions on Friday, 4 April, the three Coonagh men were given a choice of paying their fines with costs or serving a term of imprisonment.<sup>50</sup>

## Aftermath

Two months later, on 31 May, the war in South Africa ended when the Boers signed what is known as the Treaty of Vereeniging. But the war still had repercussions, particularly in Ireland during the 1916 Rising. In December 1895, Dr Leander Starr Jameson, with a force of around 600 men, led a raid into the Transvaal in an attempt to overthrow the Kruger govern-

ment. After clashing with Boer forces, Jameson and his men surrendered. One of the raiders was a British Army officer who later became a general in the British Army – Sir John Grenfell Maxwell – and was made commander-in-chief of British troops in Ireland on 27 April 1916. Maxwell was imprisoned for a while by the Boers. None of the raiders was executed for the attempted insurrection.<sup>51</sup> Shortly after the Rising, a number of the rifles captured by the British were found to have Boer markings.<sup>52</sup> Maxwell, as we have seen, had been in a similar situation himself, but now had no compassion for the captured Irish leaders and had them executed. John McBride, who had fought for the Boers, was one of them.

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