

VISCOUNT GORT.

Charles Vereker, Viscount Gort, the hero of Collooney, was born at the old Mayoralty House in Limerick in the year 1768, his father being Mayor of Limerick at that time. His mother was the daughter of Charles Smyth, one of Limerick's representatives in Parliament for forty-five years. Charles joined the navy at the age of fourteen, but left it for the army after a few years. The Limerick Militia was formed by his uncle, John Prendergast Smyth, in 1793, and in 1797 Vereker became its Colonel.

It is well known how that brilliant General, Humbert, with the French Invading Army of 1798, containing less than 1,000 men and a few straggling Irish recruits, inflicted a disgraceful defeat on the British at Castlebar, an event since known as "The Races of Castlebar," from the precipitate retreat of the disorganised British forces. It is not so well known, however, that the Limerick City Militia, with its gallant Colonel, was responsible for the eventual defeat of Humbert and the squashing of another of Ireland's futile attempts at revolt.

After Castlebar, Humbert turned northwards, where he was sure to get support from the Irish. He was met, however, at Collooney, a small town about six miles south of Sligo, by Colonel Vereker and about 300 men of the Limerick City Militia. He refused to surrender to so small a force, and retreated northwards, leaving his large field guns behind. Within a few days he surrendered to the main English army under Cornwallis. He is reported to have said: "I have met many generals in Ireland, but the only soldier among them was Colonel Vereker."

When Vereker, seriously wounded, returned with the Militia to Limerick, he was feted by the citizens and publicly thanked. A silver medal was specially struck for the occasion and Vereker was given the right to adopt the word "Collooney" as the family motto.

Vereker represented Limerick in Parliament for twenty-seven years—from 1790 to 1817. He voted against the Union, which he always opposed, and said: "Having defended my country with my blood, I shall never betray her with my vote." It is more likely, however, that Vereker wished to retain the status quo and the corrupt control which his family had exercised over the affairs of the City of Limerick, since it had been wrested by them from another ruling family, the Roches.

Once in a speech against this influence, O'Connell paid tribute to Vereker's bravery by telling a story of how the latter killed in a street-duel a fellow-officer whom he had found mercilessly flogging an old man-servant.

Vereker became second Viscount Gort on the death of his uncle. He died in 1842 aged 74.