ARCHITECTURE IN NINETEENTH CENTURY LIMERICK

BY MYLES CUNNINGHAM

The county and city authorities have just restored one of the most notable of Limerick's civic buildings, the County Court House. This classical building was erected in 1809 to the design of brother architects, Nicholas and William Hanman. The family seems to have lived at Cahireilly and the brothers designed Grange House for their neighbours, the O'Grady's (See this Journal, 1949, p. 19). The city accounts recite certain minor payments to Nicholas Hanman about 1813-14 for work at the Exchange but about that date the Smith-Vereker family interest which controlled Corporation affairs introduced another pair of architect brothers who were to leave their mark on city building for a quarter of a century. Theresafter the Hannans fade into the twilight: a city directory of 1824 mentions William Hanman, perhaps one of the brothers, as a builder with offices at Taylor Street, off Cecil Street.

John Nash designed Lough Cutra, the residence of the Gort family, and he employed his apprentices, James and George Richard Pain, to supervise the work. The Vereker interest promptly secured them employment in Limerick and there hangs on the stairway wall of the City Library a drawing of Old Thomond Bridge and a design for its replacement prepared by James Pain as early as 1814. On his own account or jointly with his younger and more competent brother who had settled in Cork, James Pain built the Limerick Prison (1817-21) and immediately afterwards the Villiers Home within the city walls near Thomond Bridge. Dromoland and Mitchelstown castles were also designed by the Pains. An appreciation of their work will be found in Hill's paper on Cork buildings in the Journal of the Cork Hist. & Arch. Soc., 1939.

Thomas Spring Rice headed the local opposition to the Old Corporation for a period and as M.P. he sponsored the scheme for a bridge linking the New Town (exempt from Corporation control) with the undeveloped north suburb. Work on the bridge continued over eleven years (1824-35) and Nimmo, the architect, died during the course of it. Not, however, before he had designed for his patron the striking Rice Memorial Column in the people's Park. While the new bridge was under construction the Pains erected Athlunkard Bridge and replaced Balls Bridge. As soon as Wellesley (now Sarsfield) Bridge was open for traffic they had the opportunity of achieving their old plan for Thomond Bridge. As architect to the Board of First Fruits for Munster, Pain had occasion to work at St. Mary's Cathedral; according to Canon Meredyth, James Pain was eventually interred in the Vereker vault in the Cathedral grounds.

A succession of English architects worked at the Cathedral after Pain—such
figures as Bardwell, Slater, and Street. Limerick men like Fogerty and William Sidney Cox contributed their quota and at the close of the century came Fuller who busied himself with the Romanesque west doorway. An account of their work will be found in R. F. Hewson’s paper on the Cathedral in this Journal, 1944. Presumably Bardwell’s introduction to Limerick came through the Barringtons for whom he designed Glenstal. Their famous hospital however seems to be the work of a W. O’Hara about whom little else is known. (See this Journal, 1950, p. 63). A minor memorial of Bardwell is his monument to Father Pat Hogan in the transept of Saint Michael’s.

The building of the new bridge enhanced the value of Barrington leaseholds along what is now the North Circular Road. With the Municipal Reform Act of 1840 Vereker control of the Corporation came to an end and a new name appears in the architectural records of the period. W. H. Owen built at the time Glendower Cottage and Woodyville—the present Derravhore and Tivoli. At the same time he was erecting the New Savings Bank, the well-known Doric temple in Glentworth Street. For the New Corporation he built Matthew Bridge in the early forties and laid out the adjoining Markets on the site of Limerick’s medieval harbour, the filled-in Long Dock. Through sixty years of the last century a Welshman, Jacob Owen, and his son James held the post of architect to the Board of Works. Our W. H. may have been of their stock: he gave a Welsh name to his residence and he had a flair for Welsh Gothic detail. This survey of secular building would not be complete without a mention of Joseph Fogerty who gave the city Leamy’s School and the old Theatre Royal.

If aristocratic impulse launched James Pain on a building career in Limerick, we may attribute the choice of an English architect for Saint John’s Cathedral to a similar influence. In 1850 the third Earl of Dunraven, on succeeding to the title, summoned P. C. Hardwick, son of a more famous architect father, to complete the Manor House at Adare and to adapt the former Trinitarian Priory as a Convent of Mercy. Bishop Ryan availed himself of Hardwick’s services, and Limerick kept last year the centenary of the great and grave building which ranks with Killarney, Monaghan and Enniscorthy among the noteworthy Irish cathedrals of the nineteenth century. Hardwick also designed the Redemptorist Church, deputing a local architect, William Edward Corbett, to supervise the construction.

When the Dominicans proceeded to rebuild their church after 1860 they introduced to Limerick the best known Irish church architect of the period, J. J. McCarthy. He designed a new sanctuary, the high altar, and an altar of Our Lady. He was later to give the diocese two notable churches in Rathkeale and Kilmallock: he might have done a like service for Newcastelwest if local circumstances had not cramped his style. McCarthy was succeeded at St. Saviour’s by George Goldie, a London architect who secured many Irish commissions. He did work for the Vincentians at Phibsboro and in Cork, and he designed Sligo Cathedral for a Vincentian bishop, Dr. Gillooly. The high altar at the Redemptorists is also his work as is the tabernacle and reredos that crowns McCarthy’s altar at St. Saviour’s. In 1870 Goldie introduced at the Dominicans “Mr. Maurice Hen- nessy, assistant architect in the office of Mr. Cox” to superintend work on the nave, and the Priory records pay tribute to his talent and vigilance. Goldie may be best remembered in Limerick for the noble church that graces the skyline at Monaleen; the name of Hennessy will ever be linked with the spire of St. John’s, its soaring harmony a pleasing contrast to the quiet strength of Hardwick’s Cathedral. The Hennessy brothers also designed the mortuary chapel at Mount
Saint Laurence—they eventually settled in Cork and an impressive Romanesque church at Timoleague figures among their achievements in that district.

Corbett, Hardwick's deputy at Mount St. Alphonsus, had already designed the church at Castleconnell. In 1876 took place the foundation ceremony of the Franciscan church, Corbett's work also. The Corinthian portico and the greater part of the nave were executed for Father Bonaventure McDermott but the friars had to wait well into the present century for the necessary building space to complete the great basilica. There is one legacy of Corbett which citizens seem usually to find mildly amusing, though for reasons not connected with the architectural design. This is the Tait Memorial Clock Tower in Baker Place. William Edward Corbett resigned from the city surveyorship in 1899 after holding the post for forty-five years. But he lived into the new century long enough to design St. Joseph's Church.

The compiler of these notes begs to suggest that readers who may be in a position to supplement or correct this information would forward their comments for use in a subsequent issue of the Journal.