

TODAY

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1978

by PADRAIG O MAIDIN

A military action in Pallasgreen, 1880



IN the autumn of 1880 Bernard Becker was sent by his paper *The Daily News of London*, to report on the "disturbed districts" of Ireland. One of the reasons he was chosen, he tells us, was that he knew nothing of Ireland, or of Irish politics and had no Irish friends. Reading his reports suggests that he saw his mission as providing assurance to his readers that the authorities were in command of the situation and that the social and economic upheaval, as he saw it, would hopefully soon pass into history.

One of the places he visited was Pallasgreen in Co. Limerick, and inevitably he recalled that he was on classic ground and that Old Pallas and New Pallas and Pallasgreen formed the scene of the never-to-be-forgotten feud of the Three Year Olds and the Four Year Olds. "Readers of *The Daily News*," he wrote, will hardly need to be reminded that this historic vendetta commenced with a dispute concerning the age of a bull, one disputant maintaining that the animal was four, while the other insisted he was but three years old. The matter was settled by a 'mighty pretty quarrel' in which one of the combatants was either killed or badly maimed, whereupon his cause was taken up by his family and friends and a feud inaugurated which lasted many years and led to the deaths of a considerable number of persons."

Pallas, he continued, is in the midst of the Golden Vale, a deliciously pastoral country, admirably fitted on such a glorious morning for the sports of shepherds and sheperdesses as Watteau and

Lancret loved to limn. But first object that catches the eye in Pallas is not a bower of ribbons and roses but a stiff-looking police barrack. Close at hand is the railway station, another unlovely edifice, and lounging about in groups are 70 or 80 of the gloomiest and most sullen-looking people I have seen in this country. The very little cheerfulness there is in Connacht is quite absent from MuAster, or at least from the Tipperary border of Co. Limerick.

Becker was informed that "loungers" were a rent-gathering or rather an attempt to gather rent, and that Thomas Sanders of Charleville, the agent for the Erasmus Smith School Trusts was sitting but not in receipt of custom. The tenant farmers had made the usual reference to Griffith's Valuation and the usual result was that not a shilling had been paid. The landlords feared that if they accepted Griffith as the basis of rent it would be taken as settling permanently the value of the land.

A BOYCOTT

Empty handed Sanders had to slip away by train and the farmers adjourned to the nearby "groggeries" to talk over Griffith and Sanders and other matters. Failure to pay the rent meant that court action would follow and that inevitably would lead to police action and that would culminate in military action. A bailiff had been shot in Pallasgreen, "because he, in the execution of his duty, occupied the dwelling of an evicted farmer, one Burke; hence it was decided that a police hut should be built on the ground lately occupied by Burke, but as readers of *The*

Hussars came from Limerick by road. The whole operation had been carefully planned and timed. The trains from Tipperary and Limerick met almost exactly at Pallas a little before nine in the morning, just as the busbies of the Hussars appeared upon the bridge. "Pallas was evidently taken by surprise, for any movement in a western Irish town before nine in the morning may be taken as a night attack."

The people rubbed their eyes, says Becker, to find the classic sportsfield of the Four and Five Year Olds taken by the matudinal redcoats and horse, foot and artillery already in possession of the ground. Colonel Humphreys made good use of his forces, in all about 350 men. His first care was to secure his base, the railway station, which was strongly garrisoned by the 48th Regiment. Then the road to Burke's farm was strongly patrolled — so strongly as to keep up an unbroken line of communication between the farm and the railroad.

When the base had been

secured and the lines of communication firmly established, the procession bearing the making of the hut set out. First came the armed police, all 70 of them, then an escort of Hussars, and then the artillery wagons carrying the pieces of the hut, guarded by soldiers of the 9th Regiment.

While this was going on, Fr. Ryan, the parish priest, went among the people exhorting them to be quiet. So the whole affair passed off quietly and after trebling the ordinary police garrison at Pallas, the military returned to their respective quarters. Like the latest chapter of a book which we should have read elsewhere, Becker finished his dispatch on that momentous day: "A beginning has been made of building the hut, and at the moment of writing (9 p.m.) all is quiet at Old and New Pallas as well as Pallasgreen. Whether the blood of the Threes and Fours will endure the sight of the detested hut gradually rising on the farm of the sainted Burke remains to be seen."

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