

5. Martin Hogan and the Catalpa Rescue

by Camon McDermott

The Soldier Fenians



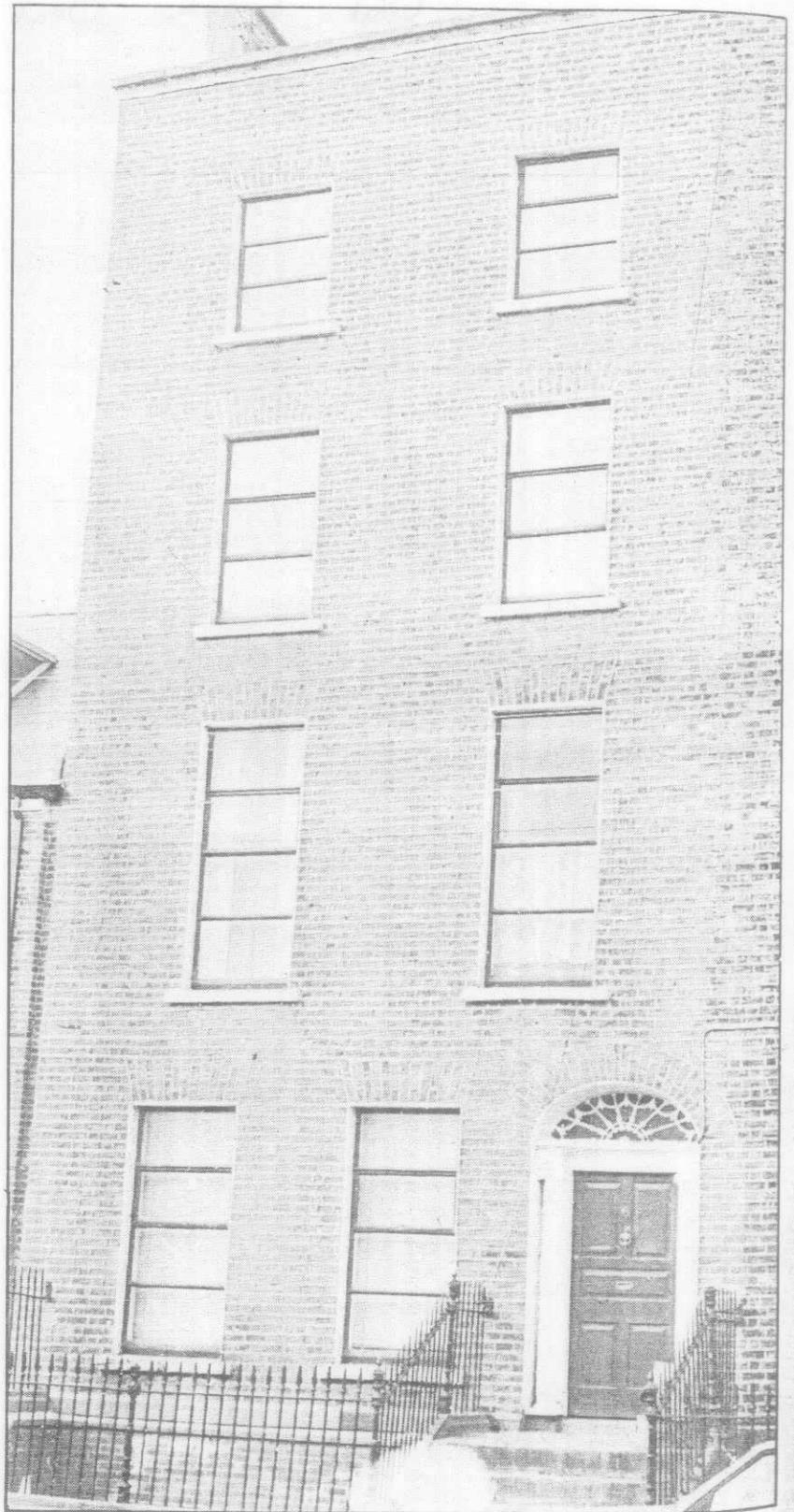
On a January evening in Dublin in 1866, Martin Hogan of 6, Barrington Street, Limerick, stood at the door of Peter Curran's Pub, at 1 Clare Lane, near Merrion Square, Dublin. He checked that he was not observed and entered. With James Wilson, he had deserted from the Fifth Dragoon Guards in November, 1865, when it became too difficult for them to operate as Fenian organisers and propagandists in the regiment. Although gazetted as deserters, they remained on in Dublin, hiding in safe Fenian houses, and working among the soldiers for the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

The inside of the pub was dimly lit, but a fire blazed at one end. The 'Curran's of Clare Lane' was a byword among the Fenians in the city, and was a favourite meeting-place of the leading I.R.B. men of the British regiments stationed in Dublin. The men who were in the pub on that evening were all cavalrymen from the Fifth Dragoons and the Tenth Hussars who had joined the Fenian Brotherhood.

Martin Hogan did not pause in the bar but continued upstairs to a private parlour. He stepped inside the room, and thus began for him a nightmare that was only to end ten years later in one of the most audacious escape stories in Australian penal history – the Catalpa Rescue – in which he was to play a key part.

The men had come to the pub that evening on the orders of John Devoy, the Irish Republican Brotherhood's chief organiser for the British Army. He had personally recruited Hogan and Wilson, whose desertions were precipitated by the wave of Fenian arrests in September, 1865. Martin Hogan was then twenty-eight years old, having been born in Limerick City in 1838.

The Irish Republican Brotherhood was founded by James Stephens on St. Patrick's Day, 1858, and its members became known as Fenians. By 1866 the Brotherhood claimed to have 80,000 oath-bound members in Ireland and 15,000 in the British Army. And there were other volatile forces ready and willing to help in bringing about the revolution the I.R.B. had long plotted.



Martin Hogan's family home, 6 Barrington Street, Limerick.