DE VALERA
-A FATEFUL VISIT

by Mairin Power

accepted or reject any of the British proposals without first consulting the 'Chief' at home. They travelled back and forth to Dublin on several occasions to confer with the Dail on the latest proposals being put forward by the British plenipotentiaries.

December the 5th, 1921 was a 'harrowing day for Michael Collins. Only two days earlier the steamer on which he, Erskine Childers and Gavan Duffy had been travelling had been involved in a collision with a schooner in the Irish sea. That same day he attended a cabinet meeting in Dublin. The following day (Sunday) he was back in London to prepare for the resumption of the treaty negotiations on Monday. On Monday morning the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, met privately with him to discuss the outcome of Saturday's cabinet meeting in Dublin. Lloyd George was not pleased. That afternoon as de Valera was making his way through the crowded streets of Limerick to receive the freedom of the city, Michael Collins, Arthur Griffith and Robert Barton were having a reception of a very different kind. They had been summoned to the conference table and issued with an ultimatum, 'settle now ... sign the agreement for a treaty or else quit ... and both sides would be free to resume whatever warfare they could wage against each other'.

At 7.15 p.m. the Irish withdrew to consider the proposal. They signed the treaty between Ireland and Great Britain at 2.10 a.m. on the 6th of December, 1921.

In the grey hours of early morning, in the house overlooking the Shannon, beside the Sarsfield Bridge, de Valera was roused from his sleep to receive the news that the treaty had been signed and the Irish Free State created. The lean bespectacled man standing by the telephone could hardly have envisaged the terrible bloodbath that was to follow when brother would kill brother and family allegiance would be rent in two.

The man who boarded the train at Limerick on that Tuesday morning was a very different man to he one who had, less than 24 hours before, entered the city in such a triumphant fashion. More than any other man, Eamon de Valera knew that Ireland was on the brink of civil war.