

Incident at Hospital

Further Government Correspondence

Lieutenant Inglis to Mr. Walker.

Limerick, September 30, 1846.

I beg to submit, without delay, the following report of circumstances that yesterday transpired in Hospital, when the extraordinary Presentment Sessions were held under 9 and 10 Vict. cap. 107, for the barony of Small County.

The proceedings of the day were opened by an address from one of the magistrates, in which language we used which could not have failed to incite in the minds of the people, that were assembled in crowds from all the adjoining country, feelings of discontent and ingratitude towards the Government for the measures that have been hitherto adopted for their support. It was explained to them what hardships they were to endure during the ensuing year, - how poor would be their payment, - and in fact, as it were, they were called upon one and all to raise their voices against any attempt to introduce measures similar to those we are now about to carry out.

This speech appeared to have the desired effect. The people at once showed symptoms of great excitement; and although the business of the sessions was conducted with tolerable regularity throughout, the crowds in and surrounding the house gradually grew more and more uproarious, until when the proceedings of the Court had closed, the greatest confusion appeared to exist.

Had it terminated here, I should not have attached so much importance to these matters.

It was very soon evident that all their passion was at once to be directed, at Mr. Kearney. This gentleman, on leaving the Courthouse, after some little delay, was received by the crowds of thousands that were assembled with the most vehement expressions of uncontrolled indignation; and his escape from this moment appears to have been almost miraculous. The mob followed him for a distance out of the town, with evidently a real determination to overtake him, and undoubtedly had they had the opportunity they would have murdered him. Every possible abuse was heaped upon him; the whole country seemed up in arms to kill him; the fury of the mob amounted to nothing short of madness.

Such scenes as these will show what may be expected on the first attempt to introduce our system in this district.

Mr. Kearney had made use of no expression whatever that ought to have rendered him unpopular, but I believe in every respect precisely the contrary. The excitement arose merely from anticipation of the introduction of task-work, and the other inconveniences to which their idleness will subject them; and these scenes will also show



'They could not conveniently get at him without killing a very favourite parish priest'.



A landlord, and the kind of man who acted as a magistrate.

that, in order to introduce our system, we must have powerful aid in reserve, not only for the protection of the lives of all persons serving under Government, but also in order that our regulations may be strictly enforced. It would be impossible for one individual to deal otherwise with crowds of people, excited to such a state of frenzy; and if the anticipation only can arouse them so much, how much more may be expected of them when actually under the treatment to which they are so much averse.

Lieutenant Inglis to Captain Larcom.

Limerick, September 30, 1846.

I cannot allow my report upon the dreadful proceedings at Hospital yesterday to leave without adding a few lines to you in private.

The magistrate to whom I refer, as making use of language calculated to excite the minds of the people, was —; and certainly either inconsiderately, or intentionally, he has done us immeasurable injury. The sight was the most terrific you can possibly conceive. Poor Mr. Kearney was actually hunted like a mad dog by the whole country population. I have not seen him since we parted in the Courthouse, and I think neither he nor anybody else there expected he had long to live. What is to be done with such a country? I suppose we must make an attempt to recommence our works, which we shall be ready for in a day or two; and if that cannot be managed, an overpowering force of some description must be thrown in, and the same in Coshlea.

If Kearney is thus treated now, what is to be done to us all in the course of a few weeks. I always expected great opposition, but I certainly never anticipated so general a rising of the country.

That gentleman wants, of course, to have that measure for the improvement of private property brought forward. Consequently he is opposed to our works; and instead of introducing the subject calmly and dispassionately amongst the enlightened members of the meeting, he speaks with vehemence to the populace; calls upon them to assist him in crying down the employment by public works; tells them that they do not receive one-tenth of the money granted, and winds up by warning them against task-work.

Terrific yells accompanied him all through his speech; and thus was laid the foundation-stone of all the confusion.

I have just now seen Mr. Kearney; he escaped, and may consider himself lucky indeed. It is all to be attributed to rapidity of movement, and the circumstance of so placing himself on the car, that they could not conveniently get at him without first killing a very favourite parish priest.

(British Parliamentary Papers, Famine [Ireland]), Vol. 6, pp. 95-96.)