



THE McMAHON DIARY:

A CLAREMAN IN PARIS, APRIL/MAY, 1888.

BY BILL McINERNEY

INTRODUCTION

This article is based on part of the diary of Patrick McMahon, a Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare, man, who returned to his native place on a holiday in 1888, after thirty-four successful years in Sydney. During his year-long touring holiday, he kept a daily diary⁽¹⁾, and his entries on the time he spent in Paris give some interesting sidelights on life in that city, just one hundred years ago.

Patrick McMahon was born on 28 April, 1831, in Clounteen, about one and a half miles outside Sixmilebridge, on the Newmarket-on-Fergus road, and about eight miles from the city of Limerick. He was baptised in the Roman Catholic Church at Sixmilebridge three days later, on 1 May.⁽²⁾ He had one brother, Timothy, and seven sisters. His father, also named Patrick, had originally come from Ballyroe, a townland between Oatfield and Sixmilebridge.

In 1850, his sister Honora decided to emigrate to Sydney, and although her father and mother and the rest of the family tried to dissuade her, she sailed for Sydney on the 'Ramelies'⁽³⁾ on 11 August, 1850.

In 1850, the first goldfields were discovered in Australia and thousands of people were heading here from all parts of the world.⁽⁴⁾ The glowing accounts of the rich goldfields gave the young Patrick McMahon the first notion of trying to make his fortune in New South Wales.

In 1854, Honora paid his passage under the assisted emigration scheme, and on 8 July, he sailed from Plymouth on the Caroline. The ship arrived in Sydney on 13 October, after a good passage of 96 days.

Patrick McMahon prospered in Sydney, and on 26

September, 1857,⁽⁵⁾ he married Nora MacDonagh from the city of Limerick, whose acquaintance he had made on the first day of the journey to Sydney. They had nine children, whose many descendants now live all over Australia and other parts of the world.

On the 28 February, 1888, he left Sydney with his wife Nora (whom he refers to as 'Mother' in his diary) for their holiday in Europe and America. The first entry in the diary records that they boarded the Orient Line Steamer 'Liguria' at Sydney on Thursday, 28 February, 1888.

The ship called to Melbourne, Adelaide and Albany before heading into the Indian Ocean. After completing the first leg of the journey, the Liguria arrived in Naples on Tuesday, 3 April, at 5 p.m.. The McMahons proceeded at a leisurely pace to Rome, Florence, Venice, Milan, Turin and then to Paris, where they stayed for more than twenty days.

Patrick McMahon's diary covered every day he spent away from home,⁽⁶⁾ but for the purpose of this article I have confined myself almost entirely to entries dealing with Paris and France.⁽⁷⁾

His wife predeceased him on 24 February, 1908, aged 75 years, and he died on 7 March, 1910, aged 79 years. Both are buried in the family grave in Rookwood Cemetery, Sydney.

Perhaps the highlight of their stay in Paris was their visit on Saturday, 5 May, 1888, to Marshal MacMahon, the Duke of Magenta, and his wife at their home at 70 rue Bellechasse, although every day brought new attractions in the 'beautiful city'.

We take up the diary as the McMahons prepare to leave Turin for Paris:

Extract From Diary

Monday, April 29th: Turin

Breakfast at 8.30 a.m., went with Mother and Mass; the church was well filled with men dressed, respectable looking people; men and women who seemed to be very devout and attentive to the service. Had lunch at the Hotel Trombetta at 12 o'clock. Left Turin for Paris at 2.15 p.m. Reached the Mount Cennis tunnel at 5.17 p.m., got through at 5.38, was 21 minutes going through the tunnel, arrived at Modane at 6.20 p.m., where our luggage was examined with very little trouble, none of them crossed with chalk without being opened. Went on then towards

Paris for the whole night, the usual kind of night travelling; in the morning at 4 a.m. daylight. Could see the country nearing Paris which looked very fine and every inch turned to account and well tilled good ploughs, harrows and farming implements, not like those seen in Italy.

Before coming to Mount Cennis tunnel, passed through several small tunnels. The snow on the Alps was quite close to us on either side and every little patch of land cultivated and terraced up the mountain side. I never saw in Ireland on the mountain or in the bogs such a struggle as this to obtain a poor subsistence from bare and miserable patches of mountain side. It made me

think at once that the people of Australia were not aware of the great blessing poured upon them by God. To see those miserable stunted little vines growing amongst the rocks and on the mountain side and to compare them with the fine healthy strong vines of Australia. In my mind I can scarcely portray what Australia is destined to become. A new country for me - Australia or America - instead of the worn out old countries of Europe where the land is exhausted and must be plentifully manured before it will produce anything for the benefit of men. Arrived in Paris at 7 a.m. I cut my hand badly in throwing something through the carriage window thinking it was open but put my hand through the glass.



Patrick McMahon
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Patrick McMahon, pictured in Limerick during his world tour, 1888.

Monday, April 30th: Paris

Arrived in Paris this morning at 7 a.m., went straight to the Hotel De Burgundy. This hotel I found to be very good and the people extremely civil. Ted's letter per 'Austral' dated 15th. March I found waiting for me, also one from Mr. Bridge, Rome. I was very pleased to get these letters. After breakfast had a walk through the Boulevards. Paris, from what I have seen so far, is a beautiful city, the people are most polite and obliging-the whole appearance is fine indeed. I felt tired and went to bed early. Mother really astonishes me, how well and strong she is keeping. No complaining, but in the very best of health.

Tuesday, May 1st

Breakfast at 8.30. Joined Gazes excursion to see the environs of Paris - fare 25 francs each - for three days excursions. A very fine dray, four in hand, well appointed. Went first to the palace of 'St. Cloud', a perfect ruin; this place was taken possession of by the Prussians in October 1870 and was shelled and burnt by the French in an endeavour to drive them out. This was a favourite palace of Napoleon the First as from its elevated position he could overlook the city of Paris. We then passed through the royal park on our way to Versailles, about 7 miles from Paris; was shown on the way the house where 'Gambetta' died; passed 'Ville de Aivri' and was shown the house where the great engineer DeLesseps was born. I went into the house and up a narrow little stairs and was shown the room where the great man was born. The following inscription was on a slab placed over the door - 'Ferdinand Lesseps was born in this house 19th. November 1805' - Then went to the Palace 'Grand Trianon'; was shown the room prepared for the reception of Queen Victoria. This bed was last used by Napoleon the First and Louis Phillip.

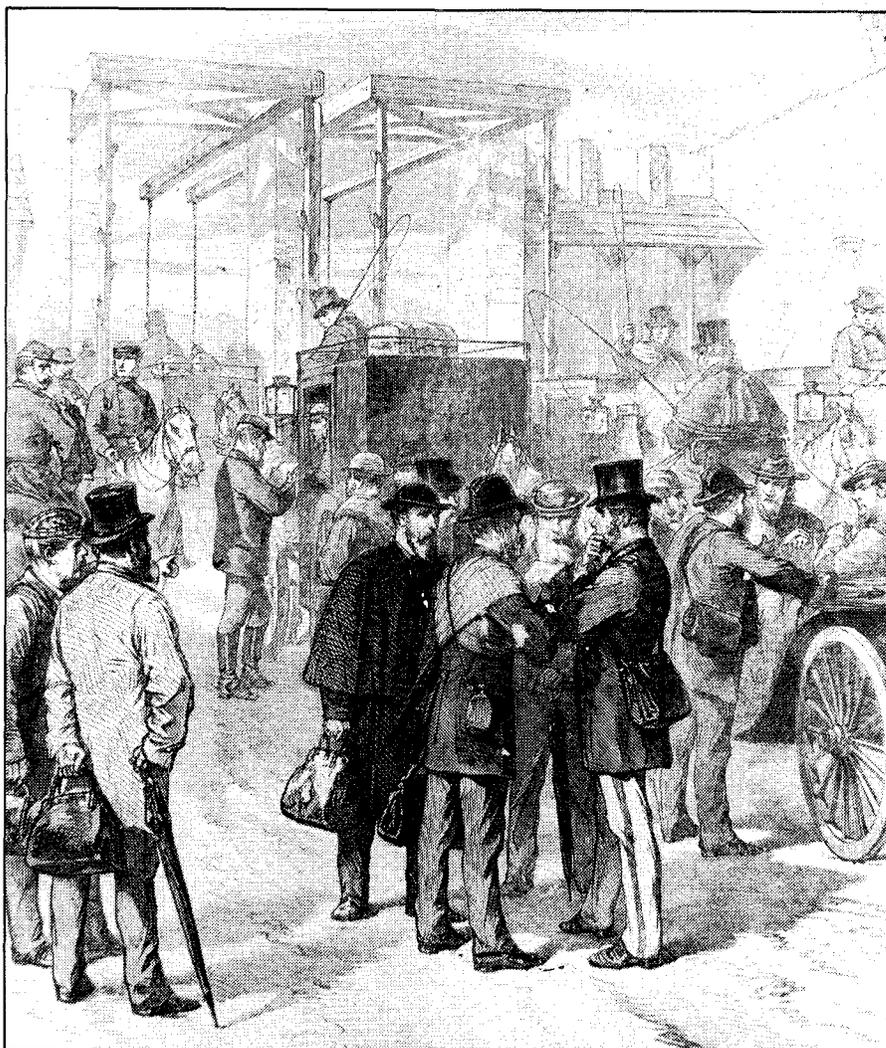
The State carriage of the first Napoleon and also the State carriage of Napoleon the Third; the harnesses hung up in Versailles and were shown the room where the Emperor of Germany was crowned after the Franco-Prussian War - the room where Marshal Bazaine was tried. Some fine pictures of the wars of the first Napoleon as also a fine one of the 'Battle of Fontenoy' with many other fine pictures of the French wars of Louis 14th, Napoleon the First and Third, as also some fine portraits of the old French Marshals. We next went to the Sevres Manufactory of china ware. The clay is brought from Limoges a long distance. Great value placed on this ware - a tea cup was marked 2/10/- and a plate 4. In the evening after dinner, went to the circus and enjoyed it very much.

Wednesday, May 2nd

Joined Gazes party this morning. Started at 9.45 a.m. First went to the Church of St. Vincent de Paul, remarkable for its magnificent column and carved oak ceilings. Next went to Turris Chaimont, a fine park commanding a good view of the city, and interesting as being one of the strongholds of the Commune in 1871. After this we went to the cemetery 'Pere

La Chaise' - this is termed the 'City of the Dead'. It contains over 100,000 monuments and covers about 114 acres of English. The tombs of great men have been pointed out to us here...

No monument appears over the remains of Marshal Ney, but enclosed with an iron railing the following inscription - 'Stranger stop, here lies a Hero Ney'. Noticed the tomb of Dr. Larry, one of Napoleon's doctors. Winsor, who first introduced gas into Paris in 1810. General Massena, Marshal Suchel. Scribe the author of the play Hugenots (De Lavalette Count & Countess) Marshal McDonald, a Scotchman whom Napoleon designated his most humane General, Marshal Kellerman. The original tomb of Thiers, from which he was removed. The Tomb of 'Abelard and Heloise', a romantic affair of a young couple. The Tomb of the Rothschilds in the Jewish portion - quite un-pretentious. The Tomb of Madam Rachael, and many others. We next went to the Bastille Column of July, 1789. This column was erected to commemorate the demolition of the Bastille, the anniversary of which occurs next year, 1889, and for which is going to a great Paris Exhibition. We visited a circular building exhibiting a panorama of the destruction of the



'Arrived in Paris at 7 AM'.



Bastille. This was the finest panorama I have seen. We visited the Roquette prison in which we were shown copies of the instruments of torture used in the Bastille. After this we went to the Gobelins Tapestry works. This, like the Sevres china, is a Government monopoly, established in the reign of Louis 14th. None of this work is for sale. It is made for public purposes, and also to make presents to Foreign States. We went to the Gallery of the Luxembourg, where are numerous fine modern pictures and sculptures. After this we visited the Pantheon, built for a church in the time of Louis 14th, but now secularised and turned into what is called the Temple of Glory, or burying place of great men. We were shown here the tomb of 'Voltaire Sufflot', the great architect, who died broken hearted when he found that he made a mistake that the columns would not support the Dome. The Tomb of Victor Hugo. We could see the coffin surrounded with wreaths and immortellas. We were shown a fine picture of St. Denis, Martyr, as also that of Louis the 9th of France, known as St. Louis. We then drove to the hotel after a good day's work, well pleased with all that was pointed out to us. On this day passed by the ruins of the 'Tulleries Palace' burnt down by the Communes in 1871.

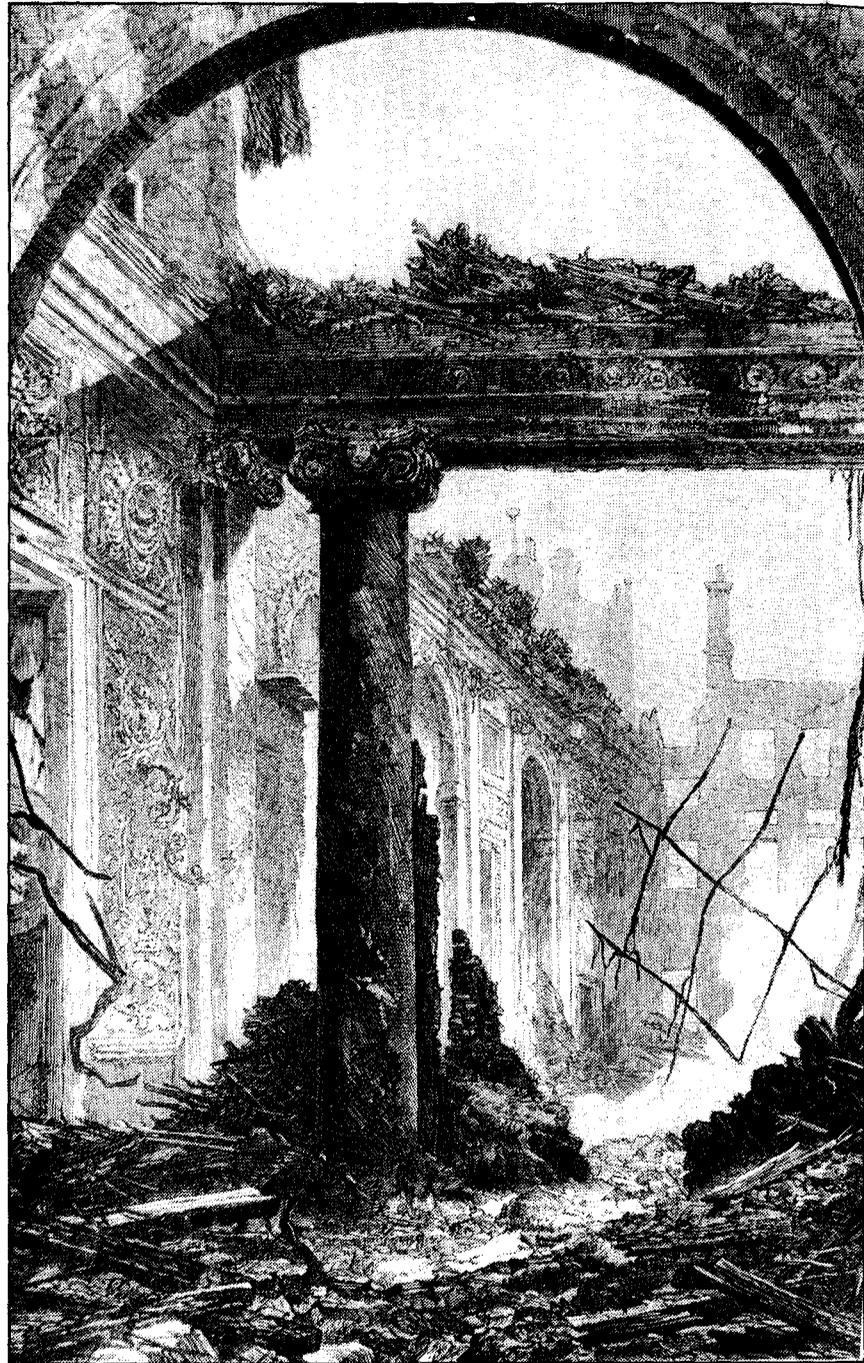
Thursday, May 3rd

We visited the Bourse this morning, the Palais Royal, the city markets, Palace of Justice, St. Chafrelle. Next went to the 'Morgue' a strange place at the back of the Church of Notre Dame on one of the bridges of the Seine. The dead bodies are placed on stretchers dressed as they are found. In front is glass windows where the people can look at the dead bodies. There were two dead men and a crowd looking at them. This was a ghastly spectacle. We visited the 'Garden des Plants'.

I then went to the convent of Congregation de St. Clotilde, 101 rue de Reuilly where I met Madam Sidonie Labat. She was really rejoiced to see me. I am to visit her with Mother again on Sunday next. She is most anxious to do anything in her power for me.

Friday, May 4th

Joined Gazes party again this morning, visited the 'Church of La Prinitie' a fine modern church. Then passed through the park 'Moneeaux'. This is a beautiful public park. Came to the Trocaderi, formerly the art Palace of the Exhibition of 1878. We next visited the Aquarium - I think the one in Melbourne quite as good. Then passed the Arch of Triumph constructed by Napoleon the First, commemorating the principal military achievements of the first Empire. We then went to the Hotel des Invalides, a place where old soldiers worn out and broken down are kept at the public's expense. Was shown the Tomb of Napoleon the First, a beautiful piece of



'St Cloud, a perfect ruin'.

sculpture in one solid block of marble, the sarcophagus of which is said to weigh 60 tons. The tombs of Jerome Bonaparte, Bertrand, one of Napoleon's generals, Vuban, the great military engineer. This place was refitted at great expense by the Prince De Joinville, afterwards Louis Phillip, to receive the remains of the great Napoleon. Was shown here the flags of different countries captured by Napoleon in his wars. Conspicuous is an English flag, war torn and in rags, taken from the English at Fontenoy by the Irish Brigade then in the service of France. Was then taken to a nice chapel St. Eustace, also that of St. Chapelle, built by St. Louis the 9th of France, to receive the treasures brought from the East.

This church is all surrounded by

stained glass windows of the 13th and 15th centuries. We then visited the Church of Notre Dame. This is the Cathedral church of Paris. In this church was crowned the first and third Napoleons, and was also baptised here the Price Imperial. This was built in the 11th century. We next visited the old museum or what was formerly the Monastery of Cluny, a very interesting old place with any amount of old antique reliques; this seemed to me to be a fine old place of byegone days. We visited the Bourse. Of all the infernal noise I have ever heard this beat it out like the bookmakers on Flemington Race Course! singing out as if they were all mad. We visited the Palace of Justice, or lawyers in black gowns with bundles of papers, seemingly quite busy. We visited the

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'Marshal McMahon then went and brought me a beautiful steel engraving of himself on his favourite charger ... he wrote his autograph on it ... and then handed it to me'.

Morgue, a place where dead people are brought by the police. They are placed behind a glass door in a freezing chamber; their bodies become perfectly frozen and kept for five or six weeks for the purpose of identification before they are buried at the expense of the state.

Saturday May 5th

At 11 o'clock this day, took a carriage and called on Marshal MacMahon, Duke of Magenta, ex-President of the French Republic, at 70 Rue Bellechasse, Paris. I was most kindly received by the Duchess and taken by her into the drawing room which was magnificent. She can speak good English. Was told by her that she was after coming from Mass; that the Marshal was out having his usual morning drive in the Bois de Boulogne; that he gets up every morning at daybreak and is away with horses and dogs. She told me to wait, that the Marshal would be back in a few minutes; that she should act as interpreter as he could not speak one word of English and could see that I was in the same position as to French. She felt most kindly and warm-hearted, full of good humour and pleasing with a fine countenance. The

Marshal arrived very soon, rushing into the room quite pleased and delighted to hear that a namesake and kinsman from Australia and Ireland came to pay his compliments to him.

He shook me warmly by both hands. The Duchess acting as interpreter - he could not speak one word of English, nor could I speak one word of French; it was amusing to see with what anxiety he heard her repeat my words to him and he would tell her in French his words to me. He told her to ask me if there was good rabbit shooting in Australia. When I told her they were in abundance, she said it would be enough to induce him to go to Australia, he was such a sportsman and so fond of shooting.

He is a fine, hale, hearty old man full of fun and fire and quite lively. I would take a lease of his life for the next twenty years. I thought old Dr. Kirby wonderful for his age, but MacMahon beats him hollow - in fact, he looks like a man of 50 years. After our conversation was over, and I had conveyed to him my compliments and those of my sons, expressing the great admiration we entertained for him not only as a great soldier but as a good Catholic who took

to the faith of his great ancestors. Without asking him, he then went and brought me a beautiful steel engraving of himself on his favourite charger. He then asked the Duchess to bring him a writing pen and then and there, in my presence, he wrote his autograph to it then folded it up very carefully; he then handed it to me. He said he never cared for his likeness unless on horseback. I am informed that he is the greatest lover of horses in France and is scarcely ever seen out without horses or dogs. He has a horse entered in every race that is on, and like James White with us, is the terror and pride of the racing confraternity. I am told he wins thousands of pounds at almost every race. Madam MacMahon said to me that she thanked God that he had retired from politics; that she had three sons and one daughter - the daughter was married about twelve months ago; that two sons were in the army (Patrick and Charles) and one with them but was then absent.

She said she regretted very much that she had not an opportunity of introducing her sons to me. After having a glass of wine I then bid them both goodbye. I could not possibly be received in a more hospitable or kinder manner.

I cannot close this sketch of my kinsman Marshal MacMahon better than by quoting from the Nation Irish newspaper on the presentation of a Sword of Honour by the Irish people to him after the close of the Austrian War of 1859:-

*Rise Irish men attend the call
Which echoes forth to one and all
A tribute to the Celtic Gaul
Our Island must afford.*

*Hark to the Nations proud appeal
Let Irish hearts excellent feel
For Ireland's son the flashing steel
The famed MacMahon sword.*

*Full oft upon the battle plain
Strewed with the wounded and the slain
Did he the victor's laurel gain
By valour on record.*

*So like the fame of brave Dessaix
Upon the Magentas crimson day
The Irish Chieftain bore the sway
And won his country's sword.*

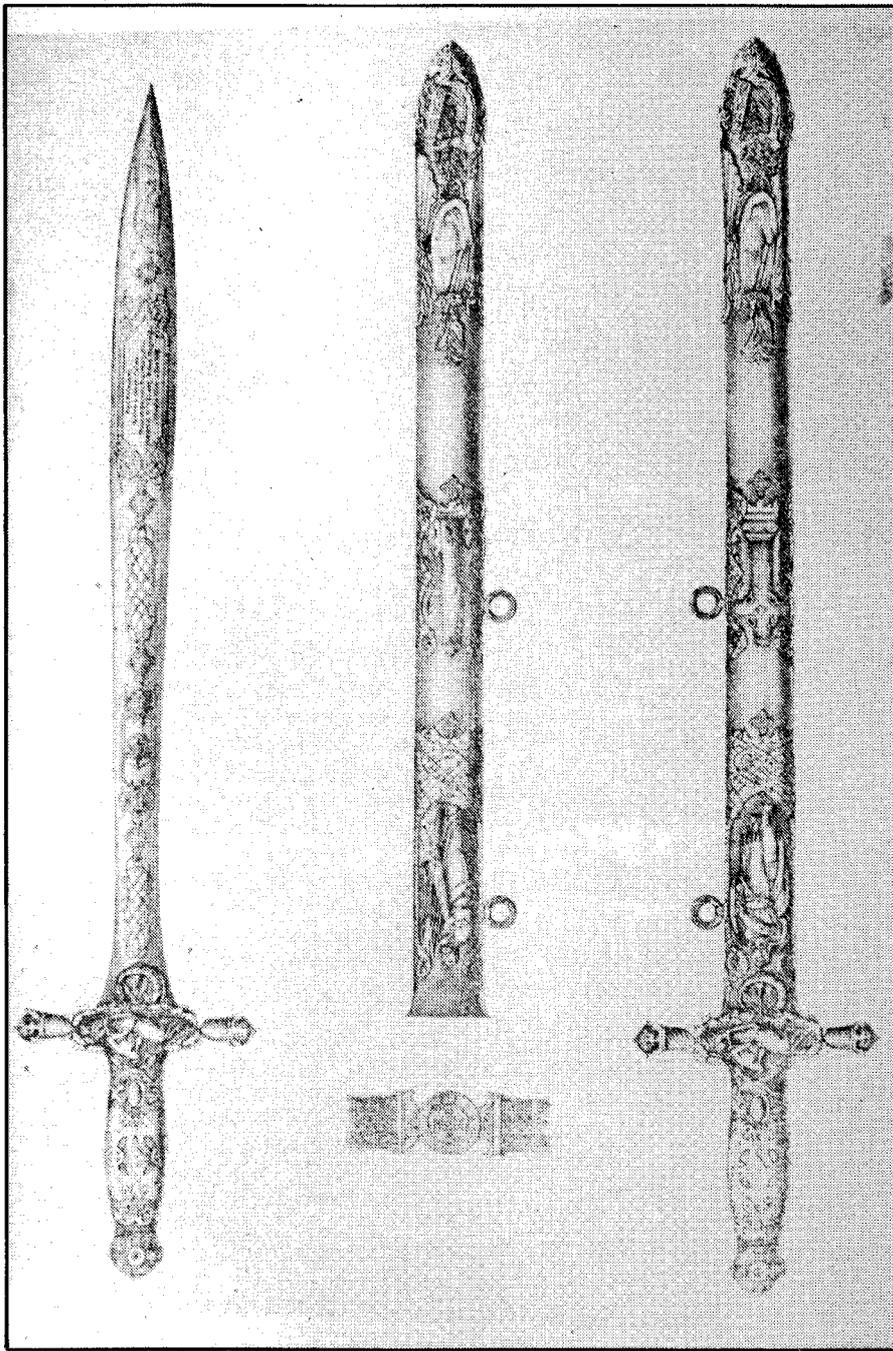
*That arm which laid the foeman low
On Africa's heights or by the 'Po'
Will wield the blade for right we know
Till freedom is restored.*

*To him the brave of Irish grade
The glorious tribute must be paid
A precious hilt and shaming blade
Must be MacMahon's sword.*

After leaving Marshal MacMahon, I visited the Vendome Column. It is a beautiful pillar ...

Sunday, May 6th

Went to 11 o'clock Mass this morning to



The McMahon Sword.

the Madeline - 1 1/2 francs for chairs, and afterwards a priest went round with a bag and seemed to receive generally some small pieces of silver. There was a good large congregation. The people looked devout and attentive. Men went round with baskets covered with a nice linen cloth containing very small buns the size of a large marble. The people took one each, crossed themselves with it and then ate it. Mother kept ours. After Mass, took a carriage - 2 francs per hour - and went to see Madame Sabat. She took us through the convent which, with the grounds, is very spacious. She told us they had about 100 young ladies - their uniform was very nice purple. The name of the convent is Congregation de St. Clotilde, 101 Rue de Reuilly, St. Antoine, Paris. She told us the pension is 1100 francs, about 44 per annum, and that

there were there several young ladies from Ireland. She showed us a shell that fell into the place at the time of the war, believed to be by the Communes. She gave us some nice pictures and a brown scapular. This convent was founded by St. Clotilde, Queen of France, at an early date.

Monday, May 7th

On this day I employed an interpreter, a very decent man, Mr. Piper, and soon after 10 o'clock, went to the great wine and brandy depots at Bercy where we spent the whole day and obtained much valuable information as to Brandy and the trade in general. This depot at Bercy is an immense place, acres upon acres covered with wine casks full and empty. We also visited the Brandy Depot or rather where the Brandy of the present

day is manufactured. Came home late in the evening and made up our minds to go by the night train on to Cognac. We started by the Orleans Railway and travelled all night. Left Paris for Cognac at 9.40 p.m.

Tuesday May 8th: Cognac.

Started last night by the 9.40 p.m. train for Cognac. Arrived at Luxe at 6.30 a.m.; took the coach for Aigre, a distance of 3 miles. Saw Mr. Gautier who I found to be a very nice gentleman indeed. He remembered Mr. Olliffe, said he sent him some carrier pigeons. Had a long talk with him over business matters. Had our dinner at the hotel came back to Luxe and started for Augoleme ... arrived at 2.30 p.m. Started from there ... arrived at Cognac at 5.40 p.m. Went to Hotel, had a good wash and strolled around the town. We noticed Hennessy's and Martel's places from the outside. Came back to Hotel and had dinner; after this, had another good look over the place. I had Mr. Piper, the interpreter, with me. Mother remained in Paris during our visit on business to Aigre, Cognac and Bordeaux.

Wednesday, May 9th: Cognac, Bordeaux

Called to Hennessy's this morning; a gentleman named Castillon took me all over the place which is immense. I learned some wrinkles as to the way of putting on labels and the way the cases are marked. This gentleman I found very kind and he took me over the whole place, told me they kept nothing but high class brandy to which they would only put their name and labels. The lowest brandy with them in bulk 13/- per fall, they had no agents; they looked on all customers as equal. The man who would take 100 cases would be treated exactly on the same footing as the man who would take 100 a month. This was an old standing rule of the firm established for all time. He told me that Mr. Ewan from Melbourne went to Cognac some time ago where he remained for a week; he would give an order for 1200 qr. casks, and guarantee to take 100 cases a month. After remaining for a whole week and calling to the office every morning, he had to go away and could not get 1/2d. per fall taken off. They told me he wrote to them afterwards from Melbourne saying that Hennessys were the most consistent people he ever met in business. Old Hennessy was an Irishman who came to France about the same time as MacMahon. The descendants always felt proud of their Irish origin and clung to the old faith. None of the Hennessys were there. The firm at present consists of two Hennessys, Mr. Castillon who was showing me the place, and another gentleman. Mr. Castillon said he would help me in getting another class of Brandy[®] as nephews of his own did that kind of business, a firm he left some four years ago to join the Hennessys. So then I

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Women's club at the Boule Noire, Boulevard Rochechouart.

gave him an order for 100 cases of Brandy. He then took me to his friends, Pinet Castillon & Co. I gave them an order for 8 qrs. ... then parted with them.

Left Cognac ... arrived at Bordeaux at 5 o'clock p.m.; this is a beautiful city of great trade and importance built on the river Garomie. I noticed a beautiful bridge 600 yards wide - nearly one-third of a mile. The city is built along the river bank; great appearance of trade and shipping to all parts, a good deal to South America. A large quantity of ships and steamers. The whole trade consists of wine business - all the dreys laden with wine. Wharfs all covered with wine casks and cases of claret. Looked up the streets and lanes - nothing but loads of wine. We got a cab for two hours and drove round the city. Had a good look at everything and must say that Bordeaux is a city of great importance and trade. Travelled all night and arrived in Paris at 10.40 this Thursday morning.

Thursday, May 10th

Arrived in Paris from Bordeaux at 10.40 a.m. this morning, found a letter and samples of brandy from Gustave Claudon. Felt very tired; was in bed for greater part of the day. In the afternoon had a walk with Mother; nothing else this day.

Friday, May 11th

At 10 o'clock this morning went to Bercy to see Gustave Claudon. Had a long talk with him over the Brandy. He seemed anxious to do business with me. I gave him an order for 8 qrs. Brandy and one qr. Port wine to be put on board at Havre.

Saturday, May 12th

Went down to Bercy again this morning, had a look over Gustave Claudon's place. Made final arrangements about the Brandy. Found the people there very nice. Had Mother with me. Came home to the hotel by bus. Spent a few hours in

the picture Gallery of the 'Louvre' a fine place, beautiful pictures and interesting reliques of the kings of France. Saw the Sceptre of Charlamagne and other very old relics.

Sunday, May 13th

Went with Mother this morning to Mass to the Madeline Church. After coming back, found a letter and samples of Brandy from Gautier Freres of Aigre Chareute. I examined the samples and answered the letter, after which I spent the whole afternoon writing letter for home. Went to Vespers after and felt quite pleased with the religious appearance of the French people, men and women.

Monday, May 14th

Rose early this morning, had a walk as far as the 'Arch de Triumph' read over the names of the French Generals of the Wars of Napoleon. The morning was very beautiful. I enjoyed this walk very much. After breakfast went with Mother on a bus for a long distance. In the afternoon finished writing a letter home to Pat.

Tuesday, May 15th

Posted letter to Pat this morning. West to General Post Office, letter overweight - postage 1.25 francs, also 0.20 francs for registration. After this Mother and self went on a bus a good way out of the city. In the afternoon sauntered through the Boulevards looking at the shops.

Wednesday, May 16th

Received a letter this morning from Gautier Freres, Aigre Chareute. Spent a good part of the forenoon in writing and answering letters. The morning was wet. Went out for a walk with Mother through the city in the afternoon. After dinner we went to the Opera. The house looked very beautiful; understood little of the Opera but music and singing very good. Sent letters to Hotel London.

Thursday, May 17th

Received letters this morning from Mps Pinet Castillon & Co., Cognac. Answered it at once. With Mother had a walk through the Tulleries gardens - a nice place; spent most of the day here.

Friday, May 18th

Got tickets for London this morning 53.85 francs each from Cook & Sons. Exchanged some coupons I had remaining less 10%. After this Mother and self went on a bus to 'Atuel', In the afternoon spent a few hours in the gardens and in town.

Saturday, May 19th

This morning visited Mr. Versepuy. I found him a very nice man indeed. Had a talk with him about corks. He showed me samples at 21/- per 1000 with 3% his commission. Said he would send samples to Sydney. He showed me a nice kind of 1/2 dozen baskets, made of hoop iron 18/- each. I told him to send 1/2 dozen to Mr. Roddick for me. He said to write to him for any information upon any matter, that he would be glad to attend to me. Visited Bon Marché Markets back through Pont Royal.

Sunday, May 20th

Went with Mother to Mass this morning to the Madeline. Very fine music. High Mass. After Mass, went on a bus a long way out of the city. In the afternoon, had a letter from Mr. S. DeLissa from the Grand Hotel. Gave me his address, anxious to see me. In the afternoon packed up for leaving in the morning for London.⁹⁾

REFERENCES

1. Extracts from Diary by kind permission of Dr. E.B. McMahon, Washington D.C., great-grandson of Patrick McMahon.
2. Sixmilebridge Parish Church records.
3. Co. Clare emigrants to Australia, shipping lists, 1830-1880.
4. See another east Clare mans story Paddy Hannon from Quinn pioneer of The Golden Mile by M. McMahon 'The Other Clare', Vol. 5.
5. Marriage register St. Mary's Cathedral, Sydney.
6. Extracts from diary, published in *The Other Clare*, by Bill McInerney, Vol. 8, dealing with Clare area.
7. Extracts from the diary pertaining to Limerick appeared in article by Bill McInerney, *The Old Limerick Journal*, No. 23, Spring, 1988, Australian Edition.
8. Patrick McMahon was a successful wine and spirits importer in Sydney.
9. P. McMahon stayed in London for more than 4 weeks, then travelled to Scotland, Ireland and America, before returning home to Sydney, on 10 February, 1889, nearly a year after leaving home.