



THE REVOLUTION

HOW IT WAS REPORTED IN THE LIMERICK CHRONICLE

Before the arrival of the railways in the mid-19th century, local newspapers were the only printed source of news available to local populations and, consequently, they saw their function as reporting international and national, rather than local, events.

Excluding advertisements, an average issue of the *Limerick Chronicle* in 1789 contained no more than half a column of local news, about 3% of the paper. International reports were selected from the London and Dublin papers, usually appearing 2 to 3 weeks after the event. The *Chronicle* reported extensively on events in France in 1789, the stories scattered throughout the paper under the source heading, with occasional editorial observations. The extracts below concentrate on the sidelights, rather than on the extensive reporting of the main events.

Prior to the meeting of the Estates General on 4 May, which was reported in the issue of 18 May, the *Chronicle* in the previous months reported on food riots in Paris, due to the scarcity of bread. That issue carries a letter from Vienna, dated 30 April, which reported:

France is in danger of losing their object, liberty, in the whirlpool of licentiousness. In the late tumults, the populace broke into a convent near Paris and ravished the nuns.

21 May. In addition to a detailed description of the grand procession at the opening of the Estates General on 4 May, a correspondent says:

He has just seen a letter from Paris, which says that 200 persons only were killed in the firing of the soldiers, and 3 times that number wounded . . . Bread is 3¹/₄d a pound, and the pretence is the high price of that article. The mob found a pocket book in the manufacturer's house full of bank notes, which they deliberately threw one by one into the fire . . . 25,000 troops are arrived at Paris, and the rioting was not over when the last letters came from there.

25 May: From London, 16-20 May:

A great number of French families of distinction arrived yesterday in town, owing to the disturbances which now prevail in that kingdom. The French papers have endeavoured, in their late accounts, to lessen the number of the mob killed in the late dreadful riot - but let us only remember, that 3 field-pieces played upon the mob for more than an

BY LARRY WALSH

hour, and we shall have some idea of the carnage, in narrow streets, too, where perhaps escape was impossible.

28 May. Paris, 4 May:

600 of the poor wretches who escaped the balls of the French guards have spread themselves about the vicinity of Paris, and joined themselves to all the beggars, robbers, sharpers and thieves that they could find; and this desperate set have twice attempted (but in vain) to release all the prisoners in the Bicetre . . . On Saturday they were at St. Cloud. It is

supposed that they intended going even to the environs of Versailles.

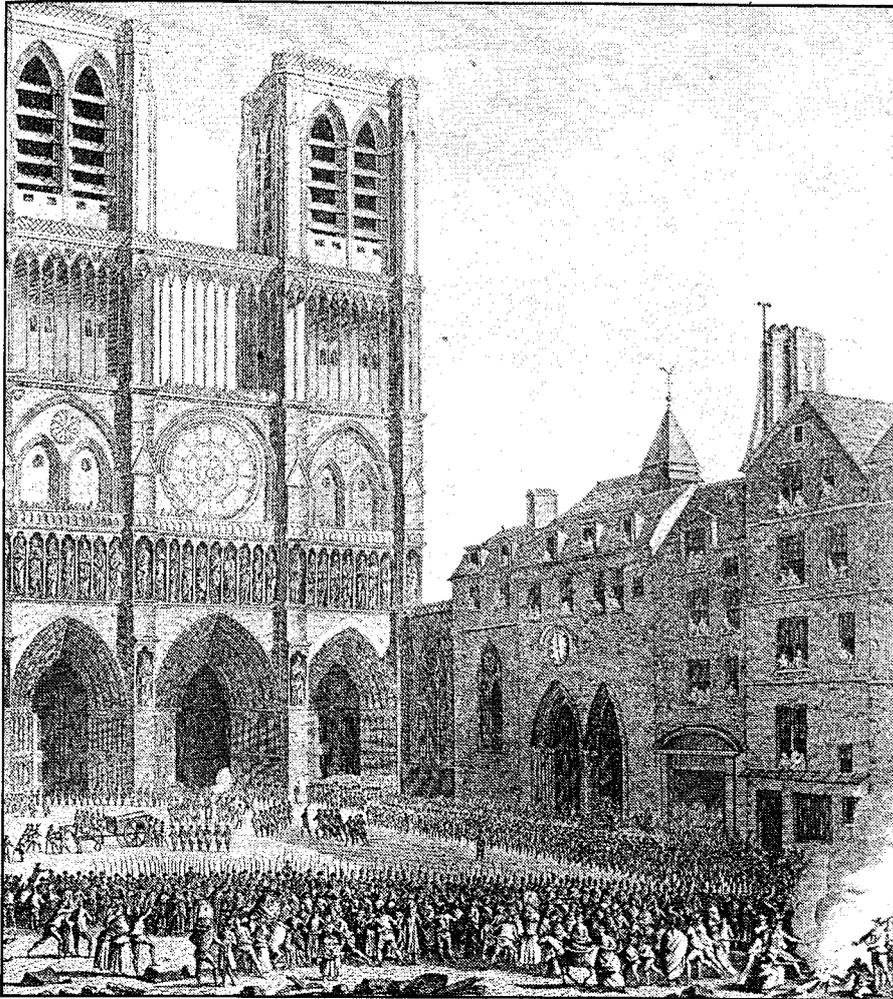
The French king's edict for suppressing every periodical publication not authorised by the Royal authority has produced a very spirited protest from the representatives of the city of Paris, which appeared the next day.

Our yesterday's letters from Paris advise that Mr. Necker found it extremely difficult to stem the tide of popular prejudices daily increasing against the present system of French Government, that his resignation was hourly expected.

1 June. Paris, 20 May, reports of differences in the Estates General over meeting arrangements.



The Swiss financier, Jacques Necker, became Director of Finance in 1777.



They all made "amende honourable" before the church of Notre Dame'.

It was intended to publish a free paper at Paris. The prospectus had brought no less than 12,000 subscriptions; but the publication has been suppressed by an arret of the council.

In Monsieur Necker's late statement of the revenues of France appears the extraordinary item of 1,600,000 livres for annual interest of the debt owing from the United States of America to the French Treasury.

4 June. Paris, 18 and 21 May, lengthy reports on Necker's statement of French revenues and meetings of the Estates General.

8 June. Paris, 25 May, reports from the Estates General, and from London, 29 May:

Two of the Paris rioters were last week hanged, and 10 more have been condemned to the galleys for the rest of their lives.

11 June: The only report from France was the death on 26 May at Paris of Count de Sarsfield, great-grandson of General Patrick Sarsfield.

15 June. From Dublin, 13 June:

The fall that so suddenly took place in the price of grain at Bordeaux and other maritime towns in France, was not, we

hear, so much occasioned by the great quantities of corn and flour received there from Great Britain and Ireland, as by the arrival of a vast number of large ships from America entirely laden with flour; which, together with the near approach of the wheat harvest, occasioned the reduction.

18 June. Reported the death of the Dauphin, heir to the throne, on 4 June.

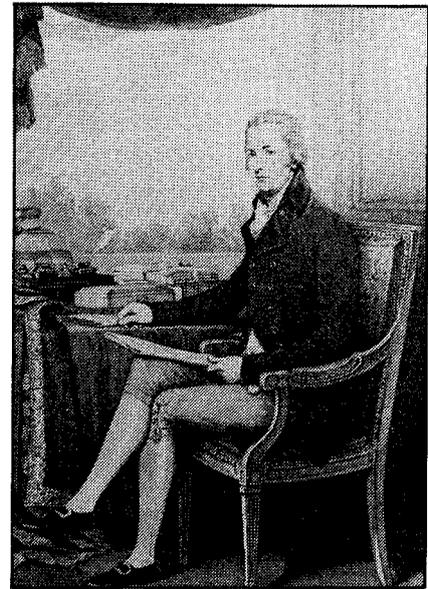
22 June. Reported extensively on events at the Estates General on 7 June, and the desertion by 56 nobles and 14 clergy of the 'feudal cause'.

From London, 15-17 June:

On the 25th of last month, a courtier sent by Count de Caraman, brought to the French court the agreeable news that all was peaceable at Marseilles, and that the people had laid down their arms. One of the chiefs of the insurgents was living, and five others, who were obliged to assist at the execution, were sent to the galleys for life. They all made 'amende honourable' before the church of Notre Dame.

25 June. London, 18-19 June: The address from the French House of Commons to the king, 6 June, was carried in full, and this report:

When our last dispatches left Paris,



William Pitt, drawn by H. Eldridge.

orders had been issued at the War Office for 6 more regiments of infantry to be marched immediately into that city.

29 June. Reported extensively on the Estates General, 15 June.

2 July. Reported the French Commons voting themselves the National Assembly of France, 17 June.

Dublin, 30 June:

Our last letters from France bring intelligence which must give pain to every person that country, labouring under a scarcity of corn, is now likely to be reduced to a famine. The inclemency of the weather has destroyed the husbandman's hopes, in various parts of the country, but particularly in Gascony. In Beauvois, there was not 6 day's sustenance.

6 July. London 27 June:

There is a tide in the affairs of nations as well as men, that seems to set human management and control at defiance. This is now evident in France at this moment, where the most powerful and absolute sovereign in the universe bids fair to be deprived at a blow of all his prerogatives, and reduced to the most rigid limitation of authority, where the influence of the church stands on the brink of annihilation, and where the most formidable Aristocracy is threatened with instantaneous dissolution, where, in short, an enslaved people become paramount, and dictate to the customary dictators.

Under the headline 'Storm in France', the damage to crops in Gascony was reported, as was the visit of the Mayor of Beauvois to Necker at Versailles and his arrival at 4 in the morning:

The minister desired that they would instantly return, and assure the people that a supply of corn should arrive before the expiration of 5 days, that should be sufficient for their consumption till the



first of July; and that in the mean time measures should be adopted for procuring a further supply.

Such is the condition of France; and yet the Commons of that kingdom in States General assembled, instead of devising means for the relief of the people, are debating about idle forms.

London, 26 June: The French, whose levity is proverbial, have for the moment lost sight of the proceedings of their States General, and are now busied in an important controversy, to determine whether the death of Mons. de Lamoignon was accidental or premeditated.

9 July. Under the headline 'Revolution in the Political construction of France. A Patriot King and the People Free!! Versailles, Saturday, June 27th', is an extensive report on the refusal of the commons to obey an order by the king to disperse, the joining of the commons by a majority of the Order of Clergy and some of the Nobles, the surrounding of the assembly by troops, the subsequent accession of the king to the assembly demands, and his order to the Order of Nobles to join the commons, ending:

When the people heard of this happy juncture, they repaired to the Palace, and made the air resound with the most joyful acclamations, which being heard by their Majesties, they presented themselves at the balcony, where they were witnesses to the happiness and the loyalty of the whole nation.

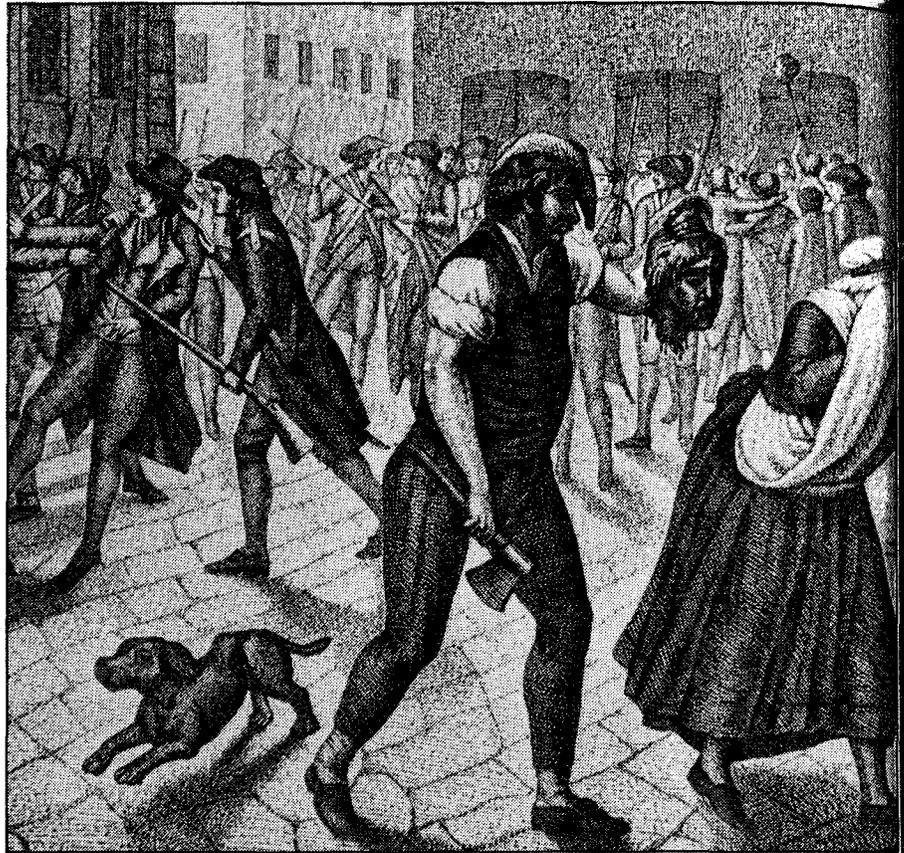
Elsewhere in the same issue is reported a request from the French ambassador to Prime Minister Pitt for permission to buy up and export flour to relieve 'the wretched state some of the French provinces are in for want of bread'. Also, from Dublin, a report on the abolition of internal customs in France. Most of the final page reported verbatim the speech of the king to the assembly, and his declaration of 35 articles, the subsequent refusal of the commons to disperse, the forced entry by 'an immense multitude of persons of all kinds' into the inner court of the Palace of Versailles on the rumour of the departure of the popular Minister, Necker, and the refusal of troops to fire on them when ordered. The report ends: 'Paris in full of alarms, joy, misery and rejoicings!!'

13 July. London. 6-7 July:

The Count d'Artois' conduct in ordering the soldiers to fire, has rendered him the most unpopular character in France. Had he been obeyed, that country would probably have been involved in all the horrors of a civil war - and the magnificent Palace of Versailles, the boast of the nation, would probably ere this have been reduced to ashes.

The French have sent out very large orders to America for corn, to be sent to France with all possible expedition.

London, 7 July: Our government, after making the necessary inquiry concerning



When Lyon was recaptured by the revolutionary forces, savage repression followed.

the state of corn in Great Britain, have given the French ambassador for answer, that they cannot with prudence permit the exportation of 20,000 sacks of flour applied for.

Also reported was a change of mind by the king regarding the assembly and, under the heading, 'Convulsions in France,' the assembly's reaction was also given. The report stated:

The king will not suffer things to remain long in their present state, as can be seen from the marching of 30,000 troops from Lorraine to Paris, making a garrison of 50,000 there ... it is believed that his majesty has not yet abandoned the idea of enforcing his former resolutions.

16 July. Reports from the National Assembly, 2 July, and from the British Commons on their inability to supply flour.

A report from Lord Elgin, who returned from Paris, on 7 July, confirms tumults in the provinces:

At Metz, the dearth of flour was such that the people, driven by hunger and despair, collected in great bodies, and attacked the houses of several persons whom they suspected of hoarding meal. The governor drew out two French regiments, and having furnished them with ammunition, ordered them to act against the mob, but they refused. The Governor ordered them back to their quarters, but without taking from them the ammunition. Two German regiments were then brought out, which roused the

indignation of the national troops, who burst from their quarters, and joined the mob. A dreadful havoc was the consequence. Upwards of 1000 men on each side were killed, and at length the German regiments were overpowered. The Governor escaped in time from the fury of the populace.

Versailles and Paris, when the last express came away, were both fortified and exhibited one general scene of the most dreadful confusion. The Swiss guards have fired on a part of the mob who were attempting to destroy an hotel; the consequence of which is, that a general insurrection, in which many of the native soldiery have a share, has absolutely taken place. The regiment of Navarre is reported to have rebelled. The most gross and indecent caricatures are handed about of the king and queen, and the most atrocious liberties taken with their characters.

20 July. London, 10 July:

The farms this year, all along the Seine, and through the northwest of France, again look ill. Germany and Holland offer little surplus but of oats. At Constantinople also, usually a great granary, the war has forbidden all further exports. The only hope of supply is from England, and that hope is for the present, at least, done away with by the decision of the Committee to the House of Commons.

The Swiss guards behaved in a very becoming manner, on the late trying

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Agitation by the 'sans-culottes' and 'red caps' demanded a remedy for economic distress.

occasion. Count d'Artois went up to the Count d'Affry, the colonel of the Swiss guards, and ordered him to command his men to fire. The patriotic Swiss immediately answered, 'The Swiss guards never fire till the French guards have'. On which d'Artois turned to the latter, and bade the commanding officer to fire upon the people. This noble regiment, instead of firing, ordered their firelocks, which the Swiss did also with the greatest alacrity. The laudable conduct of these two regiments has perhaps saved France from the horrors of a civil war.

When the French guards, that had been put under arrest for the late affairs, were freed by the people, about 40 others were delivered at the same time, who had been in custody, some 15 years, some 20, for various military offences. This deliverance was effected with good humour, and without the least disorder. There are certain accounts of a tumult having happened at Lyons, in which some lives were lost; a mob assembled to the amount of about 2,000 persons, and attacked the house of the chief magistrate, which they attempted to pillage, but were prevented by the city militia. On the night of 1st, a mob attacked one of the government offices and were repulsed after having had 4 men killed, about 20 wounded, and near the same number committed to prison. Paris is at this time supplied with corn and flour by means of post-horses, of which relays are kept on the road between the capital and the seaports.

23 July. This issue contained lengthy reports from the London papers of 16-17 July, under the headline 'Civil Commotion in Paris. Authentic Par-

ticulars', reporting events of 12 July, the dismissal of Necker by the king, his determination on coercion, riots against the king's foreign troops, the departure of some of the nobles to England, demands by French troops for better pay and conditions, and defections by troops from the king:

The Americans have had a profitable trade with France, from the scarcity of corn—their gains are computed at 100%. If the commotions of France are nursed into vigour, it will be well for England—her grandeur may thence be enlarged, and her commerce extended! The French king has requested the aid of England:—our Charles 1 made a like demand of France, and he lost his head!

It appears now that 20,000 sacks of corn, which the French government requested of ours, was for the support of the army. This our ministers were not aware of; and if there had not been a scarcity here, the supply would have been freely offered. As friends of liberty, we should therefore rejoice that we have been in want ourselves.

Those gentlemen who are in the habit of reading attentively our plain political observations, may probably remember that, some months ago, was stated that matters were come to that pass between the king and the people of France, that all would depend on what part the army would take in the crisis of the struggle, and that must ultimately give the casting, the decisive vote on the question 'whether the French are to be a free people or not'. Things have gradually come to that pass! — and the army have decided in a few minutes! . . . The year 1789 will be to the French now, what the memorable era of 1688 has been to Great Britain for a century past, and will

probably be referred to with as much honest pride and native dignity by French, as the latter has been by Englishmen.

27 July. Extensive reports from Paris, 13 July, of soldiers coming into Paris and joining the citizens, who were collecting money for them. 'Within the last fortnight the barbarous ferocity of the Parisian mob has arisen to an unparalleled height. Their wanted gentleness and urbanity of manners is no more'.

From Le Havre was reported an attack by a crowd on waggons of flour heading for Paris — 'the distresses of the poor are beyond all belief'

The king was reported as uncertain:

At one time he resolved to head his army against his rebellious subjects; at another, to make a precipitate retreat to Spain. Swiss troops received orders from home 'not to act against the natives of France, so that the Irish Brigade alone continues to steady the king'.

A letter from an Englishman in Paris reported 'that the famine is arrived at so great a height, as to render it almost impossible for the poor to get bread; for my small family that one article stands me in a guinea a week!'

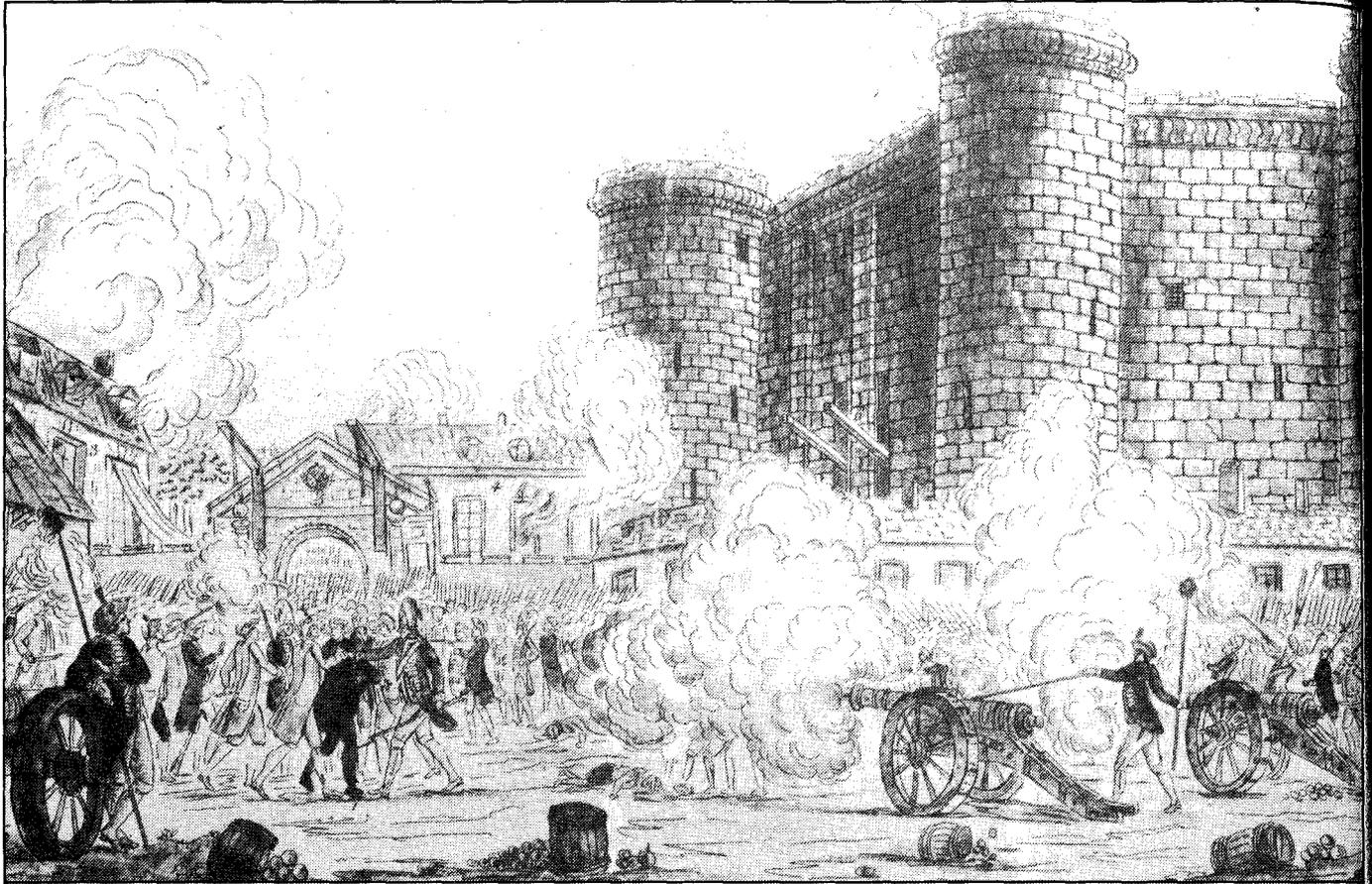
This issue also carried, by report of 22 July, the storming of the Bastille and release of the prisoners 'among which number was Lord Mazarine, an Irish nobleman, who had been confined for debt for 30 years'. The report continued:

Normandy, the granary of France, as far as it grows grain, is entirely emptied. From Paris to Pontoise, and from thence to Rouen and Havre, the prospects are deplorable — the mills all stand still — the factors have no store — and what is worse, the farmers have little hope upon their ground.

By a gentleman lately come from Paris we learn, that the French king seems as yet but little affected with the troubles of his kingdom, his great embon point, or rather corpulence, still continues, nor has he lessened his daily rations of three hearty meals, and six bottles of Chambertin Burgundy.

30 July. Most of this issue was devoted to events in France, and reflections on the Revolution. One correspondent, under the headline 'Some Reflections of the Distracted Politics of France', observed: 'Whilst our enemies are at war amongst themselves, they have neither the leisure nor power for operations that may prove injurious to our interests'. He foresaw large scale immigration of poor French to England,

which would furnish more hands for manufacturing all the commodities of life . . . We can dispeople an hostile kingdom without the expenses of war; and surely we shall have no objection to naturalise even our enemies, or make them participant of those fruits, and of that harvest, to which they cheerfully contribute their mutual labour.



The attack on the Bastille, with the white flag of surrender on the battlements at the top of the picture. On the left is the governor, de Launay, being taken away under arrest; he was later attacked and beheaded by the angry crowd.

Mr. White, who was found in a dungeon of the Bastille, had been in that prison for 27 years; his beard was down to his knees; and when he was led into the presence of the Duke of Dorset, he exhibited a gloomy reality of the picture d Uglino at Knowle.

From a letter of a Dublin gentleman in Paris, 18 July:

During the late commotions in Paris, a young man, a native of this country (Ireland), who is a student in the Irish College of that city, distinguished himself in a very particular manner. Being a perfect master of the French language, and possessing an uncommon flow of eloquence, together with all the graces of oratory, every evening he harangued the populace in the different public places of the capital, pointing out to them their natural rights as men, and animating them in the most forcible manner, to assert their well founded claims to freedom and independence. One evening, in the midst of an animated oration, a party of Marechauffe (or police) attempted to take him into custody, but the populace attacked them with such fury as made them make a precipitate retreat, and the young student was carried in triumph to the college, amidst the acclamation and applause of the multitude.

3 August. Again, this issue contains mostly reports on events in France. The

London Gazette is quoted from Paris, 20 July:

Everything is now quiet in the capital. The Militia perform the duty of the Police so effectually as to prevent every species of robbery and pillage.

The intention of the French to build their Hall for the National Assembly on the space where the Bastille lately stood is realizing the allegory of Freedom putting her foot on the rock of Tyranny.

The Revolution in France was conducted with such a systematic degree of regularity and design, as must plainly evince, that there were some very principal personages at the bottom, who privately directed and urged on the previous measures, 'til the design became ripe for execution.

Reports from Paris, 29 July, detailed executions of hoarders of flour, and the flight of aristocratic families to Brussels.

This issue had an editorial on the Revolution:

The French Monarchy may justly thank their own weak policy in teaching, from the American war, multitudes of their soldiers to fight for liberty, for that momentous revolution, which hath taken place in their empire. It is not unlikely but that thousands of their troops, who taught others to be free, had determined in the same moment no longer to be themselves slaves. The thought was natural, and the execution of the great work attended with much less difficulty than might at first be imagined. The

whole nation caught the flame of freedom, and in an instant, almost, effected a revolution, that will both astonish and alarm European Potentates in general.

So great in the demand abroad for the true effence of the British constitution, that if the rage continues, it is feared we shall not be able to retain sufficient for home consumption!

6 August This issue reported mob executions in Paris on 27 July, and the gathering of royalist forces in Flanders.

10 August. This issue contained a detailed description of the Bastille by Mr. Howard, reports from the National Assembly committee for forming a constitution, provincial uprisings, and a massacre of people by the Lord of Quinsay.

The back page carried an article headed: 'French Revolution. Retrospect to the Causes!', which noted the causes as the recall of parliament, the neglect of the army by the king and his family, the beggaring of the finances by establishing a navy, the loss of exports by the imitation, and improvement, of French manufactures abroad, and the perception by the people of 'want of economy in the Royal Family' as the cause of deficiencies in the exchequer.

Thus, *Limerick Chronicle* readers in 1789 were given full and accurate reports on the Revolution and its fall-out.