



SOME RECOLLECTIONS

by W.W. Gleeson

The 4 August, 1914 - the date of outbreak of the Great War - is a day I remember only too well, for I was carried in the arms of Jack ('Bolger') Quilligan to nearby Barrington's Hospital, as a 'first casualty', having been struck over the right eye (the mark of which I still bear), by a stone 'fired' at me by my pal Joe Shanahan. I can still recall a kind neighbour, Mrs. Ellen Bourke, rather excitedly shouting to those people nearby, 'Take him to Barrington's immediately before he expires!' The good woman need not have worried, for, although I was only in my ninth year, I was made of stern enough stuff, and my injured eye was duly patched at the hospital.

But that cry of anguish, 'Take him (or her) to Barrington's!', continued down the years, not alone in the vicinity of the medical institution itself, but far beyond its confines, into County Limerick, County Clare, North Tipperary and North Kerry to the very borders of the Mid-Western region of which Limerick city is the capital.

Michael Hogan, the Bard of Thomond, had many links with Barrington's. He tells us in his unpublished memoirs that in January, 1859, he and his wife Nan went to live 'in a roomy cellar in Nicholas Street', a few hundred yards from the hospital; 'We liked it first rate and engaged it, and it was here my fame and fortune began to grow'.

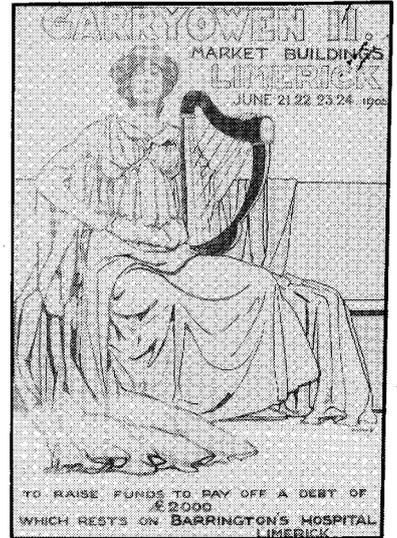
However, the all too familiar pattern of Hogan's unhappy life soon asserted itself. Here is his comic description of an encounter with two not-so-strong

lawmen, who, like so many more casualties before and after them, wound up in Barrington's:

'In the summer of 1862, I got myself into a quagmire of trouble about loan money which I had secured to oblige a neighbour. The sum was left unpaid by the borrower, and the lender - a hungry pettifogging vampire - let loose the helldogs of the law at my throat. The day and the scene is yet before my eyes, when two gallows-looking bailiffs came into Valhalla to distraint me. They appeared like the procureur of anti-Christ. They carried out all my little things on the side of the street, while Nannie was crying bitterly, and I was standing outside the door mutely looking on.

I saw the stalworth amazons of Nicholas Street gathering into a silent mass, like a thunder cloud. I saw the spirit of battle kindling in their crimson faces, while the ominous throng grew denser; but no more signal was made until the bailiffs commenced to lift the things on to the car.

Then a sudden angry yell resounded thro' the street, and a charging brigade of war-goddesses fell like a hurricane on the amazed bailiffs. They were knocked down - they were kicked like footballs - leaped upon - dragged like dead dogs through the sinks, and in less than two minutes one would think them more like



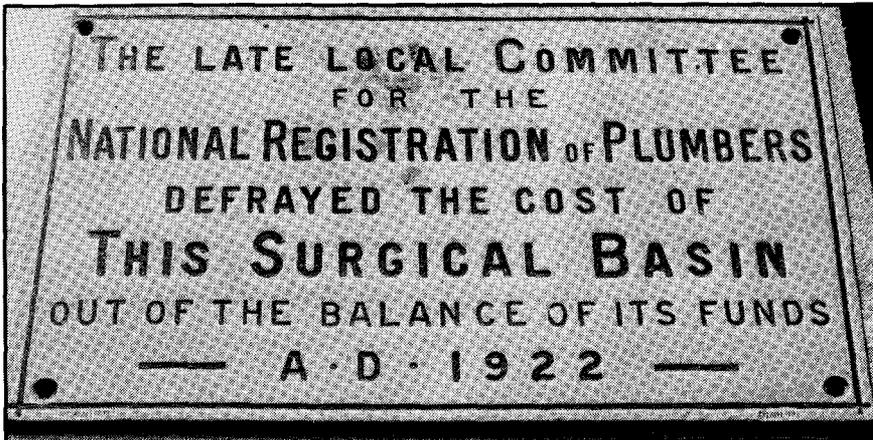
'Garryowen II' poster, June, 1905 to meet a £2,000 debt.

shapeless masses of mud and blood than anything resembling human form. And while the conflict was raging another section of the brigade was employed at rescuing my chattels by running away with them to places of safety. But I certainly felt delighted at the novel display of feminine faith and valour so boldly exhibited in my interest on that day.

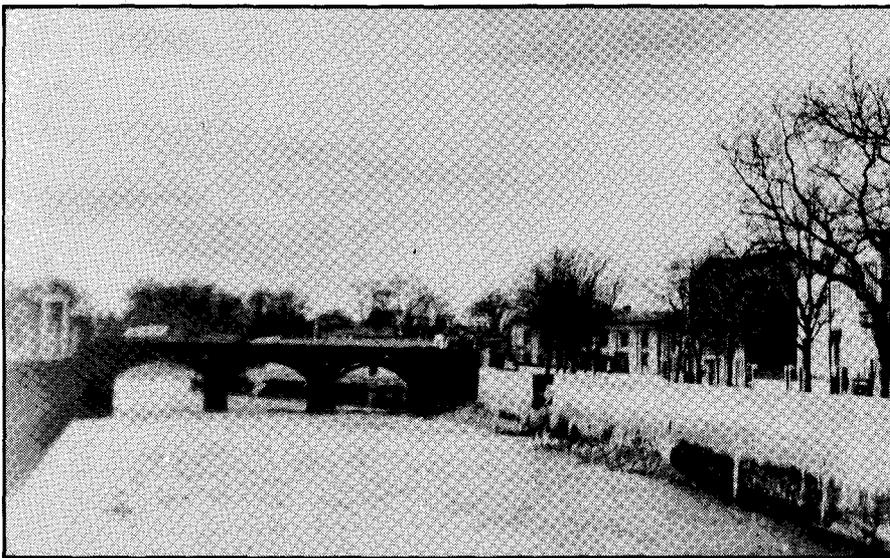
The car which the sons of anti-Christ - those bailiffs brought to carry away my effects, was smashed into smithereens - and the unfortunate bailiffs themselves were no better. They were rescued from total destruction by the police, and carried



At 'Garryowen I' 1895



Appreciation plaque to the Committee for the National Registration of Plumbers, 1922.



Mathew Bridge and George's Quay, in the 1940s.

bruised, battered and bleeding to Barrington's Hospital. With grateful courtesy I warmly thanked those warlike women for their work of love, and I need hardly say that a bailiff never troubled me again in the same quarter!

Yes, it can be truthfully said that bailiff and bankrupt were treated without fear or favour at the hospital.

To revert to the Great War: I remember seeing one and sometimes two Royal Army Medical Corps ambulance vans on their way to Barrington's with wounded Allied soldiers - English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh - to recuperate. Those who recovered were pronounced medically fit for duty, and were hurriedly despatched to their bases in Britain. The few who died were buried in the military cemetery at the Island Field - now St. Mary's Park.

In 1922/3, our first year of self-government, members of the National and Irregular Armies, whether wounded or killed during the Civil War, were despatched to Barrington's Hospital for immediate attention or *post-mortem*.

My next association with Barrington's goes back to the summer of 1925 when I

was operated on for a serious neck injury, the result of having fallen twenty feet from an aerial railway that spanned the Abbey River during carnival-time at the Athlunkard Boat Club. Of course I recovered, notwithstanding having bled profusely through nose, mouth and ears,

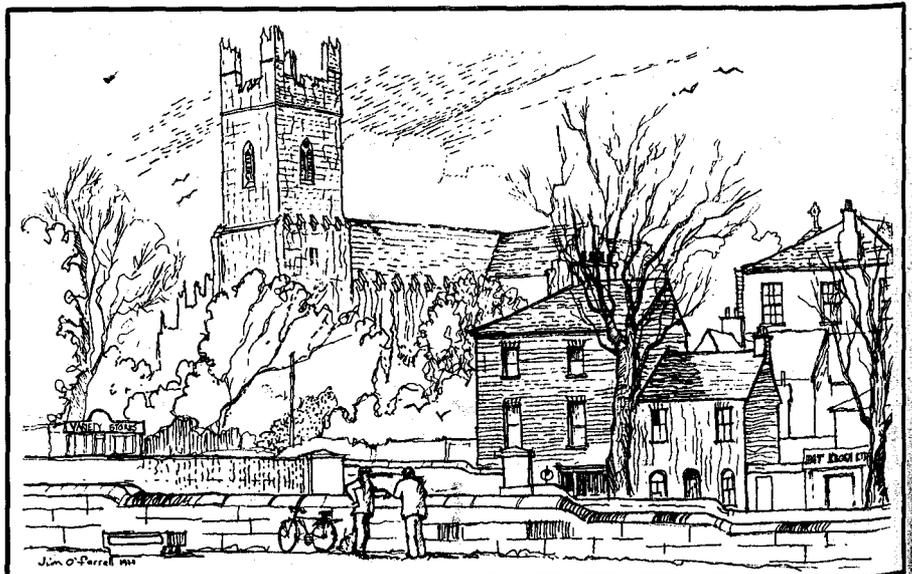
at the same time seeing stars of various hues till bedtime that evening.

On reflection, soon after my discharge from Barrington's, it occurred to me that after what had been done for me by doctors and nurses during my three weeks' stay, I could never adequately repay the hospital for its dedicated medical treatment and innate kindness shown me. Scarcely had I settled down when the urge to return once again to Barrington's gripped me - this time as a visitor; and so for the next 63 years I almost became part of the furniture itself, so regular were my visits there. Later the County Infirmary, St. John's Hospital, the Union (now St. Camillus Hospital) were added to my list.

Came the year 1939 and the Second World War. In the third year of our 'Emergency', on Tuesday 3 April, 1941, Sean MacEntee, Minister for Health, speaking on Radio Eireann, made an impassioned appeal to all listeners between the ages of 18 and 65 to become blood donors by firstly reporting to their local branch of the Red Cross before donating at the nearest hospital. On the following morning, I donated my first pint of blood at Barrington's Hospital.

Little did I know, as I set out for the hospital, that I had opened up a whole new and rewarding chapter in my life. For the next 30 years, and having 'bled' in the four provinces of Ireland, Northwich (Lancashire), Liverpool and Tiber Island, Rome, as a voluntary donor, I went on to give 119 pints of blood, pure and unadulterated!

My seventy-four years' relationship with the hospital came to an abrupt end earlier this year when, like a bolt from the blue, came the staggering news, direct from the Government, 'Barrington's must close on 31st March 1988' - and, sadly, close it duly did! The fine hospital, the loyal staff, the 160 years of Limerick medical history, and all that Barrington's represented, certainly deserved better.



St. Mary's Cathedral, from a drawing by Jim O'Farrell.