

Patrick J. Kearney

Limerick and the Colleges, Ireland, Bill

Patrick Kearney, M.A., H.D.E., is Principal of Scoil Bhríde Naofa in Limerick. This present article is the second of two articles relating to the establishment of the Queen's Colleges in Ireland. It deals specifically with the campaign in Limerick during the period 1844-1845 to have one of the Colleges sited there.

The brave efforts of William Smith O'Brien and others during the period 1838-1839 to establish a definite claim for Limerick as a site for one of the proposed Queen's Colleges¹ lost much of its momentum as a consequence of O'Brien's political involvement with the Repeal Association which he joined in October 1843. O'Connell and others had been imprisoned on charges of seditious conspiracy as a result of the 'monster' meetings at Clontarf.² During the State trials that ensued O'Connell was rendered politically inactive and Smith O'Brien was formally appointed deputy leader of the movement. He did, however, contribute to the debate in Parliament in May 1845 when the Bill for the Establishment of Academical Institutions was introduced by Sir James Graham.

Thomas Wyse remained clear of the Repeal Association and did not support O'Connell except in the Catholic agitation. He was, therefore, free to pursue matters concerning education and he persisted steadily with the Colleges scheme at Westminster. In July 1844, on the occasion of the House going into Committee for a grant to Maynooth College, Wyse urged the necessity of a solution of the Irish colleges question. In reply Sir Robert Peel admitted the defects of which he complained, but stated that the subject was one which already occupied the consideration of Ministers and to which the attention of the new Viceroy, Lord Heytesbury, would be immediately directed. Peel further observed that at an early period of the next session the Government would strive to increase the means of academical education in Ireland.³ These declared intentions were heartily welcomed in Cork and the committee there organised a meeting for 13 November 1844. They again had a circular printed and again titled themselves 'The Munster Provincial College Committee'. They sent a copy of the circular to many of the more influential people both in Cork and in the neighbouring counties. They also sent a copy for publication to the editors of

newspapers in the South of Ireland.⁴ James Roche was still their Chairman while William Clear and D. B. Bullen were joint secretaries and the circular itself was dated 26 October 1844.

A letter from James Roche and a copy of the circular were forwarded to the Limerick Corporation and were discussed by the Mayor W. J. Geary and the members of the Town Council at their Quarterly meeting which was held on 1 November.⁵ It was at this stage that the Mayor and members of Limerick Town Council became actively involved in the campaign to have one of the proposed Colleges established in Limerick. Roche sought the co-operation of the Town Council; however, it was agreed that the Mayor should return an answer to the effect that the extension of Collegiate education was most valuable and desirable, but that in applying to Parliament, it was hoped the interests of the city of Limerick would not be overlooked. It was unlikely that Smith O'Brien would receive a circular in view of his previous attitude, but it is clear also that he did nothing now to bring together the Limerick Committee of 1839 and organise a meeting in the city. The truth was that he was now totally occupied with the affairs and business of the Repeal Association. However, Lord Monteaule did reply from Mount Trenchard to Roche and stated:

'If I possibly can I shall attend your meeting as I consider the object to be one of the most interesting and important questions to which the attention of the Government can be called, and from the very satisfactory and liberal statements made by Sir Robert Peel during the last session I feel we may entertain the most sanguine expectations of success.'

Monteaule's support must have been most welcome to the Cork Committee as he was one of the most influential Limerick men of that period and though now retired from active politics, he still enjoyed immense respect in the area.

Another who gave support to the proposed scheme was the Catholic Bishop of Limerick, Dr. John Ryan. His letter which was published in a local newspaper was most favourable 'concurring in every sentiment put forth in the circular'. He regretted his inability to attend the meeting due to the fact that he had to attend the Annual Meeting of the Bishops in Dublin on 11 November. Nevertheless he gave them permission 'to make any use of my name in connection with this undertaking you may deem useful to the end in view.'⁷ Dr. Ryan's concurrence may be interpreted by some as being hasty since he would have had an ideal opportunity to discuss the matter at the forthcoming Episcopal meeting.

The meeting went ahead at Cork and the principal speaker was Thomas Wyse. In his speech he reviewed the whole course of his of fourteen year campaign. It is clear from this speech that he fully expected Cork to be the site of the proposed College and indeed he went on to advise the people of Cork as to how their new College should be administered.⁸

Limerick remained inactive until after the Bill for the establishment of Academical Institutions was introduced into Parliament by Sir James Graham on 9 May 1845. Graham stated that there would be three colleges and that Cork would be a natural site for the college for the South of Ireland. Though he would not pledge himself to the precise spot, he further thought that Limerick or

Galway would be very proper places for the establishment of another of these colleges.⁹ Cork was now assured of getting one of the Colleges, and next a decision had to be made between Limerick and Galway. A special meeting of the Limerick Town Council was held on 12 May¹⁰ at which Dr. William Griffin adverted to the Bill introduced by Sir James Graham. He regretted that the honourable member did not intimate his intention of having four instead of three academies. He proposed that a memorial to the Government be prepared praying that one of the collegiate institutions now contemplated for this country be placed in the City of Limerick. It was also proposed that prominent gentlemen in the city and county be requested to assist, notably the Marquis of Lansdowne, Earl of Clare, Lord Monteaule, the Earl of Dunraven and the Earl of Limerick, together with the county and city Members of Parliament. The fact that Dunraven was now asked to support the claim of Limerick is interesting in the light of his earlier stand.

A newspaper editorial comment of the following day argued that Limerick had a far greater claim for a college than Galway, being a city of commerce, revenue and population far beyond Galway, 'a town situate upon a point of the extreme western coast and remote from general access.'¹¹ The editorial further stated that the Mayor, W. J. Geary and the Catholic Bishop of Limerick Dr. Ryan waited on William Smith O'Brien, M.P., but that they found that he, 'originally the eager advocate for such an institution, declined moving in the business without the sanction of Mr. O'Connell.' O'Connell, meanwhile, made his position clear at a meeting of the Repeal Association in Dublin on 12 May.¹² He condemned the colleges, in a phrase borrowed from Sir Robert Inglis, as 'a gigantic scheme of Godless education.' Although O'Brien failed to act for the establishing of a college in Limerick he disagreed with O'Connell and the others who were against the establishment of the colleges. He wrote a letter to this effect to the Secretary of the Repeal Association in which he states, 'I have no hesitation in saying that I regard the extension of Academical Education as a benefit, the value of which to Ireland cannot be exaggerated.'¹³ He was in agreement also with the non-denominational aspect of the proposed colleges. He had reservations, however, which were genuine and deeply held. He continues:

'I trust that we shall concur in declaring that some provision ought to be made for the religious instruction of the students in the Faith which they respectfully profess, and that adequate guarantee should be afforded against attempts to undermine their religious beliefs.

'We shall also, I hope, concur in resisting any arrangements with regard to the appointment of the professors which shall place at the disposal of the Executive increased means of political corruption.'

He voiced both these objections in later debates in Parliament.

The Limerick Town Council and other interested parties advanced the campaign for a Limerick college. The Commissioners of St. Michael's Parish, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Limerick Institution forwarded memorials to Sir Robert Peel and Sir James Graham, requesting that Limerick be determined upon as a location for one of the colleges about to be established in Ireland.¹⁴ The Limerick Town Council met on 27 May and adopted the Memorial to Sir Robert Peel. They appointed a deputation consisting of the

Mayor, Sir Richard Franklin, the Town Clerk, Mr. J. F. Raleigh and Mr. F. J. O'Neill, to proceed to London, to confer with the noblemen and gentlemen of the county and city at present there and to wait on Sir Robert Peel with the memorial.¹⁵ The Memorial dwelt on the desirability of selecting Limerick, it being the centre of an immense population, whose inhabitants were most anxious for academical education.¹⁶ It mentioned the facilities for Science, Medicine and Agriculture which Limerick already possessed. In an obvious reference to Galway it states:

'It is far from the desire of your Memorialists to deprive other localities of those educational advantages for which they are so exceedingly anxious themselves, but they submit if Government are not yet prepared to establish a fourth College in Ireland, which is generally thought to be necessary, the claims of Limerick are on every account too pressing to be postponed. They therefore pray that you will be pleased to fix on that City as a site for one of the proposed Colleges.'¹⁷

The people of Galway and Connacht in general were active in the matter also. In the *Limerick Chronicle* of 28 May there is a report of a deputation, headed by the Marquises of Sligo and Clanrickarde, having an interview with Sir Robert Peel to impress on him the necessity of establishing a college at Galway.

The deputation from the Limerick Town Council proceeded to London, where they were joined by the city and county noblemen and gentlemen. They had an interview on 4 June with Sir James Graham on the subject of the selection of Limerick. The members of the deputation were: The Marquis of Lansdowne, the Earl of Clare, the Earl of Dunraven, Lord Monteagle, Col. the Hon. R. Fitzgibbon, the Mayor of Limerick, John O'Brien, M.P., Samuel Dickson, F. W. Russell, Matthew Barrington, Charles W. Williams, James Harvey, and the Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce.¹⁸ The petitions and memorials having been presented, Lords Lansdowne, Clare and Monteagle and the Mayor of Limerick fully brought before him the claims of Limerick. Sir James replied that, though the claims of so considerable a city as Limerick could not escape the attention of Government, it was premature in the present state of the question to hold forth anything approaching a promise. In answer to a suggestion from Mr. John O'Brien, M.P. for the City of Limerick that a fourth College might be necessary, Sir James stated that the sum required from Parliament would in the opinion of the Government be inadequate for the establishment of more than three colleges.¹⁹ The deputation retired quite pleased with the courtesy and attention accorded to them by Sir James Graham and were, it appears, sanguine of ultimate success. At a meeting of the Town Council on 24 June, 1845 the Mayor, W. J. Geary, reported as follows:

'Gentlemen,

'In compliance with the Resolution of Council I proceeded to London accompanied by Mr. O'Neill and had the honor to submit to Sir Robert Peel and Sir James Graham the Memorial adopted by you, which claimed for Limerick the benefits of being selected as the site of one of the Academic Colleges which Her Majesty's Government propose erecting in Ireland.

'We were accompanied on the occasion by Lords Lansdowne, Clare, Dunraven, Monteagle, Hon. Col. Fitzgibbon, John O'Brien, M.P., Samuel Dickson, Matthew Barrington, James Harvey, Charles W. Williams, Francis Russell.

'The claims of Limerick were most ably put forward by the deputation, but more particularly so by Lords Clare and Monteagle and Mr. John O'Brien.

'After a very lengthened discussion Sir James Graham appraised the Deputation that the claims of Limerick, represented as they were by so highly respectable a deputation and sustained by arguments so strong as those put forward, would be sure to receive the most anxious and mature consideration of Her Majesty's Government.

'To the deputation the interview appeared to have been very satisfactory and we may at least draw the conclusion from it with some certainty that under any circumstances the claims of Limerick to a College, cannot be deferred to any distant period.'²⁰

The Catholic bishops had met at this stage in Dublin. This meeting took place on 21 May and was presided over by Dr. Murray, Archbishop of Dublin.²¹ A minority, led by Archbishop Crolly of Armagh and Dr. Murray, which also included Dr. Ryan of Limerick, were inclined to accept the colleges. The majority, under Archbishop MacHale of Tuam, favoured a demand for purely Catholic colleges. The outcome was a compromise. A Memorial was forwarded to the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Heytesbury, accepting the colleges, but with some radical changes which would alter their non-denominational character.

William Smith O'Brien spoke in the House on 13 June. Sir James Graham moved that the House should resolve into passing a Resolution on which to found a grant necessary for the formation of Colleges in Ireland. While agreeing with the proposed measures and avowing himself an advocate of the system of mixed education, he (W. S. O'Brien) had grave reservations concerning the appointment of professors and the lack of provision for religious instruction.²² He further stated that his constituents were extremely anxious upon the subject and were desirous that such an institution should be established. He confessed, however, that he would rather forego all the advantages which these institutions promised to the country, should his objections go unheeded. He felt that he spoke for the majority of the Irish people on these issues.²³ O'Brien's reservations were noted by the House, but he was verbally attacked by some of the more extreme members, notably Mr. Colquhoun and Sir Robert Inglis. The former was particularly vindictive when he spoke of O'Brien as 'He, who came fresh from Conciliation Hall—He, who had abandoned his duty in that House in order to carry on that most mischievous agitation in Ireland.'²⁴ O'Brien's defence was able and controlled. However, the personal nature of the debate lessened the influence of his views on the House.

O'Brien delivered a fine speech to the House on the same subject on 30 June. On this occasion he reiterated his objection to the Bill, while at the same time putting forward positive suggestions to make it more acceptable. He suggested that the Government might well consider the opinion of the Catholic bishops with reference to the appointment of a Catholic chaplain in each of the colleges, as expressed in their Memorial. With regard to the appointment of professors he thought it desirable that the initial appointments be made on the recommendations of a board, whose members should be named in the Bill and a majority of whom should be Catholics. For future appointments he said that the professoriate of each

college might, 'after public examination', recommend the appointments. In this speech he also urged the Government to bring forward a measure for opening the fellowships and scholarships of Trinity College to Catholics.²⁵

Limerick still persisted in its efforts and a Memorial from a citizen named Samuel Dickson was presented by Captain Gladstone, M.P., to Sir James Graham.²⁶ Dickson had been a member of the deputation who interviewed Sir James on 4 June. The memorial stated the advantages Limerick had over Galway and highlighted the diverging views held by Dr. MacHale, Archbishop of Tuam, and Dr. Ryan, Bishop of Limerick. It read:

'Memorialist refers you to a recent letter from Dr. MacHale, R.C. Archbishop of Tuam, to Sir Robert Peel, denouncing those colleges, and showing clearly, that should one be established in Galway, his district, it must be a decided failure there whereas, Dr. Ryan, the highly respectable R.C. Bishop of Limerick, was not only one of the applicants for such a college in 1839, but still is a great advocate to have one on Limerick where its success is certain.'²⁷

A further Memorial was transmitted to Sir Robert Peel during the first week of September which was titled, 'The Memorial of the Inhabitants of Limerick and its Vicinity.'²⁸ It set forth the advantages possessed by Limerick in much the same sequence as the earlier Memorial of the Limerick Corporation. It did make a further point when it mentioned the building of railroads. It read:

'The approaching speed of railroads, too, Sir, will evidently render even the most remote parts of Connacht within three or four hours drive of Limerick, in fact to be accomplished between bedrise and breakfast.'

The people of Galway were by now very active in the matter. A public meeting was held on 7 August and a deputation met the Lord Lieutenant on the subject. The people of Tuam 'under the nose of its formidable archbishop'²⁹ also supported the claim of Connacht for a college.

However, time was fast running out on the matter of location. The Bill itself received the royal assent on 31 July. Two inspectors from the Board of Works, Radcliffe and Owen, inspected several sites in Cork on Monday 25 August and then left for Galway.³⁰ They did not visit Limerick and it must be assumed that by this date the choice as to the location of the colleges had been made. In the *Limerick Chronicle* there was a report of a letter written by the Marquis of Clanrickarde to a friend (not named) in Galway, stating that he had interviewed the Lord Lieutenant on the subject of the claim of that town to the site of a Provincial College. The Marquis briefly observed that 'I think His Excellency's language gives every reason to be confident that Galway will be the site.'³¹ This confidence was not misplaced since by 1 October, 'the Government had no longer any serious doubt about Belfast, Cork and Galway as the seats of the three colleges.'³²

Thus, Limerick's claim failed in the end. The campaign for a college had endured for seven years (1838-1845) and although the outcome was unsatisfactory, nevertheless, the present writer concludes that the noblemen, politicians and citizens who were actively associated with the campaign endeavoured gallantly to achieve their goal. It would appear that the Government was

guided in its final choice by the Report of the Select Committee, that: 'one college at least of the description, in each of the four provinces of Ireland . . . be so established.'³³ Since, in fact, only three colleges were provided for and since Cork and not Limerick secured the Munster site, it was only fair, under the terms of the Report, that Galway should gain the western college.

A71725

REFERENCES

1. Patrick Kearney, 'William Smith O'Brien, Limerick and the Queen's Colleges,' *Oideas*, No. 27, Spring 1983, pp. 5-17.
2. F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, London 1971, p. 107.
3. Hansard, 3, cxlii, 1122-35.
4. *Limerick Chronicle*, 2 Nov. 1844 (Provincial College).
5. *Ibid.*
6. Montegale to Roche, 29 Oct. 1844, (*Limerick Chronicle*, 6 Nov. 1844).
7. Ryan and Roche, 28 Oct. 1844, (*Limerick Chronicle*, 2 Nov. 1844).
8. James Johnston Auchmuty, *Irish Education*, Dublin, 1937, p. 113.
9. Hansard, third Series, Vol. LXXX, 356-410. The original title of the Bill was "Academical Institutions, Ireland, Bill", but at the Committee stage it was altered to "Colleges, Ireland, Bill". *Ibid.*, Vol. LXXXI, p. 1037.
10. Minutes of Meetings, Limerick Town Council, 12 May, 1845, Limerick City Archives.
11. *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 May, 1845.
12. F. McGrath, *Newman's University, Idea and Reality*, Dublin, 1951, p. 44.
13. O'Brien to Ray, 15 May, 1845. (W. S. O'Brien papers).
14. *Limerick Chronicle*, 21 May, 1845.
15. Minutes of Meeting, Limerick Town Council, 27 May, 1845, Limerick City Archives.
16. Memorial of Limerick Corporation, 1845, (British Museum, Add. MS. 40567. f188).
17. *Ibid.*, for the full text of the Memorial see Appendix 1.
18. *Limerick Chronicle*, 7 June 1845.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Minutes of Meetings, Limerick Town Council, 24 June, 1845, Limerick City Archives.
21. McGrath, *Newman's University*, pp. 45, 47.
22. Hansard, 3, Vol. LXXXI, 482-499.
23. *Ibid.*, 484.
24. *Ibid.*, 485.
25. *Ibid.*, 1350-1353.
26. *Limerick Chronicle*, 2 Aug. 1845.
27. *Ibid.*, 6 Aug. 1845.

With reference to Dr. Ryan Begley says:

'Dr. Ryan was ever an advocate of progress in religion and education, and always supported a moderate guide like Dr. Murray of Dublin rather than the more uncompromising policy of Dr. MacHale, the great Archbishop of Tuam.'

(Rev. J. Begley, *The Diocese of Limerick*, Dublin 1938, Vol. 3, p. 504).

28. Ibid., 6 Sept., 1845.
29. T. W. Moody and J. C. Beckett, *Queen's Belfast, 1845-1945*, London, 1959, p. 20.
30. *Limerick Chronicle*, 27 Aug., 1845.
31. Ibid., 10 Sept., 1845.
32. Moody and Beckett, op. cit., p. 32.
33. *Report*, from the Select Committee on Foundation Schools and Education in Ireland, H. C. 1837-38, p. 76.