Late Mr. M. P. Riordan

Death sentence recalled

The death of Mr. Maurice P. Riordan, of 62 O'Connell Street, Limerick, which took place last weekend (writes W. W. Gleeson), will be remembered as one of the most vivid and exciting incidents in the Anglo-Irish War, in which the deceased was the central figure.

In the early summer of 1922 when the fighting was at its fiercest, four members of the Mid-Limerick Brigade, J.R.A., Tom Keane, Tom Scully and Henry Clancy at Ballinlough, and Timmy Murphy and Ned Punch at Kilconnell. They were former pensioners who had been transferred to the new (now Sarsfield) Barracks by Crossley tender, were beaten mercilessly by the Black and Tans, who, in their lust for blood, threw the pensioners on to the roadway after which they shot them to death. Keane was later executed for "levy of war against His Britannic Majesty," following a Drummond court-martial.

Murphy and Punch received rough treatment, too, after which they were court-martialled and sentenced to death. (Earlier on hearing of Keane being sentenced, Murphy offered his young colleague for the sentence, but the Judge adjourned the case.) At that time the late Canon Dwane was Administrator of St. Michael's, and Mr. Riordan was the High Sheriff. The ill-treatment of the pensioners, which, of course, was a breach of international law, was brought to the notice of the authorities, and immediately both the Black and Tans got a protest signed by some prominent citizens and proceeded to the New Barracks to submit same to the Chief. The Military Governor, however, refused to accept the documents.

The Military Governor, who was somewhat of a sabre-rattler, and inclined to extremes, at first refused to accept the documents, or transmit them to G.H.Q., but the High Sheriff and the Canon Riordan stood firm, the former remaining Colonel Cameron that as the King's High Sheriff he was a higher authority than even a military governor, and that the latter had no power to refuse to transmit any document presented to him.

Seeing that he was up against men of determination, Colonel Cameron became more amenable, and after a full discussion of the matter was practically admitted that there was justification for their demand, and as the finding of the local court martial had been sent by motor to G.H.Q., a few hours previously, with a formal request for permission to carry out the death sentence, the Colonel, in order that the documents submitted by Canon Dwane and Mr. Riordan would reach the Commander-In-Chief as soon as the findings of the court martial and be under consideration before them, ordered out a special train and there and then dispatched the papers by air to Dublin.

The result was that all the two faithful mediators could hope for. The Commander-In-Chief commuted the sentence to penal servitude for life, which, however, happily ended with freedom for the Colonel, and the pensioners were discharged.

In less than a year, and shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War, Mr. Riordan, a big surprise one day when a tall young man, dressed in the green uniform of the Free State soldier, with the rank of Bremer-Gefreiter, walked into his office in O'Connell St., Limerick. On rising from his seat to greet the visitor, Mr. Riordan exclaimed, "Who have I the pleasure of speaking to?" to which came the reply: "Timmy Murphy... you saved us from the firing squad!"

They shook hands warmly, a few words were spoken; but a deep debt of gratitude had been paid.

Driver fined, disqualified

A car that was bought for £25 and subsequently dis-