



Shortly before Lenihan became a member of the Corporation, a movement was initiated to erect a memorial to Daniel O'Connell in Limerick. Lenihan as an old admirer and personal friend of O'Connell naturally threw himself with a will into the movement; and in his newspaper he reminded his readers that Mr. Bianconi, while on a recent visit to Rome, had erected a commemorative tablet on the site where O'Connell's heart was buried, and urged his countrymen not to be outdone in generosity at home in Ireland. But while the movement to have O'Connell worthily commemorated was cumbersomely getting under way, another committee with apparently unlimited financial resources made a daring attempt to have erected in the Crescent a statue to commemorate a soldier, Lord Fitzgibbon, who was killed in the recent battle of Balaklava. The Fitzgibbon memorial committee actually secured this site from the Corporation, although Fitzgibbon's memory possessed no claims to so signal an honour from the citizens of Limerick. There does not seem to have been any positive ill-will against the character of the dead man. His family name was, however, tainted; for he was the grandson of John Fitzgibbon, first Earl of Clare, the too willing and efficient tool of Pitt in the achievement of the legislative union of 1800. There were Limerick folk still living to whom the sinister name was more than a mere memory.

The members of the O'Connell memorial committee now discovered, to their chagrin, that the best site in Limerick was to be set aside for a statue of a member of the detested family. Lenihan was one of the secretaries of the new committee, and he spared no pains in giving the Fitzgibbon project the fullest publicity in his own newspaper. There were angry debates in the council room of the Corporation. Members of the Fitzgibbon memorial committee moved a resolution in the corporation that the Crescent site be retained for their purpose in view of the Council's previous authorisation and added this 'patriotic' rider: "That this council sympathises fully and deeply with the gallant and glorious conduct of Lord Fitzgibbon and the men of Limerick and Clare who fell *in their country's cause* and in the defence of the peace of Europe and the liberty of the world". The great majority of the city fathers, however, were now wiser men than when they first allowed themselves to be stampeded over this Fitzgibbon memorial; so they rejected the resolution and henceforth the Crescent site was secured for the O'Connell memorial. The inauguration of the O'Connell statue took place on the 15 August 1857. Judging by the press reports of

# Maurice Lenihan:

## HISTORIAN OF LIMERICK

by Francis Finegan  
Part Two

### THE O'CONNELL TESTIMONIAL.

#### FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN.

An Appeal is now made by the "Ancient City of the Treaty" to the honest spirit, the undying gratitude, and the ever living patriotism of Clergy and People, to carry out a noble design, conceived some years ago, and allowed until now to remain inoperative from causes that could not be controlled. We allude to the

#### TESTIMONIAL TO THE GREAT O'CONNELL.

Every sentiment which Irishmen should cherish demands immediate, active, energetic co-operation in this glorious labour of duty and love.

O'CONNELL lived for the whole People. He broke the chains by which the Religion of the people was fettered. He opened up the portals of the Constitution to the Catholics of the British Empire. He gave to Irishmen a standing place in their native land. He aved the oppressor by the indomitable courage of his fearless heart; and he gave strength to the weak by showing them they had a protector in whose fidelity and strength they could repose their entire confidence. He infused self-respect and national spirit into the universal people; and whilst the wide world recognized and applauded his splendid toils on behalf of the liberties of mankind in general, Ireland, to which the eyes of all nations was turned, prided in hero and in her tribunes; and Limerick, above all, was foremost in recognizing his genius, his worth and his services, and in embracing him to her heart, at all times she proved the estimate she cherished of his princely nature. For it was in old Limerick O'Connell first commenced his ever memorable career for his country's regeneration.

We shall not dwell on the claims which the memory of the Illustrious Dead has on the deep affections of the People. He lived for the People; for the People he died. He obtained no favour from Government, though the highest places in the gift of Government were open to his ambition. And he died, far away from his native land, in Genoa, on his journey to Rome, resigning his Soul to God, his Heart to Rome, his Body to Ireland—that Soul we trust is now enrolled under everlasting Benediction—His mighty Heart has been enshrined in Rome by the munificent philanthropy of an adopted son of Ireland. Ireland has not yet discharged the debt she owes to her Matchless Champion and Unpurchasable Patriot.

Up then! Let us go on with the Great Work with manly hearts and willing minds. It is a Great and Glorious Task. A beginning has been already made. It is the End that crowns the design. As Limerick has begun Limerick will accomplish.

Signed on behalf of the Committee of the O'Connell Testimonial,

THOMAS KANE, M. D., J. P., Chairman.  
R. J. OHIGGIN, O. S. F., Secretaries.  
MAURICE LENIHAN, T. O.,

June 11th, 1855.

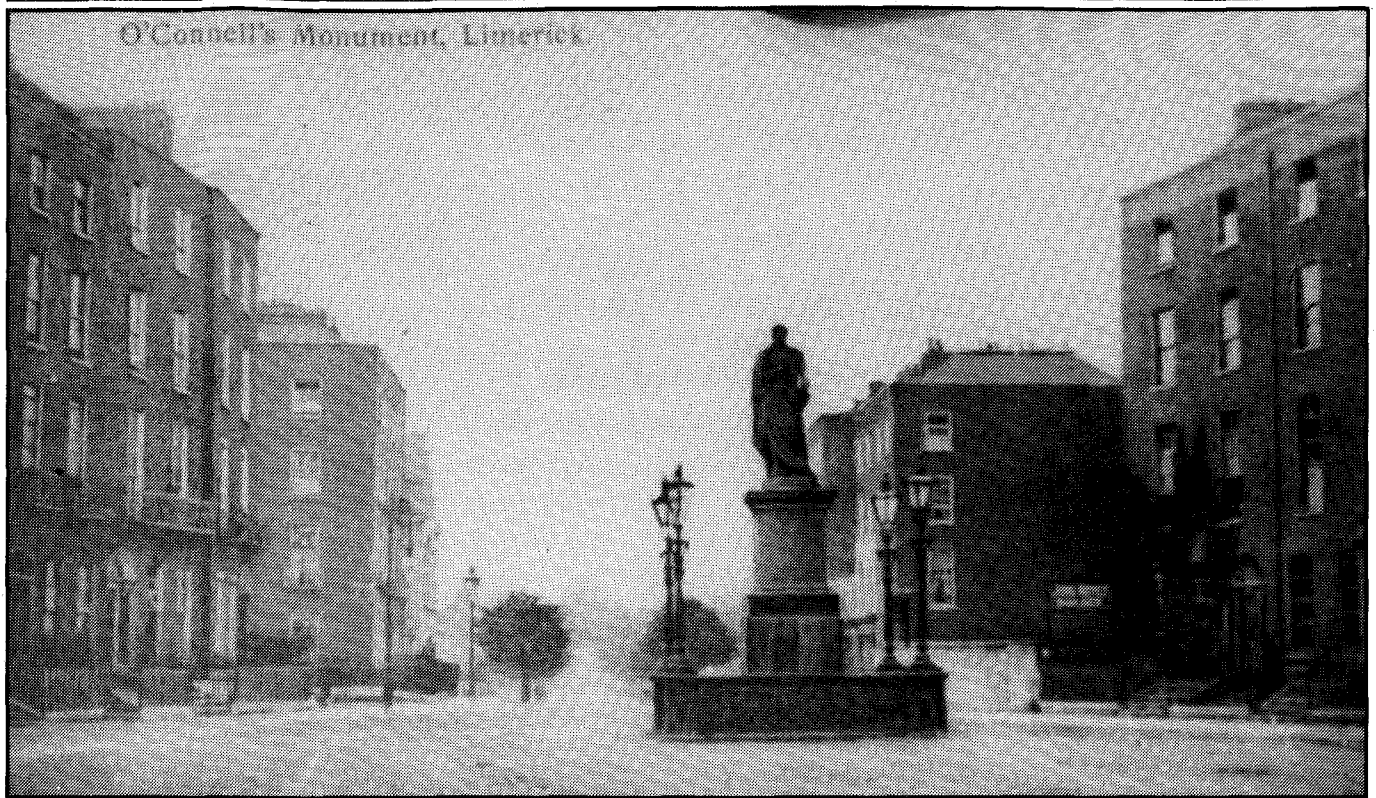
JOHN DARTNELL, Printer, 1, Ellen-street, Limerick.

#### The O'Connell Testimonial Appeal.

the time, it was a gala day for Limerick. O'Connell admirers were present in their thousands from all over Munster. For many it was their first experience of a journey on the recently constructed railroads. Lenihan, as a committee

member, was accorded one of the places of honour in the ceremony of inauguration. The press of Dublin gave a generous share of print in writing-up the event.

Limerick of the period in which these



A late nineteenth century picture of the O'Connell Monument.

events were taking place presents a strange contrast to Limerick today — in one respect at least. I mean the language question. Irish was heard in the market place; and in the courthouse an interpreter was still required to translate, for the legal man, the statements of many of the country-folk during the sessions of the court. In the minute-book of the Corporation, so late as 23 February 1860, we find the following entry: "Application read of John Roberts to be Irish interpreter at the Court House. Application was founded upon a certificate from Mr. Keogh going Judge of Assize and an appointment to the office by the late High Sheriff, but it was not entertained." It is peculiar that Lenihan has nothing to say in his *Reminiscences* concerning his own use of the Irish language; yet it is practically certain that he was an Irish-speaker. Where he uses an Irish phrase, the orthography is unusual and such as to lead us to suspect that he had no reading knowledge of the language. In his later years, as we shall see, he advocated the teaching of Irish in the schools and universities. His interest in the Irish language never lapsed at any period of his life — not even during the period of his closest association with O'Connell. He mentions a visit to the veteran Gaelic scholar, Father Matt Horgan, in 1843 at Blarney, Co. Cork, but does not tell us in what medium the conversation was conducted. Throughout the *Reminiscences*, we find frequent references to eminent Gaelic scholars of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth cen-

turies. His later open advocacy of the cause of the Irish language can possibly be traced to the influence of Eugene O'Curry. Lenihan first made the acquaintance of the great Gaelic scholar in 1852. O'Curry was then working on his edition of the *Brehon Laws* at Dr. Graves' rooms in Trinity College, Dublin. It was on the same occasion that Lenihan made the acquaintance of Dr. Petrie. "Between that year and the year 1862," he writes, "I had frequent opportunities of seeing and corresponding with O'Curry. Whenever I visited Dublin I embraced the occasion of calling upon him; he was very genial, good-humoured, full of anecdote that was racy of the soil ... anxious to communicate as freely as possible all he knew of whatever subject on which enquiry was made to him."

Lenihan does not state when precisely he became interested in the history of his adopted city; but there can be no doubt that O'Curry gave him encouragement to embark on the task. It is clear from the early numbers of the *Limerick Reporter* that Lenihan had taken up the study of Irish history. His first idea of a history of Limerick was limited in scope. He made a study of the last sieges, as he tells us in his preface, and published the fruits of his study in serial form. After completing this work, he began to entertain the idea of publishing a history of Limerick from the earliest times. It is certain that, before O'Curry's death in 1862, Lenihan had read widely and collected much matter for his complete *History of Limerick*.

Mgr. O'Reardon says that the work took five years of incessant labour. His Sundays were spent in the country copying inscriptions on tombstones and collecting folklore and general information bearing upon the subject. And yet at this busy period of his life, he found time to interest himself and the citizens of Limerick in the question of recognition by the British Parliament of the recently founded Catholic University of Ireland.

The Catholic University of Ireland had been founded ten years previously, but was unrecognised by the government. Lenihan was deeply conscious of the long-standing grievance of discrimination, in the matter of higher education, against the Catholic laity at a date thirty years after the granting of Catholic Emancipation; and in the columns of the *Reporter and Vindicator* he presented, with his matchless vigour and enthusiasm, the case for the recognition of the Catholic University. At a meeting of the Corporation, 13 February 1862, he gave notice of a motion to be debated: "That a memorial from this council be presented to His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant, expressive of the opinion of this council in favour of the grant by Government of a Charter for the Catholic University of Ireland." The motion passed unanimously, and every Protestant in the council supported it by his vote. Lenihan and five other members of the Corporation were appointed to prepare the address. When the address received the appro-

bation of the Council, a deputation — including the Mayor (Mr. Lane Joynt), the proposer (Lenihan), the seconder and three others — was chosen to present the memorial to the Viceroy. On their arrival in Dublin the members of the deputation were entertained at a banquet given in their honour by the Rector of the University, Most Rev. Dr. Woodlock. Next day, Lady Day, the members of the deputation were presented to the Viceroy. Lenihan says that he gave anything but a favourable reply. The text of the Viceroy's reply disguised all too thinly the scant courtesy with which he received the deputation:

The Corporation of Limerick next decided, by a unanimous vote, to attend the ceremony of the laying of the foundation stone of the new University buildings and travelled to Dublin for the event, which took place with great solemnity on July 20, 1862. Lenihan had special reason for his enthusiasm in the cause of a University whose name will always be associated with that of Cardinal Newman. It was Newman who discovered the genius of the great Eugene O'Curry, and it was almost natural for Lenihan to feel an interest in the cause of the University that could boast of a scholar of O'Curry's stature. It was at the ceremony of the foundation stone that Lenihan met O'Curry for the last time. He recalled that O'Curry and himself sat together at the banquet which followed the ceremonies; and before returning to Limerick, he received an invitation to spend an evening at O'Curry's home. "It was an agreeable evening indeed," he says, "though I saw that my gifted friend was somewhat exhausted after his hard day's work and thought his spirits were depressed. He zealously urged me to persevere in my then projected *History of Limerick* ... He felt much interest in my sketches of the last sieges as they appeared in the *Reporter and Vindicator*; and, if through post office delay or other lapse, a number did not duly reach its destination, he lost no time in acquainting me with the fact and in expressing a desire of the missing copy. He contributed a very interesting passage from the Book of Lecan as to the origin of the name of Limerick, of which I availed myself cheerfully and thankfully and the manuscript of which, written in Irish with a translation in his own clear and admirable hand, I carefully preserved." A fortnight later Eugene O'Curry died.

The history of the last sieges, as it appeared in weekly instalments of the *Limerick Reporter*, required long and careful preparation on Lenihan's part. But more was required than long and careful preparation when he started on the early history of Limerick. He was sufficiently aware of the pitfalls into which an amateur like himself might stumble in so difficult a part of the

work, so he looked for advice and guidance from O'Curry, a master in this department of Irish history. We of the twentieth century appreciate O'Curry for his lasting worth as an archaeologist and master of Celtic studies, yet the fact remains that in his lifetime he was far from receiving the recognition that was due to his genius. The great Newman, alone of the scholars of the day, recognised the genius of O'Curry. For most of his life in Dublin O'Curry was

"strategic retreat" at Colooney is described in all the fanciful detail of the fable that it is. Unfortunately, Lenihan's words on the matter have been reprinted — often word for word — in many local histories. There are other errors as well; yet, when the vastness of the work is considered, it is remarkable how few they are. It is true that the book is hardly notable for its good order; but for all that nothing is lost in the confusion. Everything worth know-



Eugene O'Curry.

employed as an 'assistant editor' who did the spade-work in rediscovering the genuine text of ancient MSS., while others took all the credit that was alone O'Curry's due. It required acumen on Lenihan's part to see through the propaganda of silence waged by aspiring 'intellectuals' whose reputation for Irish scholarship rested on the achievements of O'Curry but who refused to acknowledge their indebtedness.

It would be rash to deny that Lenihan's *History of Limerick* taken as a whole is free from error. Indeed the wonder is that Lenihan did not fall into more errors than he actually did. In his use of sources he might well have dispensed with the works of Macaulay. Thus, Macaulay's picturesque fable of the women of Limerick fighting during the siege finds its way into Lenihan's work. Again, the episode of Vereker's

ing about Limerick from Adam to 1866 finds a place somewhere between the covers of his book. Occasionally, in his presentation of some historical episode, Lenihan wanders off to impart some personal reminiscence of his own to the reader. Yet, perhaps, this very discursiveness is just one of the qualities that give his book its enduring charm. The outstanding fault of the *History* consists in the attempt to crowd so much matter into so small a space — though the book, strictly speaking, cannot be said to be a small book. The idea for presenting the story of Limerick in one volume rather than two came from Lenihan's lifelong friend Archbishop Leahy of Cashel. The Archbishop's letter can still be read in the *Scrapbook*: "If possible, let not your work exceed one volume 8vo. Two volumes would never pay. You



Richard Pigot (centre).

must have a good idea of the expense of bringing out two volumes respectably — something, I suppose, between five and seven hundred pounds according to the style of bringing out”.

In collecting materials for his history, he was particularly fortunate in his discovery of the Arthur MS. (The Arthur MS, is the fee-book of a Catholic physician, Dr. Thomas Arthur, a graduate of Paris University, who practised medicine from 1619 until 1663. The diary, which is in Latin, was published in part by Lenihan in the *Kilkenny Archaeological Journal*, 1867). This document is an invaluable source of social history of the period not only for Limerick. Unfortunately, owing to straitened circumstances in his later years, Lenihan was reluctantly compelled to sell this and other valuable MS. materials for his projected histories of Clare and Tipperary. The *History of Limerick*, on its first appearance, was hailed by many eminent scholars as an authoritative work. The current learned reviews in England and Ireland acknowledged its impartiality. A generous share of the costs of publication was met by the long list of subscribers whose names are tabulated at the end of the book; but the author must have found himself considerably out of pocket as the result of the poor demand for the book. For three years at least after the *History* appeared, an advertisement of two columns giving excerpts of the reviews was published in almost every number of the *Limerick Reporter*. In his correspondence with Father Meehan and Prendergast (author of the *Cromwellian Settlement in Ireland*) he

complains that his book was eagerly read but not bought. Lenihan, was never in affluent circumstances; and it should be borne in mind that, at the time of the first appearance of the *History of Limerick*, he had to earn his daily bread as a journalist and to provide for the education of a family of eight or nine children.

It is sometimes said that a great portion of Lenihan's *History of Limerick* is that of another writer, and the name of Thomas Stanley Tracey is mentioned as being that of the real author. This objection against Lenihan's authorship need not be taken seriously. There is no mystery about the name of Thomas Tracey. He graduated a B.A. of Trinity College in 1841 and became a journalist. For many years he occupied the post of sub-editor to the *Limerick Reporter*. Lenihan quite openly admits his obligations to Tracey. In the Preface he states: "In translation, research, revision and, generally, literary assistance I have enjoyed the constant, efficient and friendly aid of Thomas S. Tracey, B.A., who was conveniently near me."

Two explanations can be assigned for the propagation of this legend of dual authorship. In the first place, the fact that Tracey was a university graduate impressed people at a time when few Catholics possessed a university degree. To this it may be answered that Lenihan, though prevented from receiving the benefit of a university training because of his faith, had probably had quite as good an education as Tracey. There is the added consideration that, if Tracey wrote a

considerable part of the book, it is matter for wonder that he did not protest when his name did not appear on the title-page as that of co-author. The second source of the legend can certainly be traced to Michael Hogan. Hogan was the author of a number of scurrilous pamphlets under the name "Seán na Scuab," which were directed against the members of the Limerick Corporation. These pamphlets are long since out of print and deservedly so. The story of Hogan's grievances against the Corporation is too well known to be repeated. But however justified his grievances, no admirer of Hogan can defend a work which offends against justice and charity. Lenihan's *History* had been published only two or three years when Hogan started writing this series of pamphlets. As a member of the Corporation and as a defender of the Liberal candidates against Sir Peter Tait and a Fenian candidate at the elections of 1868, Lenihan came under Hogan's displeasure. Hogan represented Lenihan in these pamphlets as the son of a tinker from Cork, a servant in Carlow College, a man who caused trouble between a bishop and his clergy, an adventurer who sought refuge in Limerick where he cogged somebody's history. Public opinion was not influenced by such wild and unfounded statements.

Elections of members of Parliament were arranged for November 1868. Gladstone was seeking a mandate for the disestablishment of the State Church in Ireland. The Liberal candidates for Limerick were Francis William

Russell and Major George Gavin. Both these candidates had openly pledged themselves to support Gladstone's Dis-establishment Bill, and it was taken almost for granted that no other candidate would take the field against them. The Mayor, Sir Peter Tait, who had been absent from the city since the previous March, to the consternation of many, proposed to go forward as a candidate. Tait, who had been a very popular employer in Limerick, stood a reasonable chance of being elected. He was known however to be a conservative in politics, and at once the Liberal policy supporters became alarmed. He was joined in opposition to the Liberals by a young journalist from Dublin who edited a paper, *The Irishman*, which strongly supported the Fenians. On the face of things, it was a strange election contest: Conservative and Fenian *versus* Liberals. The secret ballot act was not yet in existence and elections were disorderly in consequence. The Limerick elections of 1868 were no exception to the rule, and in the demonstrations that occurred one life was lost. The Liberal candidates were elected with 1,026 votes for Gavin and 794 for Russell. The popularity of Tait may be estimated from the fact that he came a close third to Russell with 720 votes. The Fenian candidate got poor support with only 187. The Conservative and Fenian candidates immediately entered a plea that the Liberals won by wholesale bribery and corruption. A commission was appointed to inquire into the charges and commenced its sessions on January 19th, with Lord Justice Fitzgerald as chairman. After a lengthy examination of the evidence for both sides, the judge declared that the Liberal candidates were duly elected. The findings of the court indicated that if the Liberals were to blame, the opposing candidates were no less blameworthy.

Meantime the growing unpopularity of Tait was shown by a resolution passed at a public meeting of the citizens on St. Stephen's Day 1868. "We on the part of the burgesses beg respectfully to bring under your notice the following resolution which was passed unanimously at a public meeting convened at the City Court House by the (acting) Mayor on Saturday last 26/XII/68: 'That we indignantly protest against the conduct of Sir Peter Tait in tampering with the civic chain of our time-honoured city and that we call on the Corporation to replace at once the links of our most respected Mayors in that position from which they were so unwarrantably removed by the Champion of Tory Ascendancy.'" This address of the citizens to the Corporation was read at a council meeting on New Year's day 1869. Sir Peter Tait had evidently decided to leave Limerick, as his business was not prospering, and in the course of the past year had been

preparing for new financial ventures in Leeds and London. He wished however to leave some memorial of his connection with Limerick and, in commemoration of his triple term of office as Mayor, he decided to insert a large medallion in the civic chain. The insertion of the medallion required some change of the rings of former Mayors. He did this without any authorization of the Corporation or the citizens of the city. A resolution of the Corporation then notified Tait that a medallion was inserted only for some remarkable corporate event — as, for instance, the formation of the Reformed Corporation of 1840 — and that he was asked to present in place of the medallion one or three rings of the same pattern as those affixed by all the former Mayors. Tait refused to consider the proposal, and about three weeks later the City Treasurer was instructed to return the medallion to

political errors. It cannot be denied that Lenihan had made at least one grave mistake when he supported the candidature of James Sadlier in Tipperary about sixteen years previously. Sadlier, as it is well known, broke faith with his constituents and accepted office as a Junior Lord of the Treasury under the Liberal administration of the time. Lenihan in due course admitted that he had been deceived by Sadlier, as had many others, and the readers of the *Limerick Reporter* accepted his explanation. Lenihan's past defence of Sadlier now proved an easy target for Hogan, and some of the most caustic lines of "Seán na Scuab" deal with this incident. Hogan however would have been better advised to have withheld some of the toothless adulation that he showered on his own friends; for some twenty years later the young journalist who was defeated in the 1868 election



Michael Hogan, the Bard of Thomond.

Tait. Two further attempts were made by the Corporation to have Tait reconsider his decision, but Tait refused to have any other memorial of his mayoralty inserted in the civic chain except the medallion.

Lenihan, as might be expected, took no small part in the preceding events, the 1868 election and the affair of the Tait medal. His newspaper editorials gave his fullest support to the Liberals; and he seems to have taken an active part in the election meetings at the hustings, if we are to take Michael Hogan's word for it. Needless to say his political activities annoyed Hogan, who made capital out of Lenihan's past

took his place in the witness box of the Old Bailey, and the world then learned what manner of man was Richard Piggot the forger of the Parnell letters. In justice to Hogan, it must be said that he met with some cruel disappointments in life. Possibly he learned later that disappointment was never far distant from Lenihan's door even in the years when he was at the height of his success; for it seems that Lenihan and Hogan became friends again. At least some of Hogan's verses began to appear again in the later numbers of the *Limerick Reporter*. (To be continued).

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