The Impact of World War One on Limerick

The Impact of World War One on Limerick

By

Tadhg Moloney

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS

PUBLISHING

The Impact of World War One on Limerick,
by Tadhg Moloney

This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-4141-2, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4141-2

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would sincerely like to thank my supervisor Dr. Deirdre McMahon for her guidance, patience, and proof reading of this work throughout our time together.

I would also like to extend a special thank you to Pat Brosnahan for permission to use the Certificate of Honour, Ann Ashton, Breda Beegan, Rev. Michael Culhane (RIP), John Fitzpatrick, Frank Bouchier-Hayes, Michael Molony, Richard O'Brien (RIP), Kate O'Donnell, Chriostoir O'Flynn and Rev. Michael Wall, for their assistance with letters and information. To those who were my fellow post graduates, especially Jennifer Kelly, Treasa Sheehan and Matthew Tobin, a special word of gratitude for their kind assistance.

To Margaret Franklin of the Limerick County Library, Michael Maguire of the Limerick City Library, Jean Murray, who with the staff of the Limerick Regional Archives and the staff of Mary Immaculate College Library, especially Phyllis Conran and Elizabeth Brosnahan, who gave of their time and made my research all the easier. Not forgetting the staff of the History Department of Mary Immaculate College, most notably, Dr. Maura Cronin and Mr. Liam Irwin, M.A., and to Ms. Niamh Armstrong, who gave of their time, without which I would have had difficulty in completing this work.

Last but by no means least I would like to thank my family, Gerardine, Eoin and Emer for their unwavering support and encouragement without which it would not have been possible to complete this study.

INTRODUCTION

The Irish soldier of the British army who returned home after the ending of World War One did so to an environment different to that of his departure. He was feted and cheered when he enlisted and was in many cases accompanied by the local band and companies of the Irish National Volunteers. However, during the course of his absence there was a drastic change in the climate of feeling amongst the population at home, and on his return home he was treated as a pariah. If he ingratiated himself with the movement that had overtaken the Irish Parliamentary Party and the Irish National Volunteers his soul was saved. On the other hand if he remained aloof he was *persona non gratis*, and his participation in the war was not spoken of. They were to use a modern euphemism 'air brushed from history', and remained in oblivion for nearly eighty years. There have been an increasing number of local studies of the War of Independence but they have mostly ignored the First World War, which preceded it.

It was only during the latter years of the twentieth century that there has been an effort to rehabilitate and confer the honour due to him. This has resulted in a plethora of books being published relating to the participation of Irishmen and women in the war. Books from such authors as Myles Dungan, who wrote *Irish Voices from the Great War* and *They Shall Grow Not Old: Irish Soldiers and the Great War*, Terence Denman, who wrote about *Ireland's Unknown Soldiers: The 16th (Irish) Division in the Great War*, Tom Johnstone's *Orange Green and Khaki* to Keith Jeffery's *Ireland and the Great War* to name but a few. These books generally speaking have concentrated on the military and political aspect of the Irishman's involvement. For many years David Fitzpatrick's scholarly study on *Politics And Irish Life 1916-1921: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution* published in 1977 was the only study undertaken on the military, political and socio-economic life of a provincial area namely Clare. To this now can be added the scholarly work by Daniel McCarthy on *Ireland's Banner County: Clare from the fall of Parnell to the Great War 1890-1918*, published in 2002, which deals with the troublesome past of a county and its people from a cultural, socio-economic, political and military perspective. In many ways both of these studies complement each other. Another, Thomas Dooley's

Irishmen or English Soldiers, published in 1995 is a wide ranging study on recruitment, social, economic and political pressures of men from Waterford and in particular James English, a relation of the author and who enlisted in the 9th Battalion of the Royal Munster Fusiliers.

There have also been research theses by Dermot J. Lucey, 'Cork Public Opinion and the First World War' (MA, UCC 1972), Pauric Travers 'The Irish Conscription Crisis 1918', (MA, UCD 1977), Patrick Callan 'Voluntary Recruitment for the British Army in Ireland during the First World War', (Ph.D, UCD 1984), and by Martin Staunton 'The Royal Munster Fusiliers, 1914-18, (MA, UCD 1986), to name but a few. Again these studies like those previously referred to are general works, with fleeting references to some provincial areas. Staunton's work does of course refer to the political, social and economic aspects of the causes that impelled men to enlist in the Royal Munster Fusiliers in a minor way. These works have undoubtedly been instrumental in heightening the awareness of Irish participation in the Great War; but with the exception of one or two studies very little research has been undertaken into the overall effect of the war on a provincial area.

Limerick as a provincial area has to a large extent been totally neglected as far as research for this period is concerned. It is true that articles dealing with Limerick during the time span concerned have appeared in the *Old Limerick Journal*; these, however, have been in general of a military nature. Nobody has examined Limerick from the point of view of the recruitment, the conflicting influences and pressures that were brought to bear on men to enlist and not to do so. Also the political, economic and social influences that impacted on the general population during this war and how they helped to shape their mindset or opinions. A local study like this helps to build up a picture of how the war affected Ireland at a regional/provincial level. This is the first time that such a study has been undertaken, and therefore is an adventure into unknown territory.

The purpose therefore of this study is to examine the impact of World War One on the people of Limerick. In undertaking such a study, four important areas have been examined, namely the influence that the war in South Africa (1899-1902) had from a recruiting, political, social and economic perspective, but to a lesser degree than that of the Great War. One may ask why this is included in a study that is concentrating on the impact of World War One on Limerick? The answer to this of course is that from one to the other there was a very short time span, a period of fifteen years from the commencement of the minor to the major conflict, and many of the forces and personalities that were involved in the shaping

of opinion during the first were also involved in the second. In Chapter Two, recruitment in both Limerick city and county is examined. Recruitment was sluggish at the commencement of the war, but when John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, and people issued his call to Irishmen to enlist and be where the firing line was furthest in the fight against the enemy, it began to increase. However, as the war progressed there was a definite falling off of men joining up. The reasons for this will be analysed and the forces that contributed to it. Chapter Three examines the political forces that were in existence during the period, what made people change from being supporters of the constitutional movement to that of separatism, which led to the annihilation of the Irish Party in the General Election of 1918. The final chapter examines how the war affected the local economy, which was not only subject to national but also international movements of commodities, who benefited from these and who were the main losers.

The primary sources used in this study are government records of various descriptions: the Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers, Colonel Moore's Papers, the Census for Limerick in 1911; the CO 904 RIC Reports; minute books of the Limerick County Council and Limerick Borough Council (Limerick Corporation), also minute books and pay books from the various departments of the latter. Letters sent home by soldiers while they were either training or at the front often provide useful information and were often published in the local newspapers, but one has to be cautious with these as they were subject to censorship before they were despatched. While these are very useful tools for this study, the newspapers also provided valuable information despite the censorship restrictions brought into force during the Great War. The reading of newspapers depended on the political viewpoint that a person adhered to. Unionists would have read the *Irish Times*, whereas a nationalist would have read the *Freeman's Journal* or the *Irish Independent*.[1] Local newspapers more often than not reflected the viewpoint of that of the respective national newspapers. Needless to say the nationalist newspapers had during the South Africa War 1899-1902 attacked Britain, while those of a unionist orientation supported it. The *Limerick Leader* had been one such nationalist newspaper[2] but was singing from the same

[1] The *Freeman's Journal* was the newspaper of the Irish Parliamentary Party, and the *Irish Independent*, which was owned by William Martin Murphy supported the policy of William O'Brien and his All for Ireland League.

[2] The editor of the Limerick Leader was Cornelius Cregan, who was also the secretary of the Limerick City Regiment of the Irish national Volunteers, and therefore a follower of John Redmond's policy.

hymn sheet as the unionist *Limerick Chronicle* during the First World War, and in many instances their reports were often the same word for word. This was, of course, due to the fact that the reports from the war front were scrutinised by officials in the Admiralty and the War Office. The Royal Irish Constabulary reports, which were compiled by the County Inspector, also throw some useful insights into the views and activities of organisations and people. Although they had a particular bias, as they were written for a specific audience, the fact that they were secret reports for the eyes of the Inspector General often meant that they were more factual.[3] It was only during the latter stages of the war when the Volunteers went underground that the reports became more problematic. Secondary sources are used to augment and to a great extent to provide the national and international context.

[3] The Inspector general provided summaries of what was important in these reports to the Chief Secretary in Dublin Castle and the Lord Lieutenant at the Vice Regal Lodge in the Phoenix Park, Dublin.

CHAPTER ONE

LIMERICK AND THE BOER WAR, 1899-1902

Recruitment for the British Army during the Boer War of October 1899-May 1902 was, with the exception of those who were perceived to be loyal to the Crown (and that was according to one correspondent 'only about two and a half per cent'), viewed with disdain by the general populace of Limerick City and County.[1] The County Inspector of the Royal Irish Constabulary in his report to the Inspector General of the force in Dublin Castle said that the consensus of the middle and lower classes was very much on the side of the Boers in the war. This was, he said, influenced by the attitude of the newspapers that they read.[2] However, Limerick, like many other areas of Ireland, had for years provided recruits to the British Army and because the city had a large garrison it was expected to be an easy task for the recruiting sergeant.

Opposition to Britain and support for the Boers had its origins in the Land War that had erupted twenty years previously in 1879 and was to continue for thirteen years, with a war within a war, known as the 'Plan of Campaign' fought in between. The catalyst for this war was the foundation by Michael Davitt of the Irish National Land League in 1879.[3] It had been established to fight on behalf of tenant farmers who had difficulty in paying their rents due to bad harvests, and thereby faced

---

[1] *United Irishman* 24 March 1900. The author does not state where he got these figures. This newspaper was the mouthpiece of Cumann na Gaedheal and was edited by Arthur Griffith who also founded the organisation. The aims of this organisation were economic self-sufficiency and a self-governing Ireland. It wished to break the link with Great Britain. The information or articles published in this newspaper may be construed as propagandist, and therefore this figure could be viewed with some scepticism.

[2] National Archives, London (hereafter NAL). (CO) Colonial Office 904/69. County Inspector's Report, 4 January 1900.

[3] Michael Davitt was a Mayo man whose family had been evicted from their homestead in 1851, and emigrated to England. He was brought up in Lancashire, and worked in a mill where he lost his right arm. Due to Fenian activities he spent time in jail, which hardened his outlook on life.

eviction. The landlords were seen as a part of the English garrison and regarded themselves as such and thus as a barrier to the foundation of a Home Rule parliament.[4] Davitt had seen this and decided to 'make the ownership of the soil the basis of self-government'.[5] He invited Parnell to become the first president of the League as a step in this direction. Parnell had taken over the leadership of the Irish Parliamentary Party in 1877 and saw that in order to win support for Home Rule, it was necessary to become involved in the Land Question. He had at several meetings encouraged tenants to resist eviction; 'You must show the landlords that you intend to keep a firm grip on your homesteads and lands'.[6] Thus the attainment of Home Rule and the Land Question were allied together.

Tenant farmers in County Limerick were very much involved in this war, with their militancy often bordering on violence. When the forces of 'law and order' attempted to serve notice of eviction on the tenants of Colonel Hare, who had an estate at New Pallas, they were met with resistance from the tenants who took over the castle at nearby Castletown, and were armed with rifles prepared to resist any attempt to eject them. In addition to this they had three bridges on the three roads leading to the castle cut to prevent artillery being brought to bear, and when the troops endeavoured to purchase food from suppliers in the neighbourhood, they were boycotted. While other areas such as Kilfinane and Kilmallock were classed as troubled spots, Ballylanders was deemed to be the worst district, where the whole population practically turned out to resist the forces of order.[7] When the 'Plan of Campaign' was promulgated in October 1886 the first to be involved in its implementation were the tenants of The O'Grady who had an estate at Kilballyowen, County Limerick, and by August his entire household was boycotted.[8] Clerical involvement was also never too far away, the Rev. William Casey, parish priest at Mountcollins, Abbeyfeale, County Limerick delivered a speech in which he encouraged the tenants to join in the campaign

---

[4] Geary, Laurence M. *The Plan of Campaign 1886-1891,* (Cork, 1986), p. 142

[5] MacDonagh, Oliver. *The Modern Nations in Historical Perspective: Ireland,* (New Jersey, 1968), p. 51

[6] Lydon, James. *The Making of Ireland: From Ancient Times to the Present,* (London, 1998), p. 315

[7] Bew, Paul. *Land and the National Question in Ireland 1858-1882,* (Dublin, 1978), pp 167 & 170

[8] Geary, Laurence M. *The Plan of Campaign 1886-1891,* (Cork, 1986), pp. 2, 59 & 103. The Plan of Campaign was the second phase of the land war and was spawned by economic difficulties. The tenants withheld rents and combined on specific estates in order to pressurise landlords into granting abatements.

> I don't care who the landlord is, no matter what sort he is, if he was an angel from heaven he is a bad man provided he is a landlord. Well, some of you may say we have a little bit of cheap land here. I can tell you it is not a bit too cheap at all. It is worth nothing at all whatever and if you get a thousand acres of it for half a farthing I say join the Plan of Campaign and ask a reduction of fifty per cent.[9]

The Land Act of 1881 was a development of this war and was passed into law by Gladstone after he returned to power following the general election of 1880. Gladstone set about trying to pacify Ireland by coming to an accommodation with nationalists; in so doing he introduced two Home Rule Bills in 1886 and 1893, both of which were defeated in the House of Lords, a bastion of conservative domination. Gladstone had tempered conciliation with coercion and had Parnell with other leaders arrested, however, an agreement was arrived with Parnell while he was incarcerated in Kilmainham Jail, which was to cement an alliance with the Liberal Party. On his release from jail Parnell had the Land League, which had been suppressed, replaced by the Irish National League under his control and focused solely on the achievement of Home Rule.

Parnell's leadership of the Irish Parliamentary Party was seriously questioned when his affair with Mrs. Katherine O'Shea became public. Parnell refused to resign after Gladstone intimated that Liberal Party co-operation with the Irish Parliamentary Party would not continue unless he did so. A meeting of the party in what became known as Committee Room 15 in the House of Commons in December 1890 resulted in a spilt as to whether Parnell was more important than the cause of Home Rule. It resulted in forty-four members withdrawing their support for Parnell and retaining the alliance with the Liberals, and twenty-seven siding with Parnell. It was to be ten years before a fragmented party was re-unified under the chairmanship of John Redmond, with the leader of the anti-Parnellites, John Dillon, becoming his deputy. The elections that followed the split saw the Parnellites losing heavily to the anti-Parnellites, in Limerick this was manifested in the elections of 1892 and 1895 in the city and county constituencies.[10]

Some normality in the struggle for home rule returned with the reunification of two of the opposing sides in 1900, both deciding that their mutual interest, the struggle for home rule would be best served by so doing. Opposition to Britain and her recruiting policy during the Boer

---

[9] Quoted in Geary, *Plan of Campaign 1886-1891,* p. 29

[10] Walker, Brian M. *Parliamentary Election Results In Ireland 1801-1922,* (Dublin, 1978), pp 360-361

War also assisted this, after all the Boers were also endeavouring to achieve independence.

There had been an attempt to thwart the efforts of the nationalists in their quest for home rule by the Conservative Government, which had come to power in 1886. They had instituted a series of policies that were designed to 'kill home rule with kindness', indicating that self-rule was not necessary. One of these policies was the Local Government Act of 1898 whereby the power of the Protestant ascendancy, which had been wielded through the grand juries, was now transferred to the newly formed County Councils set up under the act.[11] The provisions of this act also applied to councils already in existence such as Limerick Corporation. While the 1898 act gave power to nationalists at a local level it was not a substitute for self-rule, this was made clear by Anthony Mackey, a nationalist councillor at the first meeting of the Limerick County Council on 22 April 1899 when he stated that

> Whilst undertaking to carry on the business of the county government after a just and equitable manner, we deem it imperative to convey from this assembly that nothing short of legislative independence can or ever will satisfy the national aspirations of our people.[12]

This therefore was the backdrop to the opposition of the Boer War and attaining home rule for Ireland.

Nationalist Opposition

Limerick had become very nationalist in its outlook especially towards the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. That this was so became evident with the election of an ex-Fenian prisoner a member of Limerick Corporation as Mayor of the city, Alderman John Daly for three consecutive years, 1899, 1900 and 1901[13] and also the election of Alderman Michael Joyce of the Irish Parliamentary Party as a representative for the people of the city at the House of Commons in the General Election of 1900.[14] He defeated the Unionist candidate F.E.

---

[11] This was similar to the Local Government Act passed by the conservatives in 1888 in Britain.

[12] Ferriter, Diarmaid. *Cuimhnigh ar Luimneach: A History of Limerick County Council 1898-1998,* (Limerick, 1998), pp 18-19.

[13] Leonard, Denis M 'Provosts and Mayors of Limerick 1197-1997', in David Lee ed. *Remembering Limerick,* (Limerick.1997), p. 383.

[14] Walker, Brian M. *Parliamentary Election Results 1801-1922* ed. (Dublin, 1978), p. 36. NAL. CO 904/71. County Inspector's Report, 3 November 1900. It

Kearney, LLD, by 2,521 to 474 votes.[15] Kearney was to receive a commission with the rank of Captain and appointed to the position of recruiting officer for the counties of Limerick and Clare during World War One.[16] Alderman John Daly, who had been selected as a Parnellite Nationalist candidate to contest the general election for Limerick City in 1895, but had been disqualified,[17] had again been selected at a meeting held on Sunday 23 September 1900 to contest the general election to be held that year. However, because he intimated that he would not take the oath of allegiance it was feared that he would be again disqualified, and if a Tory candidate decided to contest the seat he would be declared the member for Limerick.[18] It was therefore decided by the United Irish League[19] that Alderman Michael Joyce would contest the seat. William Lundon[20] and P. J. O'Shaughnessy,[21] also of the same party, had been elected as MPs for East and West Limerick respectively. An editorial in the local nationalist paper summed up the situation adequately by stating that should Daly accomplish being elected 'it will be simply a protest against Parliamentarianism'.[22] The paradox here being that although Daly was anti-parliament, he was using constitutional politics to register his opposition to it.

---

seems he threatened to withdraw from that position shortly after because he had insufficient means to support him.

[15] *Limerick Chronicle* (hereafter *L.C.*) 6 Oct 1900. This newspaper informed its readers that there were 46 spoilt votes and that 3,033 electors voted. However if these statistics are all added together the total is 3,041, a difference of eight votes. Incidentally there were 5,297 electors entitled to vote, therefore 2,264 did not vote.

[16] *Freeman's J*ournal (hereafter *F.J.*) 2 June 1915.

[17] Walker. p. 360.

[18] *Limerick Leader* (hereafter *L.L.*) 24 September 1900.

[19] Hepburn, A C. *Ireland 1905-25* Volume 2, (Co Down, 1998), p. 50. The United Irish League was founded in 1898 by William O'Brien (1852-1928) an anti-Parnellite MP. It provided a platform for the reunification in 1900 of the Irish Parliamentary Party under the chairmanship of John Redmond (1856-1918). NAL. CO 904/73. County Inspector's Report, 4 July 1901 stated that there were some fifty seven branches of the United Irish League throughout the county. On 4 November just four months later the same Inspector reported that there were seventy branches of the organisation in the county with two in the city.

[20] Walker. p. 361. William Lundon, was elected a Member of Parliament in the General Election of 1900 without any opposition. He died in 1909, his son Thomas then won the seat in a By-election beating John Molony, Independent Nationalist, by 2,664 to 1686 votes.

[21] *ibid.* pp. 361-362. P.J. O'Shaughnessy was elected a Member of Parliament in the General Election of 1900 without any opposition.

[22] *L.L.* 24 September 1900.

The latter were popular with their constituents, and made pronouncements against Irishmen participating with Britain in their fight against the Boer; Lundon stated that 'the Irish militiaman was, to his mind, on a level with the soldier of the line as an instrument of English brutality and despotism. The militiaman corrupted all around him and was a more dangerous recruiting sergeant than the man with the ribbons'.[23] Later, to a large public meeting held at Kilfinane, he exclaimed that out of every 100 people in Ireland, 99 supported the Boer cause because they were not only fighting for their families and homes but also for their independence. When asked about adopting the same tactics as the Boers by taking up arms against the British in the cause of Irish independence, he was of the opinion that this would be a fruitless exercise, as the means of accomplishing this were not available. They must, he insisted, win back the rights of the Irish people by constitutional means as it was the only practical solution. O'Shaughnessy was of the opinion that it would be 'a calamity to our country if the men of Sarsfield's county disgraced us by volunteering to do the Saxon's dirty work in plundering the homes and starving the women and children of the gallant burghers of South Africa'.[24] Daly and Joyce were much more outspoken in their condemnation of Britain with her aggressive war of annexation towards the Transvaal and Orange Free State Republics. Daly was from the physical force tradition and Joyce from the constitutional, but both had no difficulty in identifying with the cause of the Boers in their fight against the might of the British Empire for their independence, just as Ireland was endeavouring to do.[25] That is where the similarity ended.

Daly was on a visit to the United States of America during the early months of 1901 and while he was addressing meetings in Chicago, New York and Boston had condemned the Irish Parliamentary Party as traitors, for which he found himself in trouble when he arrived home.[26] He, of course, refuted this in an interview with a representative from one of the local newspapers, stating that what he said 'was that there was a general feeling in the minds of the Irish that any man who swears allegiance to England is a traitor to Ireland that this might not be everybody's opinion but the opinion of the majority'.[27] However, during the selection process to represent Limerick in parliament he again referred to those who on election went 'to England and took the oath of allegiance, was he not a

[23] *ibid*. 30 January 1901.
[24] *ibid*. 27 May 1901
[25] Rees, R. *Ireland 1905-1925* Volume I, (County Down, 1998), p. 78.
[26] NAL. CO 904/72. County Inspector's Report, 4 April 1901.
[27] *L.L*. 29 March 1901.

member of the English Government and a traitor to Ireland'.[28] He had, as far back as 17 April 1876 when Isaac Butt came to Limerick to address his constituents, become embroiled in controversy.[29] The Irish Republican Brotherhood of which he was a member designated Daly to break up the constitutional movement. He attempted to prevent the meeting by taking possession of the platform with his supporters, but was removed by Home Rulers. The day previous to this he was instrumental in having the walls of the city plastered with placards proclaiming that 'The Nationalists of Limerick have resolved to prevent the demonstration from assuming a Home Rule aspect, by every means in their power'.[30] Mayor Daly attended a meeting in Dublin, which comprised a minority of that city's Corporation[31] as well as others, called to oppose an address being given to Queen Victoria on her visit to Ireland, on 4 April 1900.[32] This was viewed as having 'been organised to stimulate Irish recruiting which it was asserted, had been badly hit by the general unpopularity of the war in Ireland and the anti-recruiting campaign'.[33] On his return to Limerick he reported to the Corporation there on the proceedings that had taken place, saying that 'if the Queen had come to … grant Home Rule she would be welcome, but not on political visits' like that which had taken place.[34] At another meeting of the Corporation he 'used most insulting language to the Queen'.[35] He also attempted to stop the workers of the Cleeves' factory going on a trip to Dublin for the Queen's visit. However, this did not succeed, but a rick of hay belonging to Cleeves was burned in South Tipperary, which was attributed to Pro-Boer extremists in revenge for the visit. This action was alleged to have been organised and financed from Limerick.[36] The Inspector General of the Royal Irish Constabulary

---

[28] *ibid*. 24 September 1900.

[29] Walker. pp 114, 117 &122. *L.L*. 25 Aug 1902. Isaac Butt had been elected to represent the city of Limerick in parliament as a result of a By-Election held on 20 Sept 1871 following the death of Francis William Russell. He was again returned in the General Election of 1874 until his death in 1879. He had been conferred as an Honorary Freeman of Limerick on 1 January 1877.

[30] MacDonagh, Michael. *The Home Rule Movement*, (Dublin, 1920), pp 112-113.

[31] *Cork Examiner* (hereafter *C.E*.) 23 March 1900.

[32] *L.L*. 23 March 1900. Levenson, Samuel. *Maud Gonne* (London. 1977) p. 168.

[33] Jeffery, Keith. 'The Irish military tradition and the British Empire' in Keith Jeffery ed. *An Irish Empire*'? *Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire*, (Manchester, 1996) p. 96.

[34] *C.E*. 23 March 1900.

[35] NAL. CO 904/70. County Inspector's Report 2 April 1900.

[36] *ibid*. CO 904/70. Inspector General's Report April 1900 and County Inspector's Report 4 May 1900.

summed up the establishment's attitude toward Daly, when he referred to him as

> A licensed convict who owes his freedom to the clemency of the Crown, has stirred up and keeps inflamed the worst possible spirit of disloyalty and sedition amongst the low class of extremists who are unfortunately numerous in Limerick, and entirely under Daly's influence.[37]

Joyce on the other hand, made speeches both outside and inside parliament that alluded to anti-recruiting sentiment. At a meeting in Manchester, to celebrate St. Patrick's Day, he said that 'he had no desire to be anything else than a soldier of Ireland. He had no ambition than to take his place with the fighting line of the Irish Army, whenever the fight for the old land takes place'.[38] In the House of Commons he opposed the granting of £100,000 to Lord Roberts saying that the war was not a just one and was being imposed 'on a free people whose crime is that they have gold mines which you (British) want to rob them of', and with the 'blood money granted at the price of the bloodshed and misery entailed on South Africa'.[39] He further stated that while 'they were asked to vote this large sum to Lord Roberts … there was nothing asked for the soldiers who fought your battles'.[40] While these statements do not specifically refer to anti-recruitment directly, the implication is present. He also participated, as did the two other MPs for Limerick, William Lundon and P. J. O'Shaughnessy,[41] with other Irish nationalist MPs in rising from their seats in the House of Commons on 10 March 1902. This was to cheer the news that the Boers had not only ambushed and beaten General Lord Methuen, but also had captured him in what was to be the last Boer victory of the war.[42] Joyce may have been cautious in his references to recruitment when he made speeches in England; such was not the case when he spoke back in Ireland. Recruiting sergeants were seen as the

---

[37] *ibid.* CO 904/70.
[38] *L.L.*18 March 1901.
[39] *ibid.* 12 August 1901.
[40] *L.L.* 12 August 1901 and Kitchen, Martin. *The British Empire and Commonwealth,* (Hampshire, 1996), p. 41. Field Marshal Lord Roberts VC, was a veteran of the Indian Mutiny, and had been Commander in Chief in India before taking up the same position in South Africa. He relieved Mafeking, an event celebrated throughout England. It was thought that with this result the war would soon be over, therefore on his return to England he was feted as a conquering hero. This was the reason for the grant of £100,000.
[41] *Irish Daily Independent and Nation* 11 March & 17 March 1902.
[42] Magnus, Philip. *King Edward VII,* (Middlesex, 1975), p. 375.

backbone of enlistment for the British army and an institution in every military barracks.[43] It was therefore necessary to denigrate them at every possible moment, and whenever the opportunity arose. Joyce set about this at meetings that he addressed. At a meeting held under the auspices of the United Irish League he was more forthright in opposition to recruitment. He said that the recruiting sergeant should be shunned like one would do with the devil and that if men wanted to fight against England they should join McBride's Irish Brigade, as they could not fight the English at home.[44] At a meeting in Patrickswell, County Limerick, he said that the recruiting sergeant should be told to go to the devil and that the army the men of Ireland would join would be the United Irish League Army and England should fight her own battles.[45] Joyce seems to have had a fixation about the recruiting sergeant and the devil, the implication being that they were one and the same, although one might ask whether or not the devil would have been recognised if he had come amongst them?

Clerical Opposition

Priests were often used to discourage enlistment and the prospect of having one's soul damned for all time may have had a bearing on this. The Irish Parliamentary Party, although it was campaigning against recruitment, had at this time some misgivings about clerical interference in political matters; its newspaper *United Ireland* stated that 'Catholic Clergymen are using their influence as clergymen not as citizens to intimidate and frighten the people'.[46] Certain members of the Catholic clergy with strong nationalist tendencies took advantage of this situation. One such clergyman was the Rev. P. F. Kavanagh, the historian of the 1798 rebellion, who was not only a Franciscan priest attached to the Friary at Lower Henry Street, but was also the President of the Limerick Young Ireland Society.[47] He classified himself as an advanced nationalist, which he understood to mean 'one who looked forward to the independence of his own country as a complete and sovereign cure for the ills, which arose from slavery in any shape or form, and view it how they might, subjection

[43] *C.E.* 18 Jan 1900.
[44] *L.L.* 14 January 1901.
[45] *L.C.* 22 October 1901.
[46] Boyce, D. George. *Nationalism in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1982), p. 259.
[47] The Young Ireland Societies were the youth branches of the United Irish League, although the *Limetick Leader* of 21 January 1901 refers to the Limerick Young Ireland Society as a branch of Cumann na nGaedheal.

to a foreign power was slavery'.[48] His form of independence for Ireland was of course Home Rule within the empire, and did not believe in the use of physical force as a means of attaining it, which was not that of those who professed to be advanced Nationalists later on.[49] In a letter published in one of the local newspapers he said that war was never just unless the cause of it was just also and that those who participated in such a conflict knowing that it was not just were guilty of sin and if they remained so without having repented before they died they would suffer eternal damnation. This, he went on to state, was the doctrine of the Catholic Church, but it would not prevent those who were members of other denominations from joining. Recruiting sergeants were seen as belonging to the latter and were 'making desperate efforts to entrap young Irishmen into its (British Army) depleted ranks'.[50] They were therefore the cause of the destruction of houses and the harassment of women and children not to mention persons of a weaker disposition. This was not the first time that he had been embroiled in such controversy. In a reply to an invitation that he had received from the High Sheriff of Limerick to attend a meeting to draft a message of welcome to Queen Victoria, he sent a copy of a letter to the *Cork Examiner*, which he had previously sent to the High Sheriff. He said that as an Irish nationalist this in itself would be sufficient for him not to attend. As a long reigning monarch of forty years (in fact it was 63 years by 1900), he continued, the Queen had never visited the country, and neither had she shown any interest in how it was progressing. The purpose of her visit was the furtherance of recruitment of Irishmen into the British army. However, he said that although Irishmen had in the past been manifestly ignorant they were quickly learning that men of the Christian faith should only engage in fighting for the 'defence of their own country and never in an unjust war'. While there were those who were apt to quote chapter and verse from the bible in defence of this war, he observed that the Fifth Commandment of the Decalogue states 'Thou shalt not kill', and that in the war which was underway was not only unjust it was mass murder.[51]

The Bishop of Limerick, Dr. Edward O'Dwyer, made what could be construed as anti-recruiting remarks when he held that those who stood to gain from the war were responsible for the death of Irishmen in the field of battle and thereby brought immense sorrow to many an Irish parent. They were also responsible for the vast array of wrongdoings that permeated the

[48] *L.L.* 26 May 1902.
[49] *ibid.* 18 June 1902 & 23 Dec 1901.
[50] *ibid.* 20 November 1901.
[51] *C.E.* 23 March 1900.

countryside i.e., destruction and devastation not only of the countryside but also of the labour and industry of generations.[52] It was also reported that he took issue with the editor of *The Tablet*, an English Catholic newspaper, for printing a story from an officer who had returned from South Africa. This story related to a Boer, who having fought bravely until he was outnumbered by his enemy, the British, surrendered and threw himself at their mercy only to be bayoneted to death. The Bishop asked with forthright justification 'what more right had an English soldier to insult and murder that single unarmed Boer who surrendered than De La Rey[53] would have to put a bullet through the brain of one of the officers of the Northumberland Regiment who surrendered…?' Further stating that 'if the Boer leaders adopted the course of shooting down all the prisoners they captured, Kitchener's demand for more men would be twice as pressing as it is'.[54]

Allegations were also made in the *United Irishman* that Lord Monteagle was contemplating the discharge of some of the men working for him in order that they would then be forced to enlist in the British army. This was refuted not by Lord Monteagle, but by his steward who said that Monteagle did not want to dispense with anyone, 'no thought, expression, or act of his ever betrayed any such sentiment … every man in his employment can proclaim aloud his political convictions as well as his lordship himself, and with equal impunity'.[55]

Some people went to extremes in their attitudes to Britain and the war. At the petty sessions court in the city, Johanna Singleton had William Riordan before the Magistrates for assault. When dogs attacked her cat she chased them off, and he took issue with her over this saying 'the devil sweep the English' while she retorted 'down with the Boers' – apparently one of the dogs was named 'Kruger'. In a case before the petty sessions court at Patrickswell a member of Crecora United Irish League Branch was charged with assaulting two men and a woman at a public house in the village because one of the visitors said 'Rule Britannia'. When questioned about its meaning he said that he would say it before the world if England won any battles in South Africa, and that he would continue to say it as long as he lived. However, there were those who did not appreciate this expression, hence the altercation.[56]

---

[52] *L. C.* 19 February 1901.
[53] De La Rey was a Boer commander.
[54] *L.L.* 7 January 1901.
[55] *ibid.* 21 February 1900.
[56] *ibid.* 27 Feb 1901 & 2 Aug 1901.

Praising the Boers

Before the war commenced a resolution was passed by the Dock Ward Electoral Association expressing sympathy with the Boers and condemning other organisations for not expressing 'their sympathy with the plucky Boer farmers in their fight against the English…and to express a hope that if a war is forced, it may end in another Majuba Hill'.[57] The Limerick Corporation adopted this resolution word for word;[58] we should, however, not be surprised at this, as some of the members of the former organisation were members of the Corporation. The Board of Guardians of Rathkeale, County Limerick, on receipt of the resolution from the Corporation adopted it also[59] as did many other local authorities.[60] The news of the passing of this resolution by the Corporation was received by at least one Limerick Non Commissioned Officer serving in South Africa with anger. Writing to relatives, he bitterly resented the action of the Mayor and Corporation in passing resolutions favourable to the Boers. He was of the opinion that a deputation should proceed and speak to that body in an effort to have such resolutions stopped. They would he believed not only have a serious effect on Irishmen serving in the British army but also on those who were working in the Cape Colony.[61]

Limerick Corporation went further than just passing resolutions favouring the Boers: it conferred the Freedom of the City on Paul Kruger, who was the President of the South African Republics, by 22 votes to 2 against on 13 December 1900.[62] A motion to confer the Freedom of the City on three Boer Generals namely de Wet, Botha, and De La Rey and ex-President Steyn was passed amidst applause, Alderman Michael Joyce, MP, saying that 'in Limerick they were the descendants of the men and women who fought with bravery as did the Boers, and repulsed the Dutch from the city walls as did the Boers repulse the British in South Africa, and if for no other reason they should be honoured for that'.[63] He, of course, neglected to inform those present that the Boers were descended from the Dutch. Similarly, a motion to confer the Freedom of the City on another Boer leader, Captain O'Donnell, who was described as not only

---

[57] *ibid.* 4 September 1899. Majuba Hill was where the Boers had defeated the British Army during the first South African War 1880-1881.
[58] *ibid.*11 September 1899.
[59] *ibid*. 29 September 1899.
[60] McCracken, Donal P. *MacBride's Brigade*, (Dublin, 1998), p. 72.
[61] *C.E*. 12 December 1899.
[62] *ibid*. 14 December 1900.
[63] *ibid*. 5 September 1902.

being an Irishman but also a Limerick man, was unanimously adopted by the Corporation.[64]

Letters from the Front

During the war some letters from Irish soldiers sent home to their families or friends relating their experiences at the front were published in the local newspapers. In writing these letters the soldiers may not have intended or have had any idea that they were going to be published, but they were. These letters were from soldiers who were in the regular army before the war commenced or who were in the reserve,[65] and were called up when the war commenced. Although used to tough conditions, they apparently did not expect the conditions they had to endure when they arrived in South Africa. One soldier stated that he had left a good job to join up and was fed up with what he termed being knocked about. He hoped that the war would soon end as he and his comrades were short of money and were not issued with any new uniforms until the uniform that they were wearing literally fell off their backs. Also, as he had not received any pay for five months he could not afford the postage stamp to send the letter. However, he felt that a soldier must grin and bear such things in wartime. In ending his letter he hoped that the Boers would win the war so that they could go home. Another letter from a soldier to his mother complained that with all the work of digging trenches etc, they seldom had time to themselves. Their food was bad without any nutrition and he then described what was on the menu:

> 1 pint of tea, without milk, 3½ biscuits for 24 hours and 1 lb of either tinned or fresh meat. That's the menu day after day. Sometimes we don't even get that. We get ½ flour and ½ biscuits, make your own cake how you like with water-the result is the men are run down; they are as weak as boys of 12 years of age.[66]

The names appended to the end of these letters were Tom and Bob, possibly *nom de plumes* for fear of being severely reprimanded for having them published. This may be contrasted with letters published from James Rahilly, Ballysheedy, County Limerick, who did not have any

---

[64] *ibid*. 3 October 1902.
[65] A reservist in the army was one who had spent time as a regular soldier and on discharge was sent to the reserve for a time ready to be called upon in the event of a war commencing.
[66] *L. L.* 31 October 1900.

difficulty in giving his full name and address, possibly due to the content of the letters. Writing to his wife he said that while they were exposed to the cold travelling from Durban to Pietermaritzburg in open trucks by train, they were nicely catered for when they arrived at their destination. They were greatly welcomed into their camp and met some Limerick men with whom they had a high time. He stated that the newspapers at home were responsible for a lot of misinformation. They got a great reception wherever they went and that the blacks who worked for the British had nothing but good things to say about the soldiers. In another letter he wrote that the Boers threw quite a number of dead soldiers into a mass grave as well as a wounded Dublin Fusilier.[67] We do not know what effect these letters had but any intending recruit reading them would almost certainly think twice before enlisting.

While those opposed to recruiting took credit for its decline, it was stated that throughout Great Britain and Ireland there was a general reduction in men joining the infantry anyway.[68] This, it was alleged was due to recruits enlisting in other corps notably 'the more showy and attractive arms of the service, such as the cavalry and artillery'.[69] The health of those who presented themselves at recruiting offices was another factor that contributed to the decline: 'The very serious number of rejections, owing to defective teeth among recruits offering for enlistment cannot be ignored. Among the class of men from which recruits are drawn the deterioration of teeth appears to be rapidly increasing'.[70] Because it was from the working class that the majority of recruits came and would continue to come, there was some concern for the future if this declining physique was to persist.[71] In fact it was rare find a good set of teeth from recruits, with the exception of those who came from an agricultural background.[72] A decision was therefore made that those desiring to enlist wearing dentures should not be rejected for this alone, and a dentist had been obtained in one area to reduce the loss.[73]

---

[67] *L.C.* 4 January 1900. He was a sergeant (reservist) in the Connaught Rangers.
[68] *Annual Report of the Inspector General of Recruiting 1900* Cd 519 Volume IX, (London, 1901), p. 323
[69] *ibid*. p. 305.
[70] *ibid*. p. 165.
[71] *Annual Report of the Inspector General of Recruiting 1902* Cd 1417 Volume XI, Part 1, (London, 1903), p. 20.
[72] *C.E*. 28 October 1899.
[73] *Annual Report of the Inspector General of Recruiting 1900* Cd 519 Volume IX, (London, 1901), p. 165.

A correspondent writing in a local newspaper reported that army medical officers could obtain specific dental guidance when it was required adding that if the results were good the army authorities could state on their recruiting literature 'Extraction free of charge. Fresh sets supplied by the Government'. However, the point was raised whether, when soldiers were discharged, they would have to return the dentures as part of their kit.[74] The Director General of the Army Medical Service made some scathing remarks on the physical unfitness of men endeavouring to join the army. He said that for every five men who presented themselves at the recruiting office, only two were passed fit to enlist. This, he said, was as a result of poverty, which he defined in two parts, Primary and Secondary, taking the definitions from a paper read by. B. S Rowntree to the British Medical Association, and which he (the Director General) agreed with. Primary poverty was the condition that existed when the gross earnings are not sufficient to realise the minimum basic necessities for the maintenance of self and family. Secondary poverty was 'when earnings would be sufficient if some part of them were not wasted'.[75]

The rate that the soldier was to get as far as pay was concerned was one shilling a day, which was given to him on enlisting. However, after stoppages were deducted for breakages and other expenses, the soldier would not have a full seven shillings in his pocket at the end of the week. It became a matter of contention that 'what some people call the 'gentlemen soldiers' received 5s a day, while poor 'Tommy' had to be content with his shilling, and he did not always get that'.[76] Thus it was stated that unless the government did something to address this situation 'the men from whom the ranks must be recruited are not likely to be impressed with 20th century treatment of the soldier, nor while things are as they are, is there likely to be much of a rush to take the King's shilling'.[77] Efforts were being made just before the end of the war to ensure that 'Tommy' would get his pay, 'free of all deductions' and 'that the complete shilling will find its way into the pocket of the soldier'. In addition to this there was to be the inducement of an extra 6d a day good

[74] *L.C.* 4 July 1899.
[75] *Memorandum by the Director -General, Army Medical Service, on the physical unfitness of men offering themselves for enlistment in the army* Cd 1501Volume XXXVIII, (London, 1903), pp 921 & 923.
[76] *L.C.* 13 March 1902.
[77] *ibid*. 29 June 1901.

conduct pay for men of two years who decide to stay with the colours for a further six years. [78]

Young men desiring to join the army were often prevented by their parents from doing so[79] because it was felt that only the layabouts and corner boys with nothing else to do did this, just like *Tommy Atkins* in Rudyard Kipling's poem of the same name;

> I went into a theatre as sober as could be,
> They gave a drunk civilian room, but and't none for me;
> They sent me to the gallery or round the music 'alls,
> But when it comes to fightin' Lord! they'll shove me in the stalls!
> For it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' 'Tommy, wait outside';
> But it's 'Special train for Atkins' when
> The trooper's on the tide,
> The troopship's on the tide, my boys, the troopship's on the tide,
> O it's 'Special train for Atkins' when the trooper's on the tide.[80]

The respectable mother of Field Marshal William Robertson epitomised this attitude most strongly when he enlisted as a Lancer in 1877. She stated that 'the army is a refuge for all idle people; I shall name it to no one for I am ashamed to think of it. I would rather bury you than see you in a red coat'.[81] While this was an English mother expressing an opinion about her son enlisting in the British Army, it was also the view of many Irish mothers. The Croom Board of Guardians was not particularly enthusiastic when an invalided soldier, Thomas Walsh of the Royal Munster Fusiliers, from Ballingarry, Co. Limerick, was brought to the Croom Workhouse from Netley Hospital, England, as it meant additional costs to the ratepayers. The way in which this person was treated, according to a member W. Moloney, was further 'evidence of British misrule in Ireland'.[82] Members of the Limerick Board of Guardians also expressed anger at the fact that a discharged pensioner, P. McNamara, was sent from the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, London, to the Limerick Workhouse. Although he was in receipt of a full pension, in accordance with regulations the Guardians sought more for the maintenance of his

---

[78] *ibid*. 13 March 1902.
[79] *Annual Report of the Inspector General of Recruiting 1900*. Cd 519 Volume IX, (London, 1901), p. 324.
[80] Kipling, Rudyard. *Barrack Room Ballads* Volume I, (London, 1914), p. 7.
[81] Smithers, A.J. *The Fighting Nation*, (London, 1994), p. 64. William Robertson was the only man at the time to have enlisted as a private and to have risen to Field Marshal, the highest position attainable in the British Army.
[82] *L.L*. 24 August 1900.

keep in the workhouse. When it was refused, one member, Mr. O'Regan, voiced the opinion that 'it shows the generosity of the English Government in dealing with the unfortunate Irish soldiers who helped to build up the Empire'. He exclaimed further that it showed how the English Government treat the Irish soldiers. They were good enough as long as they were able to fire a rifle or burn down a house, and while they served to hide the British soldiers when fighting innocent people. However, when they became disabled they were only good enough to be let die in the workhouse; therefore this should be a warning to Irishmen against taking the 'shilling'.[83]

Recruiting

With such strong pro-Boer feeling prevalent in the city and county, did the British Army obtain any recruits in Limerick? Certainly, the army had suffered greatly at the hands of the Boers in December 1899. A succession of defeats took place during what became known as Black Week and this had a tremendous effect on British public opinion. That a trained army of the "finest soldiers" could be beaten by what was termed 'a collection of Afrikaner farmers [Boers], who seemed to have stepped straight out of the Old Testament'[84] and who were estimated to be between 45,000 to 50,000 men in number.[85] To put it more succinctly 'the great English people has been held in check by a handful of farmers …'[86] Reservists in the Limerick area were called up and this was estimated to be about 500 men who were reporting for duty to their regiments. The majority of these men belonged to the regiment associated with the area, the Royal Munster Fusiliers, who were despatched to their depot at Tralee, and thence to South Africa.[87] As they were reservists they had been out of training for some time and some had married. This resulted in pathetic scenes when the men were departing, with wives and children crying profusely and the men in a distressed condition. Because

---

[83] *ibid*. 30 January 1901.
[84] Carver, Field Marshal Lord. *The Boer War*, (London, 2000), p. 1.
[85] Kitchen, Martin. *The British Empire and Commonwealth*, (London, 1996), p. 41. Although Corelli Barnett in his book *Britain and Her Army 1509-1970*, (London), p. 338 estimates the number as that of 'some 50,000 well armed infantry …'
[86] Dixon, Norman F. *On The Psychology of Military Incompetence*, (London, 1976), p. 81.
[87] *C.E*. 20 November 1899.

of this the departure of the ship was brought forward sooner than scheduled.[88]

In order to release regular soldiers from garrison duties at home and abroad Militia battalions were embodied. One such battalion was the Limerick County Militia or as it was popularly known the 5th Battalion Royal Munster Fusiliers, which had its headquarters at the Strand Barracks, Limerick. It saw service in England and Malta. Another battalion was the Limerick City Artillery (Limerick City Militia), who mustered 300 men out of a total of strength of 576. The reasons given for such a low turnout were that the men had been called up two months before they normally were, and that they would be sent to South Africa on active service in connection with the war. Some of those departing cheered the South African President, Paul Kruger, which elicited hostile comments from others.[89] Despite these organisational changes there still were not enough soldiers to fight in South Africa.

An appeal was also issued by Queen Victoria for ex-servicemen such as officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and men to re-enlist at home for one year to replace those who went to South Africa. To encourage this, it was stipulated that from the time that this appeal was to be made public, so that from 17 February 1900 to 10 June 1900, the closing date, a bounty of £12 was paid to those who re-enlisted. There was also the guarantee that a further £10 would be paid on their discharge. This had the magical effect of attracting 24,130 ex-servicemen back to the colours;[90] all of them it seems were accepted. While these statistics are general and relate to Great Britain and Ireland, it may be reasonably stated that quite a number of them came from Limerick City and County. Later on it was decided that in order to bolster the intake of ex-servicemen who wanted to re-join the army, and provided that the recruiting regulations were adhered to, any time served could be added to time previously served. This would have improved their good conduct pay and pension prospects; it was of course conditional on the men declaring any previous service on re-enlistment.[91] We are not informed of how many availed of this offer. However, these added bonuses were sure to have attracted those who did not avail of the previous allowances. Other inducements were either increased or introduced to urge men to enlist, the rates of

---

[88] *ibid.* 27 November 1899.
[89] *ibid*. 7 May 1900.
[90] *Annual Report of the Inspector General of Recruiting 1900.* Cd 519 Volume IX, (London, 1901), p. 302.
[91] *Annual Report of the Inspector General of Recruiting 1902.* Cd 1417 Volume XI, 1 (London, 1903), p. 6.