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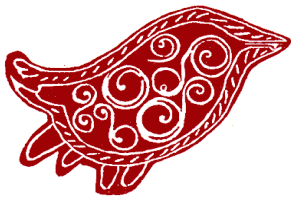

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JOURNAL
OF THE
CORK HISTORICAL AND ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

VOL. II. JULY, 1893. No. 19.

Biographical Sketches of Persons Remarkable in Local History.

VI.—WILLIAM MAGINN, LL.D.

[The following paper has been compiled partly from Webb's *Compendium of Irish Biography*, O'Donoghue's *Dictionary of Irish Poets*, and Allibone's *Authors;* but more especially from R. S. Montagu's biographical sketch prefixed to the *Maginn Miscellanies in Prose and Verse.* London: S. Low, 1885.]

WILLIAM MAGINN, editor, author, poet and wit, the most remarkable magazine writer and most eminent scholar of his time, was born on the 10th of July, 1793—exactly a hundred years ago—in Marlboro' Street, in the city of Cork, where probably little is now known or heard of his name and history.

His father,(1) who conducted the leading school (or Academy, as it was named) in Cork, gave him such a careful educational training that he was sufficiently advanced to enter Trinity College, Dublin, at the early age of ten. Here he was so fortunate as to come under the care of Dr. Kyle (afterwards Protestant bishop of Cork), who soon recognized his budding genius, and continued to be a wise and judicious friend to him in afterlife.

On completing his college course, during which he published a poem called *Eneas Eunuchus*, young Maginn returned to Cork and taught classics in his father's school, of which he became the head on the death of his parent in 1813—a position which his associates thought hardly compatible with one of his rollicking, wit-squandering disposition. Things, however, went on smoothly, and in 1816, when only twenty-three years old, he took the degree of LL.D. in Trinity, which no previous student of his *alma mater* had attained at so early an age.

The repute of his scholarship spread far and wide, and pupils were attracted to him by it, in spite of his lack of those qualities "supposed to be the distinguishing attributes of a schoolmaster." That one of his temperament should, however, cast about him for a more congenial occupation than pedagogy is not surprising; yet, it is to his credit, that Maginn stuck to the school for ten years, and maintained by it the family circle, which had become dependent upon him on the death of his father. For a portion of this time he had as his assistant, J. J. Callanan, the poet, whose poems and biography have already appeared in this Journal; whilst his own playmate, school-fellow, and life-long friend, was another forgotten literary Corkman, M. J. O'Sullivan, a "Fasciculus" of whose "Verses" was published posthumously at Cork in 1846.

In the depth and breadth of his reading Maginn soon surpassed all his contemporaries in Cork literary society, whilst some of his earliest literary productions were those which he contributed to the Cork press, notably to *Bolster's Magazine* (1826-30). The first periodical out of Cork for which he wrote was the *Literary Gazette;* but in *Blackwood's*

(1) This was, doubtless, the John Maginn, author of the *Compendium of Rhetoric, compiled for the use of the Diocesan School of Cork.* Cork, 1801.

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Magazine, which came out in 1817, he found a specially favourable field for the display of his talents, and, for some years—from 1818 down—he was its mainstay in the shape of the essays, disquisitions, reviews, romances, ballads, squibs, pasquinades, and epigrams, in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Irish, English, and slang, which appeared in it from his facile pen.

His papers in *Blackwood* (the first of which was a Latin translation of *Chevy-Chase*) (2) had affixed to them such odd signatures as Morgan O'Doherty; M. O'D.; R. T. S.; Olinthus Petre, D.D.; Rev. E. Hincks, F.T.C.D.; Morty McNamara Mulligan; Philip Forager; William Holt; An Irish Gentleman Lately Deceased; Bob Buller; Giles Middlestitch; Blaize Fitztravesty, Esq.; Rev. J. Barrett, F.T.C.D.; R. J. P.; Augustinus; P. T. T.; W. Seward; Ralph Tucket Scott; *Richard Dowden*, and *Thomas Jennings*—the two latter being the names of contemporary Cork citizens; whilst in the *Literary Gazette* his assumed names were—Dionysius Duggan; P. P. Crossman; P. P. P.; P. J. and C. O. Crossman.

The story of his connection with *Blackwood's Magazine* shows his peculiar bent of mind—always at war with the conventional—which led him to introduce himself to its founder, William Blackwood, in Prince's Street, Edinburgh, as an irate Cork man, with a rich brogue, "whose name some blackguard there had been using in (*Blackwood's*) old thrump of a magazine;" the very thing he had himself been doing, causing Dowden and Jennings in fact to write very wicked notes, demanding the address of the author who had appended their names to some squibs which had just appeared in the magazine. This interview, though conducted by Maginn on the basis of what he called "fair quizzification," was not seemingly distasteful to Blackwood, whose guest he became for six weeks, during which interval he luxuriated in the society of Wilson, Lockhart, Hamilton, and others of literary note in Edinburgh. It is even recorded that the publisher was delighted with his wild Irish assistant, and that they were at once "up to the elbows in friendship."

His social qualities, his gaiety, pleasantry, and ceaseless flow of learned, wise and witty conversation, were such as could not fail to render him a favourite in cultured circles. A pen-picture drawn of Maginn at this period represents him as "short in stature; uttering pleasantries, and scattering witticisms about with the careless glee of his country. His articulation was impeded by a stutter; yet the stammered sentences were brilliant repartees, uttered without sharpness and edged rather with humour than with satire. His countenance was rather agreeable than striking; its expression sweet rather than bright. The grey hair coming straight over his forehead gave a singular appearance to a face still bearing the attributes of youth. He was thirty or thereabouts; but his thoughtful brow, his hair, and the paleness of his complexion, gave him many of the indications of age. His conversation was careless and offhand, and, but for the impediment of speech, would have had the charm of a rich comedy. His choice of words was such as I have rarely met with in any of my contemporaries." Another writer spoke of him as "completely and perfectly an Irishman in every look and word, and movement." In 1823 Maginn married a lady named Cullen, and soon after—whether because his school was not adequate for the support of a wife and family, or that his appetite for wider social life than Cork offered had been whetted by his recent visit to Edinburgh—he resolved to give up teaching and devote himself to literature.

Having solicited his friends in London and Edinburgh to procure him permanent employment in England, he there became associated with Theodore Hook, on the *John Bull* newspaper and the *London Literary Journal*, both of which literary ventures, however, failed. The highest tribute to Maginn's powers was shown when Murray, the great London publisher, selected him for the task of bringing out the *Memoirs, Journals, and Letters of Lord Byron*, on the latter's death; an undertaking which, however, was for the time abandoned, consequent on the destruction of Byron's autobiography, and was eventually entrusted to another Irishman—the famous Thomas Moore, the poet. About this time Maginn began to write for the *Quarterly Review*, and upon the establishment of the *Representative* newspaper he became its Paris correspondent, previous to which his unfortunate failings had evidently begun to manifest themselves.

(2) In *Allibone's Dictionary* his first communication to *Blackwood's* is stated to be "Mrs. MacWhirter's Chaunt—The Powldoodies of Burran"—in *Christopher in the Tent.*

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That he eked out his income by contributing to the *Age* and the *True Sun* is only too probable. His pen could, if he would only apply himself, produce excellent work off-hand, as shown by the letter-press to the *Gallery of Illustrious Characters*, with which was connected the pictorial skill of his fellow-Corkman—Maclise. This was hit off at a moment's notice, and in the course of a few minutes. But steady devotion to business was evidently not to be expected of Maginn.

An ultra-Tory in politics, he was appointed sub-editor of the *Standard* newspaper, on its foundation in 1828, and about this time, too, (1827) he brought out anonymously a novel, under the title of *Whitehall; or the Days of George IV.*, in which all the leading personages of the period, from the king down, were sketched with unrestrained freedom of wit and humour, its special purpose being to satirize Horace Smith and his novel, *Brambletye House*. Maginn also contributed to the annuals brought out at that day, in one of which (*The Literary Londoner*) his delicacy of taste is shown in a paper entitled *A Vision of Purgatory*.

Hitherto Maginn had not faltered in his allegiance to Blackwood. The famous *Notes* which appeared in it were, in fact, his suggestion; and his contributions thereto, numerous, including the famous Greek work, with its intensely free translation. Several of the brightest songs embedded in the rich prose were his, and it is recorded on weighty authority that the whole of No. 4 of the series was written by him.

A difference seems to have arisen about this time between Blackwood and Maginn, which, occurring just when the latter was introduced to the familiar friendship of a typical Bohemian (Hugh Fraser), led to the founding of *Fraser's Magazine*. Strolling through Regent street, in search of a publisher, they arrived at No. 215, where on seeing the proprietor's name was Fraser, Maginn said to his companion, "Here's a namesake of yours, Fraser; let's try him." They entered the shop; their proposal was at once adopted; and in February, 1830, appeared the first number of *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*; the title being derived not from the projector, Hugh Fraser, but from the publisher. Maclise's cartoon of the Fraserians is a pictorial record of the proud position soon attained by *Regina*, the early volumes of which attest the inexhaustible variety of its literary excellence; not the least attractive feature, being the *Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters*,(3) in the spicy text of Maginn, with admirable portraits, the work of Maclise. Included in this collection, the articles upon Farmer's essay "On the learning of Shakespeare" exemplify the range and depth of Maginn's own learning, which his native vigour of mind never suffered to become oppressive to him. They show, furthermore, what he

(3) Re-published; edited by W. Bates in 1873.

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could have easily achieved by application. But sustained effort went against the grain with him. Only by fits and starts could he work; composition under difficulties having an irresistible fascination for his radically discursive intellect.

No better illustration of this peculiarity could be given than that supplied by his review of a novel called *Berkley Castle*. It happened that book was sent in at the end of the month, when matter was wanted to fill up some pages of the forthcoming number of the magazine, and the author of the work besides was, if not a Radical, a Whig. Maginn was now in his element. He set to work at once, with the double purpose of vexing the publisher and smashing the author of the novel, and the result was the famous review, which brought down upon the luckless publisher (then in a delicate state of health) the terrible ire of Grantley Berkley, the author, who murderously assaulted Fraser with a riding-whip in his own premises.

Upon hearing of this assault, Maginn lost no time in avowing his authorship of the review, and a hostile meeting took place between him and Berkley. After an exchange of shots both combatants, however, left the field unhurt, whilst for the cruel outrage inflicted on him by Berkley poor Fraser recovered only £100 damages.

After this it was not surprising that all the slashing papers in *Fraser* were attributed to Maginn, and when a severe criticism upon a drama, entitled *The Student of Padua*, appeared in the number for April, 1837, the *Metropolitan* (Conservative journal) branded him as a "coward," and denounced him as a "slanderer, a backbiter, and a dastardly "calumniator by profession." Maginn, however, never wrote the critique at all, and having brought an action for libel against the printer of the journal named, he recovered £150 damages and costs; the *Examiner's* brief report of the case being significantly headed, *Pot* v. *Kettle*

Of his *Homeric Ballads*, the first of which appeared in January, 1838, and was published separately in 1850, the late Professor Conington wrote "that Maginn may be esteemed "the first who consciously realized to himself "the truth that Greek ballads can be really "represented in English only by a similar "measure. This is his great praise." Mr. Gladstone has borne testimony to their admirably-turned Homeric tone; and Matthew Arnold has spoken of them as genuine poems in their own way. A complete version of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* was said to have been contemplated; but that was all. A man who, like him, seldom wrote except in company, and generally in the midst of tumult, who, in the middle of a sentence, would relieve the strain of thought by throwing himself back in his chair and telling a humorous story, and who then would suddenly resume his pen, could not possibly concentrate his powers for the production of steadily continuous work.

Maginn's intemperate habits had by this time dissolved several literary engagements, and his life may be said to have been weighed down with grief and care; passed, as it was, partly in prison for debt, and partly hiding away from the sheriff's officers, and apart from his wife and family, from whom he separated, not seemingly through any fault on their side.

Thackeray gives a memorable sketch of Maginn as "Captain Shandon" in *Pendennis*, and also generously befriended him in his distressed circumstances. His witty sallies, too, probably helped to alienate the regard of powerful patrons and even the pompous Wilson Croker, the would-be Lord Lyneham, felt their force when Maginn, at a formal dinner party, dubbed him there and then, "Lord Penny a line-em."

Through all his misfortunes, however, he appears to have retained his serenity of mind, and was able to write political leaders when too ill to rise from his bed. Near the last, a friend wrote of him:—"He was quite emaciated and worn away; his hands thin, and very little flesh on his face; his eyes appeared brighter and larger than usual, and his hair was wild and disordered. He stretched out his hand and saluted me. He is a ruin; a glorious ruin nevertheless. But he lives a rollicking life, and will write you one of his ablest articles while standing in his shirt or supping brandy. We talked on Seneca, Homer, Plato, Virgil, etc." At length, utterly broken in health, and saddened in spirit, Maginn, after recovering his liberty through the Insolvency Court, retired in 1842 to Walton-on-Thames, where, on the 21st of August, he died in his forty-ninth year, of consumption, in the arms of his attached friend and fellow-Corkman, Dr. Edward Vaughan Kenealy.(4)

(4) A biographical sketch of Maginn, from the pen

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As the fearless and persistent champion of Toryism for five and twenty years, he had reckoned upon reward when his party came into power, but in this he was doomed to disappointment; and Sir Robert Peel, the man whose policy of 1829 Maginn, with the strong feelings of an Irish Orangeman, had denounced with unsparing severity, and whose motives he had assailed with unwearied pertinacity, in rhymes only less galling than the fiercest of Swift's, was one of his chief benefactors, and sent no less than £100 when he learned of the death-bed wants of this wild son of genius.

No stone marks the place where his remains lie in the churchyard of Walton-on-Thames, but his epitaph has been written by Lockhart, the son-in-law and biographer of Sir Walter Scott, in words full of pathos and wit, as follows:—

"Here, early to bed, lies kind William Maginn,
Who with genius, wit, learning, life's trophies to win
Had neither great lord, nor rich cit of his kin,
Nor discretion to set himself up as to tin;
So his portion soon spent, like the poor heir of Lynn,
He turned author while yet was no beard on his chin;
And whoever was out, or whoever was in,
For your Tories his fine Irish brains he would spin;
Who received prose and rhyme with a promising grin.

"Go ahead, you queer fish, and more power to your fin,
But to save from starvation stirr'd never a pin.
Light for long was his heart, though his breeches were thin,
Else his acting for certain was equal to Quinn;
But at last he was beat and sought help from the bin
(All the same to the Doctor, from claret to gin),
Which led swiftly to gaol, with consumption therein;
It was much, when the bones rattled loose in his skin,
He got leave to die here, out of Babylon's din—
Many worse, better few, than bright, broken Maginn."

Amongst his writings, not previously mentioned here, were the reprints from *Blackwood's* of his *Maxims of Sir Morgan O'Doherty* (1849), his *Shakespearian Papers; Pictures Grave and Gay* (from *Bentley's Magazine*, 1859), and his *Miscellanies* (in 10 parts), which do not appear to have brought him much pecuniary benefit. His *Miscellanies* were also brought out in America, edited by Dr. S. MacKenzie. Some of his poems are to be found reprinted in the *Bentley Ballads*, published in 1858.(5) The following novels have been attributed to him—*The Red Baron* (1828), *John Manesty* (1844), and *Tales of Military Life* (1841); the last of which only bears Maginn's name on the title-page.

Allibone's Dictionary of Authors furnishes the following paragraphs, which show in what light Maginn's writings were held by his contemporaries, unknown and forgotten though they now may happen to be:— "Romancist, "parodist, politician, satirist, linguist, poet, "critic, scholar," wrote Jerdan, "pre-eminent "in all, and in the last all but universal, the "efflux of his genius was inexhaustible; and "were even the approach to a considerable "collection of his productions accomplished, "I am convinced that the world would be "more than ever astounded by the originality, "learning, fancy, wit, and beauty, with which "he illuminated the widest circle of periodical "literature."

Alluding to his fugitive essays, Dr. Kenealy remarked:—"Their variety proves the amazing "versatility of his mind; their excellence is "an emblem of its wealth and beauty. Poetry, "romance, and criticism, parody, translation, "and burlesque; of these there are en-"shrined, amid the vast collection of his "compositions, examples as perfect and "splendid as any in the language. . . . "His conversation," Dr. Kenealy further states "was an outpouring of the gorgeous "stores wherewith his mind was laden, and "flowed on like the storied 'Pactolus,' all "golden, whether the subject was grave or "gay, lively or severe, profound or merely "elegant, he infused into it such ambrosial "*ichor;* he sprinkled it with such sun-bright "wit, as if the Muse of Comedy stood in-"visibly by and whispered into his ear; he "illumined it with so many iris-like beams of "learning, originality, wisdom, and poetry, "that to listen to him was like the case of one "who is spell-bound by an enchanter. And "yet all was so artless, so simple, so uncon-"cernedly delivered, that it evidently re-"quired no effort of mind to enable him thus "to flash forth—but that which you beheld "was the ordinary lustre of his understand-"ing."

"The combined learning, wit, eloquence, "eccentricity and humour of Maginn, had ob-"tained for him," observed MacKenzie, "long "before his death, the title of *the Modern* "*Rabelais*. His magazine articles possess "extraordinary merit. He had the art of

of Dr. Kenealy, appeared in the *Dublin University Magazine*, vol. xxiii., p. 72; and a description of Maginn's grave will be found in Dr. Kenealy's *Brallaghan; or the Deipnosophists.*

(5) The *Bentley Ballads*, with preface and notes by another Corkman (John Sheehan), were also brought out in 1869.

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" putting a vast quantity of animal spirits " upon paper; but his graver articles, which " contain sound and serious principles of " criticism, are earnest and well reasoned. " Few men were equal to him in conver- " sation, though he was the reverse of a great " talker. It was the variety of topics upon " which he threw a light, and not the diffusive- " ness of his remarks, which gave a happy " idea of the wealth of his conversation. " Meet him when you might; turn the dis- " course into whatever channel you pleased, " Maginn was master of every subject—the " most recondite as well as the most familiar."

According to another writer, Henry T. Tuckerman, seemingly an American :—" One " of the most remarkable of that group of " scholars and good fellows, ready writers, " boon companions and wits, who initiated the " brilliant periodical literature of this age in " the British islands, was William Maginn, " LL.D., the youngest Doctor of Laws ever " graduated at old Trinity. Every English " periodical of mark for years owed some- " what of its influence and its interest to the " prompt, copious, erudite and funny pen of " Maginn. Now it was a parody, and now a " translation; to-day a critique, to-morrow a " letter from Paris; one month a novel, and " the next a political essay. Versatile, " learned, apt and facile, the genial Irish " Doctor made wisdom and mirth wherever " he went. Too convivial for his own good, " too improvident for his prosperity, he was " yet a benefactor to the public, a delight to " scholars, and an idol to his friends."

The subjoined extracts are the only ones of local interest to be found in the *Maginn Miscellanies* (1885), and may also serve to give some idea of the writer's style both in poetry and prose. The first is headed a "Song," on being asked who wrote "The Groves of Blarney" :—

" 'Who?' ask ye. No matter; this tongue shall not tell
O'er the board of oblivion the name of the bard;
Nor shall it be uttered, but with the proud spell
That sheds on the perished their only reward.

No, no! look abroad, sir; the last of October,
In the pages of *Blackwood* that name shall be writ,
For Christopher's self, be he tipsy or sober,
Was not more than his match in wine, wisdom or wit.

Ye Dowdens and Jenningses, wits of Cork city,
Though mighty the heroes that chime in your song,
Effervescing and eloquent, more is the pity
Ye forget the great poet of Blarney so long.

I mean not the *second*—O Fogarty hight—
Who can speak for himself, from his own native Helicon;
I sing of an elder, in birth and in might,
(Be it said with true deference)—honest *Dick Millikin.*

Then fill up, to his mem'ry, a bumper, my boys;
'Twill cheer his sad ghost, as it toddles along
Through Pluto's dark alleys in search of the joys
That were dear upon earth to this stepson of song.

And this be the rule of the banquet for aye,
When the goblets all ring with 'Och hone, Ullagone';
Remember this pledge, as a tribute to pay,
To the name of a minstrel so sweet, so unknown.'

Sept. 1st, 1821.

The following is taken from a paper "On Irish Songs," written apparently to show up the ignorance of some Cockney writer upon this subject, and, as will be seen, deals mainly with the good things of Maginn's native city such as they were fifty years ago:—"Cork, I can " assure him, is well munitioned with victual " and drink, and he has but a small chance of " being eaten alive there, particularly as he " remains but a fortnight. Nor let him dread " the hostile countenances of a grand jury " empanelled by Jack Bagnell and Ned " Colburn—best of little men—sheriffs of the " aforesaid bailiwick; and, even if that is " improbable, the thing comes to a *petit* jury, " even before them let him pluck up courage. " Men are to be found on all sides of the " banks of "the spreading Lee" who would " devour the boot, from the silk twist that " hems its upper leather to the iron horse-shoe " which guards its heel, sooner than give a " verdict against the right. Counselled by " these reflections, let him devour turbot, hot " (as the old cookery books have it) from the " banks in the harbour; let him swallow " salmon, creaming, in everlasting curd from " the Lee; let Kinsale feed him with hake, " fish of delicious flavour, unheard of in " *Augusta Trinobantum;* from Cove let him " gulp down oysters, capacious as his well- " fleshed hand; Kerry will supply him " mutton to masticate, small but lovely; Cork " itself will offer its beef and butter, peerless " throughout the land. He may, no doubt, " regret the crammed poultry of London; " but a turkey in native flavour will smoke " upon his board for two tenpennies. Does " he long for dainties more rich and rare? " In a harbour yawning for the West Indies " he need not desiderate turtle; in a city,

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" within easy march of sporting hills and " dales, he need not be afraid of wanting " game or venison. As for drink; is he fond " of port? Vessels from Oporto will jostle the " boat that brings him to the quay; if, of " claret, he must be unskilled in bibulous " lore if he knows not the value set upon the " claret of Ireland. But, as his stay is short, " I recommend whiskey-punch. *That*, he can- " not get for love nor money in London. " Let him there ingurgitate that balmy fluid; " there's Walker, there's Wise, there's Cal- " laghan, there's Hewitt—excellent artists all. " They will sell it to him for from 6s. 6d. to " 7s. 6d. a gallon; and a gallon will make " sixty-four tumblers—I have often calculated " it—and that is three times as much as he " should drink in an evening. So doing he " will be happy, and fearless of the act of " Judge Johnson. But what is this I am " about? Digressing from a disquisition on " songs, pseudo-Irish, to the way in which a " stranger who knows how could live in Cork. " It can't be helped. I have lost the thread " of my argument, so I think I had better " conclude." J. C.

Some Unpublished Records of Cork.

PART II.—FROM 1817 TO 1818 INCLUSIVE.

BY C. G. DORAN (COUNCIL MEMBER).

(Concluded.)

SEPTEMBER 28th, 1817. In consequence of the continued increase of the fever which has raged for some time past in this city, the committee of both Fever Houses made another appeal to the public, and a collection was this day made in the places of religious worship, the same as on the former occasion.

September 30th. Died this morning at one o'clock the Right Worshipful Edward Allen, mayor. He was unhealthy throughout his mayoralty, but took cold from attending the court, registering freeholders, the Friday before his death. Thus, in the course of this year, the city has been twice without a mayor.

October 1st. Married, this morning, Mr. William Deeble to Eliza Clarke.

October 5th. Died this evening of the fever (which now ravages with rather increased fury) Mr. Benjamin Barter, of Castle Street.

October 6th. This being the day for swearing in the mayor and sheriffs, the recorder and old sheriffs, and the mayor, and sheriffs-elect, came into the court at twelve o'clock. Mr. Fitton addressed the Recorder in a speech, the purport of which was that, instead of swearing Mr. Gibbings, they ought to elect a new mayor in place of Mr. Allen, but the Recorder said the course he advised was that the present sheriff swear in the new mayor, and he (the new mayor) then to swear in the new sheriffs and other officers, which (after a good deal of opposition) was done.

Thomas Gibbings, Esq., being sworn in mayor, and Thomas Wilson Newsom, and James Lane, Esq., sheriffs, after which, thanks being voted to the former sheriffs, and a protest entered on the books against the whole proceedings by several of the freemen, the court adjourned.

October 8th. Patients admitted to the House of Recovery during last month, 414; patients in the house on the 8th of September, 120; total, 534. Patients discharged, 378; patients died, 14; patients in the house now, 142; total, 534.

October 11th. Died of the fever, Mrs. Jacob Biggs, of Blarney Lane, and Mr. Babington, revenue officer.

During the last six weeks the weather has been seasonably dry, and favourable to the harvest, which, on account of the very dry spring, has been very backward. A continuance of this weather will make amends, and cause the heart of the farmer to beat with joy.

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