

as healthful and hopeful as the young Church of ancient days emerging from the Roman catacombs. Oh, holy Church of our fathers, purified as by fire, how like art thou to thy Divine Founder!—the Church ever persecuted, reviled, blasphemed, despised, suffering in every member, bleeding at every pore, yet surviving, and, in the end, ever triumphant! See its antagonist of earthly origin set up by the State—jealous, vindictive, intolerant of the truth; its hands filled with bibles and penal statutes, boasting of liberty, yet ever urging parliaments to resist the emancipation of the people; full of false zeal, boasting of evangelizing Ireland, when its followers were fallen away; full of worldly pride, full of gluttony, empty of true religion; the house divided against itself, adopting every heresy, preaching infidelity through its late Essays; approving of divorce, admitting polygamy, despising the grace of regeneration after having discarded all the other Sacraments of the new law, broken up into sects, decrepid, old, consumptive, and dying out; its friends, the first statesmen of the empire, unable to allege any reason for its continuance—save the enormous difficulty of removing at once an abuse of so long standing and of such gigantic proportions. Such, sir, is your Church; such it appears without exaggeration, or any false colouring before all men, save those who are corrupted by its favours, or perverted by its erroneous teaching. Statements of this nature, which cannot be obscured by sophistry, or evaded by subtlety, have forced, you are aware, your own brethren in considerable numbers—men of honour and intelligence—to leave your establishment. You may not have the grace and strength to make the necessary sacrifices of position and wealth, to follow their disinterested example,

but you will be enabled at least to respect the Church, which alone can make such conquests, and against which the powers of this world cannot prevail.

I have the honour to be,

Very Rev. Sir, yours,

JAMES MAHER, P.P.

LII.

ON THE EVILS OF PROSELYTISM.

TO MISS WHATELY.

December 7th, 1867.

MADAM—A friend of mine who loves religion and hates souperism has, not long since, received through the post the last report of the Ragged Boys' Home, with a letter and other papers, signed "Ellen Smyly," soliciting support for the institution, and, not wishing to reply himself, he put the whole correspondence into my hands to deal with it as I pleased.

The few observations which I deem it right to make shall be, with all due respect, addressed to you as being one of the most prominent persons even more than Mrs. Smyly, in the management of the "Home," which all persons even moderately acquainted with the doctrines of morality, and not blinded by bigotry, must consider as a demoralising and degrading system of proselytism.

The evils of the system as tending to degrade our nature, and extinguish all religious sentiment in the mind, have been denounced in the strongest terms by one whom

you ought to regard, the late Protestant Archbishop of Dublin. The unfortunate people who barter their religion for a supply of the means of living, excited his pity, rather than condemnation, but the offence of the proselytiser he looked upon as unpardonable. To his work on this subject I shall direct your attention, just now.

The principal object of your society is to subvert the faith of Catholic youth by supplying food and clothing and other relief in their distress. In your last report the Home is said to be "essentially a missionary institution," and that "numbers of Roman Catholics are inmates of the Home." To feed the hungry and clothe the naked is a work of charity, but to do it as an inducement for the recipients to renounce the religion of their fathers, is the work of Satan. The Scriptural type of the proselytiser, creeping into the houses of the poor, is the serpent tempting Eve with the apple in the garden. Is it no harm to violate the parental rights of the poor, in the person of their children, because they are poor? Can there be a more flagrant infraction of the plainest dictates of the natural and the moral law? Is such a course in accordance with the first lessons of Christianity—that of doing to others as you would wish that others would do unto you? In what light would you view, or in what terms describe, the conduct of Catholic ladies collecting money from house to house, to feed Protestant children on condition of their renouncing their creed and embracing Popery? If you give up the work of proselytism, the home, or missionary institution, will not receive one shilling from the ladies who now sustain it.

Is this, then, a work in which a lady can conscientiously engage? Hear now what Dr. Whately has stated on the subject in an address to his clergy, 1847, when proselytism, in consequence of the misery of the poor, was most

rampant. "What," he asks, "would be the feelings of any one of us, if, when residing in some foreign country of a different religion from his own, he saw his children starving around him, and if he were given to understand it was expected that, in consideration of the relief offered, he should receive himself, and allow his children to receive, such religious instruction as he had been taught to regard as erroneous? Surely if any one of you were so situated, and if you were driven by the extremity of distress to make a compromise of principle, it is likely you would feel—at least when the present emergency was passed—that your own conduct was pardonable, and that of your convertors unpardonable. It is likely you would be filled with disgust, both for them, and also for the religion itself which they had thus attempted to force upon you."

Have you ever read that passage before; or, having read it, have you made up your mind to continue in that course which your father has so justly condemned? Would it not be prudent for you and Mrs. Smyly, and others of your class, to hold a conference on the subject, asking yourselves the question, "Is our proselytising mission so dishonourable and mischievous and immoral as to fill with disgust, as well for ourselves as for our creed, all those with whom we come in contact?"

Your conduct, madam, as agent of the Ragged Boys' Home, has been severely censured in the *London Times* by a clergyman of your own church, the Rev. P. Hains. You must have read his letter, but you would do well to read it again. He writes thus: "In the *Times* of last Wednesday appeared a letter from Miss Whately, daughter of the Archbishop of Dublin, appealing for support on behalf of the Dublin Ragged Boys' Home. Far be it for me to breathe a syllable against ragged homes, or schools for the poor. But when they are opened only

upon the condition that the wretched inmates be taught to renounce that form of Christianity in which they have been brought up, then it is time to pause when English money is sought for such a purpose. I would not envy any person the possession of those feelings that would not revolt at the idea of taking advantage of the deep distress and utter dependence of some poor city outcasts, to endeavour to bribe them by the prospect of food and clothing, to enter the ranks of Protestantism.

"Signed, PHILIP HAINS, Incumbent of St. Matthias, Liverpool, April 7, 1862."

It would be hard, I submit, to imagine anything more opposed to an enlightened sense of honour, of fair play, or truth, than the proceedings which Mr. Hains so justly and severely characterizes, and if the directors of the Ragged Boys' Home were capable of comprehending fully the plainest principles of moral law, these proselytising nuisances, after the condemnation of Dr. Whately and Dr. Hains, would have been long since suppressed.

In watching the movements of the proselytisers on their tour of moral disturbance and religious agitation, from Dublin to Connemara, my eye lit upon the following passage, taken from a report on street preaching inserted in your letter:—

"In Dublin there are 200,000 Roman Catholics. These Roman Catholics are utterly ignorant of the Word of God. They cannot know it, for it is practically a forbidden book, and the teaching they receive from their priests is directly contrary to it."

In another letter, extolling your work of proselytism, you write, "It has brought the blessings of pure Christianity to multitudes who were sunk in darkness and virtual heathenism."

"Signed, E. J. WHATELY, 5, Elgin-road" (no date).

If these passages, which I have extracted from your letters, had not been written; and if it had been said that the Archbishop's daughter had uttered such reproaches against a religious Catholic people amongst whom she came to live, the statement would most probably be rejected as a malignant invention to injure his Grace's character by bringing discredit on those of his household. It would be asked, how could she be so intensely uncharitable, so thoroughly pharisaical, reporting her 200,000 Catholic fellow-citizens as sunk in virtual heathenism, and she herself a vessel of election, drawing multitudes out of the darkness of infidelity? or how could she venture to say that, to them, the Bible was a forbidden book, knowing, as she must know, that thousands of bibles are exposed for sale every day in Dublin with the full approbation and knowledge of the Catholic hierarchy?

One is really filled with surprise at the utter recklessness of truth, of charity, and good breeding which these utterances display. There is, I am aware, no law to restrain your liberty in this matter; but one cannot well understand how men of honour and intelligence, in the mercantile and professional classes in Dublin, can permit their daughters and sisters to carry on and support that pecuniary proselytism which, if Dr. Whately be a good authority, fills every enlightened mind with disgust.

Did it ever occur to you, madam, or the ladies who co-operate with you, to examine dispassionately the missionary work, in which you are engaged, in the Protestant Establishment, and compare it with that work of grace and heavenly influence which is always silently operating in the ancient Church of the country? The case stands thus:—The Protestant Church is sustained by the most powerful human agency, by wealth,

authority, and regal favour, by the parliaments and the laws—sustained by a richly salaried episcopacy, having a full staff of deans, archdeacons, dignitaries, rectors, and curates, with, in many places, no work to do—this Church, fully equipped and upheld by every earthly power, seeing that it made no progress in promoting Protestantism, either by inflicting cruel penalties, or confiscating Catholic property, or by prayer, preaching, or argument, has been for the last half century principally engaged, through the agency of proselytising societies, to rob the poor of the faith, the great gift of God, and raise a crop of Protestants from amongst the destitute, wretched, beggared children of the land, to fill the empty churches of the State. This has been especially its field of labour. Wherever poverty and destitution are known exclusively to prevail, the district is immediately covered with a net of proselytising societies, composed chiefly of a vulgar, illiterate horde of agents, designated Bible-readers, hired at a few shillings a week, which they seek to earn by ridiculing, reviling, and blaspheming the religion of Christendom, the only task which their education enables them to perform. Every year they give their reports, made up principally of bitter calumnies, of insults and reproaches against priests, nuns, and monks, together with fabulous accounts of thousands and tens of thousands of conversions, where none exist, and hypocritical exclamations, of “the vast turning away from Romanism,” of “the falling away of priestly influence,” and “the wide spread of pure orthodox Protestantism.” And here let me add that these societies have intensified the hatred and utter contempt of every rational man in the kingdom against that section of the Church which has employed them.

Turn now to the Catholic Church during the same period. She stands before us poor, oppressed, discounted, and scorned by the great ones of this world, like to the Christian Church under the pagan emperors, yet evidently doing a work—not of man, or within the power of man, but a work of divine grace, carried out unostentatiously by the sacraments of God’s Church and other heavenly influences. Catholicism, by its innate beauty and force of truth, captivates the understanding, and wins its converts from every class of society, save those who have lost all religious convictions, and are ready, therefore, to profess any creed for a mess of pottage. They are gathered into the ancient fold by hundreds from amongst the intellectual, the learned, the disinterested, the religiously-minded—in a word, from all those who are honestly seeking the kingdom of heaven. Look round, madam, and see in the ancient Church a body of men who were lately the pride and ornament of the English universities; men of the first order of minds, of deep research, of high standing, to whom the tempting succession to the richest sees in the world and other dignities was no distant prospect. Those men knew your church as well as it could be known: its merits or its deficiencies could not be concealed from their searching gaze. They walked within its sanctuary; they studied its history; they knew its corrupt origin and its mode of existence; they learned its philosophy and theology, in which they were distinguished amongst their fellows; they partook of its good things, its rich benefices, and high posts of honour, and had the strongest inducements to think favourably of it and cling to it. Yet, madam, it is a fact—we all know it—they abjure it. Having weighed it in the balance of the sanctuary, and found it wanting, they gave it to the winds. They

rejected it as not affording the sacramental means of salvation appointed by Christ.

These conversions were not, as some imagine, a fancy business, a fondness of change, an indulgence of temperament. No; they were evidently a full renunciation, after long consideration and prayer, of the goods of the world, to follow Christ on the road to Calvary. It must have cost them many a painful struggle to give up home and all who ever knew them, loved them, valued them, and become in their estimation a by-word and an out-cast. Well might they exclaim, in the words of inspiration—" *Posuisti nos opprobrium vicinis nostris, et derisum his, qui sunt in circuitu nostro. Hæc omnia venerunt super nos, nec obliti sumus te.*"—*Ps. lxiii.*

Such conversions, madam, are clearly the work of divine grace, bringing souls that are to be saved out of heresy into the house of the living God. By what other agency, let anybody ask himself, could such converts be reached or moved? What could have induced them to cast off, as the serpent does its skin, the prejudices of their whole lives, and embrace the very doctrines which they were taught to consider as "blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits;" what could have worked so wonderful a change? What but that power which St. Paul describes as "mighty under God, unto the pulling down of fortifications, destroying counsels, and every height that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ." The late Dr. Whately, possessing certainly highly-cultivated logical powers, attempted, but in vain, to account on other principles for the secession to the Church of Rome, from the high and intellectual classes of England. He said—I quote his words—"Converts to Catholicity were led and considered it

right to be led; by a craving for the beautiful, the splendid, the picturesque."

How thoroughly and evidently inadequate is such a motive! To what straits are men of acknowledged ability driven who once leave the path of truth!

Is there nothing beautiful to captivate the imagination in a rich rectory, in domestic endearments, with £1,000 a year, and the prospect of succeeding to the See of Canterbury or Dublin, with city and country palaces? Catholic converts were led by divine grace, which St. Paul has so magnificently described, and yielding to its powerful, sustaining, yet gentle influence, they entered upon the rugged road of penance, and in many instances of voluntary poverty, to escape the lot of Dives in the world to come. Nothing in this life could have afforded them so many opportunities for enjoying the beautiful and picturesque, for the gratification of taste and fancy, as the richly-endowed Anglican heresy; but the fires that are never extinguished were too visible in the back ground, and, aided by divine grace, they turned from them.

Every other half century of the two Churches, since England has sought to force her modern creed upon our people, presents the same sad picture of unceasing persecution on the one hand, of confiscation of Catholic property, until nothing was left for the hand of avarice, of insolence and unbridled tyranny; and on the other hand, centuries of long sufferings and undying fidelity to the faith of their fathers, deprived of everything, of the liberty of worshipping God according to conscience, of the liberty of education; and here let me observe, that the efforts by our rulers to reduce us to barbarism, that we might be the more easily oppressed, was never attempted even by the Pagan emperors. Am I indulging

in exaggeration? The bishop of your own Church, Dr. Fitzgerald, in his Pastoral for August, 1866, describes the laws under which we lived as "laws framed apparently for the express purpose of crushing down the Roman Catholic population into a state of hopeless poverty, ignorance, discontent, and undying hostility to everything that bore the hateful name of English," and he adds, "The revenues of the Church, instead of being applied to their proper purpose, were made a prey to shameless rapine." All history concurs in this view of the case, and when the time arrives that this unchristian proselytism shall have ceased, and its history shall be written, the lady missionaries of the present day will hold the unenviable position of bringing up the rear, at the end of three hundred years of the most satanic persecution that ever disgraced and afflicted humanity. May heaven in its infinite mercy open your eyes, and those of your fellow-labourers, ere it is too late, to the impious folly and glaring absurdity of attempting the conversion of a nation by spoon-feeding it in the nursery, or, in modern phraseology, in the Birds' Nest, or the homes of rags and wretchedness.

I have the honour to be, &c.,

JAMES MAHER, P.P.

LIII.

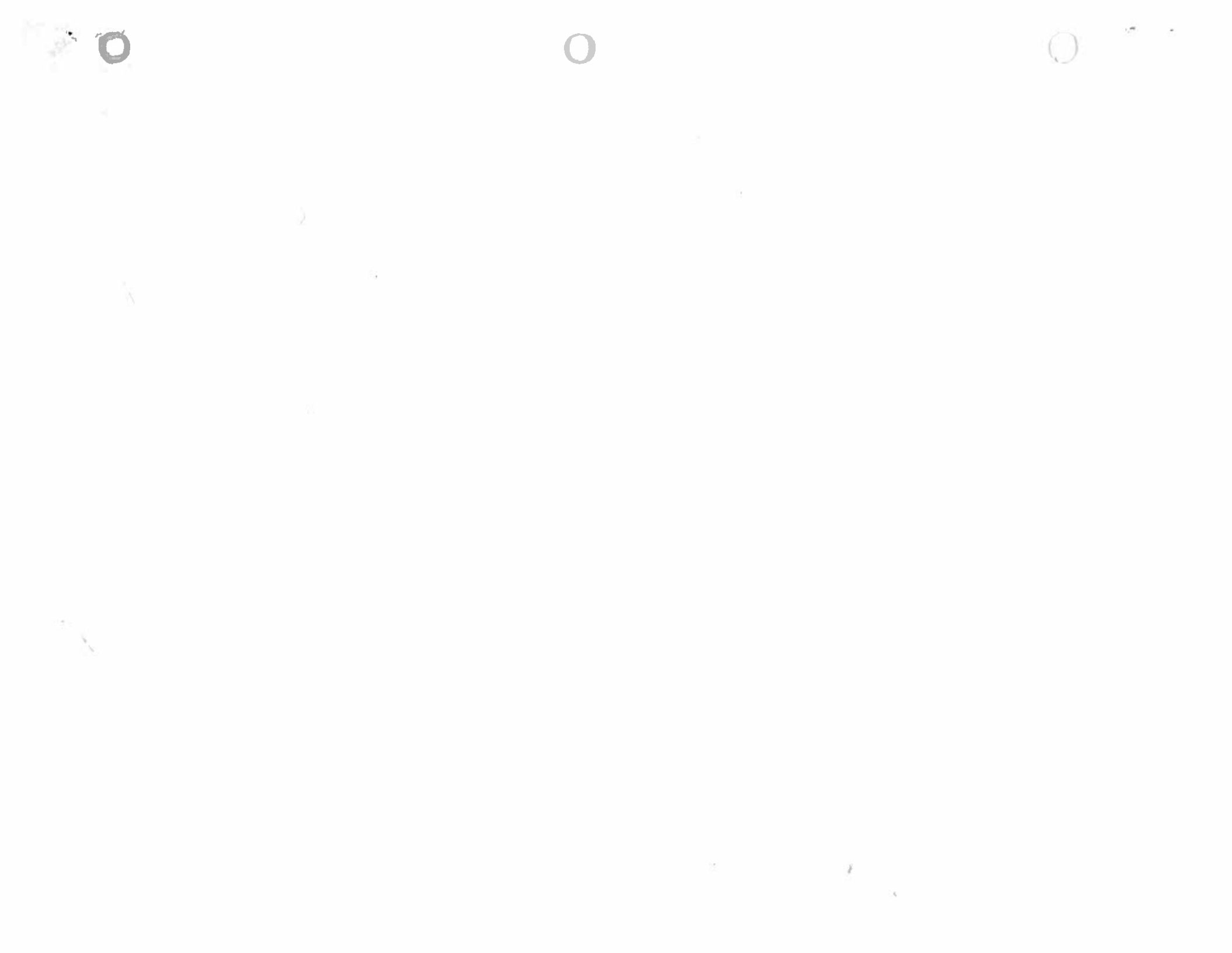
TO LORD BANDON, ON THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH.

February 28th, 1868.

MY LORD—The vindication of the Protestant institutions of this country, especially that of the Established Church, is, no doubt, a difficult task, and public opinion has already emphatically pronounced—(see the *Times*) that your lordship's zealous exertions in that line, and those of your party, have been a most signal failure.

The Protestant Defence Association, at whose first meeting your lordship presided, has indeed proved, what the country so often affirmed, namely—that the disendowment of the Established Church is demanded as a condition, without which social peace, equality, contentment, general respect for the laws, unity of sentiment and action for national objects, can never prevail in Ireland. This is a great point gained, for which we are principally indebted to your lordship, and to the great meeting at the Rotundo.

We have heard of late a great deal of Protestant principles; of the necessity of upholding Protestant principles; of standing together in defence of Protestant principles; and of showing the British public and the British government that the Protestants of Ireland, as your address has it, "firmly protest against any alienation of the endowments now enjoyed by our Protestant churches." And what does all this mean? It is simply the rallying cry of Protestant ascendancy, "Protestant monopolies for ever," and "No surrender;" and would it not be more manly and honourable to state the question



survival, but they had the advantage of being supported by the law and the rate of eviction from small holdings continued at a disturbing level throughout 1847-8.⁶ This unfortunate deterioration in the relations between landowner and peasant naturally gave an immediate significance to the tenant-right movement, but more than that, the attempts to secure rents, the seizure of stock, and the exportation from the country of agricultural produce, helped to provide the necessary material for those who were coming to regard the famine as something artificial, prolonged unnecessarily by the policy of the British government and the selfishness of the Irish landed class.⁷

As early as the month of August the question of food exports was raised in the Irish Confederation, by Fr. John Kenyon, Mitchel's friend, and one of the few active supporters of the Confederation among the Catholic clergy. He contended that British exploitation had resulted in the export of crops from an impoverished country, 'year after year our plentiful harvests of golden grain, more than sufficient—even since the potato blight—to support and support well our entire population—are seen to disappear off the face of the land.'⁸ Mitchel took this argument a step further when he suggested that if an impartial examination were made of the mutual indebtedness of the two countries, it would be found that Britain was, on the balance, very much Ireland's debtor. He, therefore, pleaded that since Ireland was experiencing a famine, she was under no obligation to repay the advances made by the government to meet the emergency—which in effect meant that the food earmarked for export should be kept in the country.⁹ It was but a short step from this position to argue that as the landlords had shown an uncompromising and stubborn resistance to the needs of the people, the landlords' excessive demands, like the government's poor rate, should be resisted. For those who agreed with Mitchel it became increasingly obvious that the country was involved in nothing less than a war of property against poverty.¹⁰ Mitchel's strictures, at this period, were, however, mild compared with the attack launched on the exportation of food, by his disciple, Thomas Devin Reilly. In an open letter to the Irish council, Reilly put forward a thesis which later John Mitchel elaborated in words that have left an enduring impression on the memory of the nation. Reilly contended, in unqualified terms, that the object of all official schemes was nothing

less than the extermination of the Irish people, the purpose of the poor relief system being to ensure that a people 'which once numbered nine millions may be checked in its growth and coolly, gradually murdered.'¹¹ From being a visitation of Providence, the famine was becoming the greatest act of vengeance ever perpetrated against the Irish nation by its enemies, internal and external.¹²

Men like Mitchel and Reilly expressed the sense of dissatisfaction in its most extreme and aggressive form, but the feeling of grievance was widespread, and deep-rooted. Mitchel and those who followed him may have given greater precision to one approach to the famine, but they drew to a considerable extent on a common fund, bred of suffering and disappointment. The resistance, spasmodic but widespread, to the payment of rates and rent left little doubt as to the attitude of a famine-stricken people, but the dissatisfaction took more coherent shape as well. In the Repeal Association, for all the emphasis it placed on the need for peaceful action, the iniquity of the existing relationship between landlord and tenant was coupled with the injustice of exporting food from a country suffering such great privation.¹³ The Catholic hierarchy, too, led by the outspoken John MacHale, archbishop of Tuam, presented a strongly-worded memorial to the lord lieutenant deploring the fact that 'the sacred and indefeasible rights of life are forgotten amidst the incessant reclamations of the subordinate rights of property.' For the bishops, the seizure of the peasants' crops and the harsh treatment of the evicted tenants were all signs of the grave defects in the existing land system.¹⁴ Repealers of all shades of opinion, tenant-right advocates and landlords with reformist views were all conscious of the injustices inherent in the existing land system, but the material difficulties to be overcome made reform appear almost an utopian ideal.¹⁵

The Irish landlords were coming to be regarded very much as the villains of the piece, as the class which, ignoring the common feelings of humanity, took refuge behind the might of the imperial government. But though the landlords, as a group, displayed no particular generosity, their economic position was by no means enviable. They had to bear a heavy burden of taxation, while their lands were often encumbered with mortgages and onerous rent-charges.¹⁶ The accumulated problems of the Irish rural

doubt that the hardship produced by the famine was the irritant which now led to this fresh division within the ranks of the secessionists themselves. From the point of view of the development of Irish political thought and the discipline of political action, the second secession, if it may be so called, was in some ways more significant than the first. It was the expression of a new approach to Irish political problems. It took, perhaps, a narrower view of nationalism than its critics could accept, but it realised the latent possibilities of the economic grievances of the rural population. It was, however, something more than a mere technique of agitation, for the logic of this 'new departure' assumed a criminal neglect of duty, on the part of both government and landowners, a deep-rooted antipathy to the people of Ireland. Such a criminal conspiracy against a nation could only have the effect of releasing the people from their obligations to those who wished them nothing but evil.⁵⁴ Mitchel and Fintan Lalor may have disagreed, to some extent, as to the precise mode of procedure to be followed in enlisting the aid of the rural population, but both were convinced of the need for a radical change in the existing political and social structure which they saw as a closely integrated whole opposed to the interests of the exploited and impoverished people.⁵⁵

Mitchel and his supporters did not contemplate revolution at the close of 1847, they were quite aware of the weakness of the Confederation and the apathy of the people, but they were developing a thesis which was to colour men's reactions to the great famine for long, because the sentiments they expressed found an echo, however faint, in many hearts in a land where distress abounded.⁵⁶

It is easy to appreciate how this interpretation of the history of the famine took root. The export of grain and other foodstuffs, during the height of the crisis, had aroused much adverse comment, especially as these exports took place against a background of declining stocks in the hands of the small farmers.⁵⁷ The provisions of the new poor law, the ejections that followed in the wake of starvation and the obvious reluctance of the government to embark on a policy of comprehensive reforms, all contributed still further to the creation of a picture in some men's minds in which stark black and white alone predominated.

VII. THE MONTHS OF REVOLUTION

Circumstances, in the opening weeks of 1848, seemed auspicious for yet another attempt to bring the Confederation and the Repeal Association together. The Confederation was divided and had made but slight progress outside the cities, while the Association still lay in the shadow of the unscrupulous whig alliance. The disputes within the Confederation had, however, made it clear that the moderate section of the Young Irelanders were by no means ardent revolutionaries. Mitchel and his friends did not withdraw completely from the Confederation but their newly founded newspaper, the *United Irishman*, rather than the affairs of the Confederation, absorbed their attention. The moderates had triumphed and this was not lost on John P. Connell, who for all his limitations as a national leader, showed himself an astute and competent politician.

Perhaps even more important as an inducement to close the ranks of repeal was the appearance of a new threat to the independence of the Catholic church. The Repeal Association was closely identified, in the minds of the people, with the vindication not only of their political liberties, but of their religious position as well. In gratitude to the O'Connell family, the vast majority of the clergy gave their allegiance to the Association, a fact which naturally made that organisation particularly sensitive to any attack on the independence of the church.

Freedom of worship was secure, but the church, the greatest single force in the country, had no clearly defined legal place in the affairs of the state. The relations between the Catholic church and the government was a problem that had long exercised Peel's mind, and it was not surprising that the Whigs, in their turn, should have endeavoured to stabilise their position in Ireland through a settlement with Rome.³

The relations between the British government and the church, in the winter of 1847-8, were rather delicate. Palmerston's Italian policy, aimed at minimising conservative and especially French influence, in Italy, was to succeed, papal goodwill was essential, while in Ireland the outspoken comment of the hierarchy on the government's famine relief measures indicated the importance of the church as a potentially formidable critic of state policy.⁴ The church was jealous of her position as an

independent force, and it was believed, especially by Dr John MacHale, of Tuam, that Lord Minto's diplomatic mission in Italy, if successful, could only weaken the position of the church in Ireland, by establishing an official connection between London and Rome. From the government's point of view, the time was opportune for an agreement with the Holy See. The 'Godless Colleges' issue remained unsettled, while the open association of many Catholic clergy with the demands for tenant-right had led to bitter attacks on them as the instigators of agrarian unrest.⁵ Lord Clarendon was particularly perturbed by the activities of the priests and felt that the Pope should send a confidential agent to Ireland to ascertain the true position.⁶

It is hardly surprising that the publication, early in 1848, of a new papal rescript on the political activities of the clergy had a most disturbing effect in Ireland.⁷ The influential Irish clerics in Rome, led by Dr Paul Cullen, had endeavoured to counter Lord Minto's representations, but they were unable to prevent the transmission of the rescript to Dr Crolly, the Irish primate.⁸ The rescript was mildly and cautiously worded, but there could be no doubt as to its general intention. The Congregation of Propaganda, it declared, could not believe that the Irish clergy condoned murder, but to prevent any false allegations, it urged the primate to admonish the clergy to attend to spiritual affairs alone, and in no wise involve themselves in secular matters.⁹ The rescript represented not the first fruits, but the sole result of intense British pressure in Rome.¹⁰ In Ireland the reaction was sharp, for even Dr Murray, the archbishop of Dublin, who was prepared to co-operate with the government, was quite alarmed by the activities of Minto and Petre, the unofficial British agent in Rome.¹¹ On the whole, however, Clarendon appears to have been satisfied that the rescript constituted a welcome rebuff to MacHale and his party.¹²

That Rome should have taken such action added greater urgency to the efforts to secure unity within the repeal movement. John O'Connell applied himself with no little energy to the task and his enthusiasm may have been further strengthened by the fact that his opposition to the coercion bill had resulted in a distinct coolness between him and the administration.¹³

A much milder tone was adopted towards the moderate Young Irelanders. Gavan Duffy was described by John O'Connell as 'a

decided moral force and "patient courage" man', while on the occasion of his visit to Limerick, at the end of 1847, O'Connell did not hesitate to urge the importance of unity.¹⁴ These conciliatory gestures were, on the whole, well received in confederate circles, but though negotiations for reunion followed, they broke down at two points. The Young Irelanders considered that the only satisfactory arrangement would be for both organisations to be dissolved and a new one established in their place. O'Connell, understandably enough, would not agree to this proposal, though it was the course finally adopted in the weeks before the abortive revolution.¹⁵ The second point at issue was closely related to the first. The confederates felt that the discipline of the organisation should be strengthened to exclude place-begging, and so bring to an end any future reliance on whig favours.¹⁶ John O'Connell, however, remained firm in his resolution that the Young Irelanders would have to return to the existing Association just as it stood.¹⁷

The failure of the negotiations could not disguise the fact that there was a widespread desire for some measure of unity within the repeal movement. The Association and the Confederation were companions in adversity, destined, it seemed, to pursue an unrewarding course of parliamentary agitation, while Mitchel, in isolation, wrote words which could bear little fruit in an utterly prostrate country.¹⁸

It was but natural that the overthrow of the French monarchy, in February 1848, should have caused a profound sensation in Ireland. In every land where the emergence of the new political and national forces was opposed by authority, the events in Paris were seized upon as proof that militant liberalism not only lived, but was now triumphant in the homeland of revolution. The French revolution, of February 1848, captured men's imaginations, because it was almost bloodless. The order and good feeling it engendered were symbolic of a willing co-operation between all classes of society.¹⁹

In Ireland, especially in the month of March, hopes ran high that the British government, faced with a hostile and revolutionary France at the head of the liberated nations of Europe, would soon have to capitulate to a united Irish demand for the repeal of the act of union.²⁰ The mounting chartist agitation suggested, too, that allies would not be lacking among the discontented people

Some angrier voices questioned a facile evoking of providence as the cause of the catastrophe. The Cavan-born Bishop Hughes of New York had solemnly warned: 'Let us be careful not to blaspheme providence by calling this God's famine.' Priests, eyewitnesses of the misery, also rejected that 'providential' interpretation. Already in 1846, Fr Mullins of Clarenbridge, County Galway, angrily protesting the death, in six months, of 75 of his parishioners – 55 of them from starvation – exclaimed agonisingly: 'How is all this desolation to be accounted for? Surely it was not caused by the visitation of an angry providence, but by the crying injustice of our earthly rulers!' In 1848, Fr Nicholas Coughlan, complaining of 'the unworthy death of some 800,000 honest men' declared emphatically: 'as to this heavy scourge coming from holy providence, I believe none of it; I rather believe it comes from beyond the (Irish) channel ...' While these angry statements may appear to discard the very notion of providence in the face of so enormous a human catastrophe, the context in which they are written indicates rather a rejection of the indiscriminate invocation of providence to cloak human responsibility. As evictions increased and their horror revealed the hand of man rather than the hand of God, by 1849, the clergy, eye-witnesses of the scenes, were horrified at the failure to protect the poor from what the Synod described as 'the most ruthless oppression that ever disgraced the annals of humanity'. Others thought the same. In horrified terms, William Bennett of the Society of Friends reported: 'they are dying like cattle off the face of the earth, from want and its kindred horrors. Is this to be regarded in the light of a Divine dispensation and punishment?' A contemporary poet, Máire Ní Dhroma, from Rinn, Co Waterford, wrote:

Ní hé Dia 'cheap riamh an obair seo,
 Daoine bochta a chur le fuacht is le fán
 (It was never God who thought up this work,
 Of casting out poor people to wander in the cold.)

The bishops' Thurles Address can be seen as an attempt to counter the ideology of Trevelyan and of the political economists. It was on the question of culpability and the attitude to the poor that they pointed to the sharpest differences. They had already, in their memorial to the viceroy in 1847, rejected any attempt to blame the famine on 'the indolence of the peasants', laying it instead on the 'penal laws' which had deprived people of both property rights and the fruits of their labour. Now again, in the Address, they insisted that those 'flung upon the highway to perish' were not indolent, but 'virtuous and industrious families'. Behind that failure to halt evictions and protect life, they discerned an attitude which they considered alien to the Gospel – a contempt for the poor whom many of the governing class saw as a drag on the progress of the United Kingdom and 'the great nuisance of the moral world ...' The bishops reminded Christians that the poor 'were made to the image of the living God and are purchased by the blood of Calvary' and 'the special favourites and representatives of Jesus Christ'. Earlier on Fr Spratt, the founder of two relief organisations, demanded more food of the government officials for their starving fellow creatures, who were created by the same omnipotent God, and were as much entitled to live as themselves, and Fr Edward Waldron insisted that the poor, too, were 'made to God's image and likeness' and should be so treated. The contact with the poor, who formed a majority of their faithful, made clergy sensitive to their plight. It is arguable, too, that the bishops and clergy represented an older, more accepting attitude to the poor, whereas the attitude becoming prevalent in Britain reflected, in part, a more modern post-industrial revolution attitude and a different work-ethic.

Evangelical Missions

'Providence' as interpreted by some Evangelical Protestants, was the cause of another concern that agitated the Catholic clergy in the latter years of the Famine. Many Evangelicals

saw the Famine as the opportunity provided by providence for the conversion of Catholics. In the enthusiastic words of one of them, the Reverend C. Richards, 'There was never such a time as the present open in Ireland ... for the preaching ... of the light of the ... Gospel'.

Most great religions feel morally bound to propagate their message of salvation, by making converts or proselytes. Yet what one religious group regards as missionary activity, the opposing group perceives as immoral poaching; when a religious body believes that outside its church there is no salvation, enticing a person to leave it is perceived as little short of demonic. Inextricably intertwined with the spiritual dimension, are other dimensions – social, cultural and political.

All these elements were present in nineteenth century Ireland for, despite warm co-operation between religious bodies on Famine relief, this was not an ecumenical age. Since the 1820s, Evangelical Protestants had launched a zealous campaign, often referred to as the 'Second Reformation', to convert Catholics. During the Famine, they redoubled their efforts. Their efforts became more organised when, in 1849, Alexander Dallas founded the Society for Irish Church Missions to Roman Catholics, with headquarters in London and branches throughout the United Kingdom. By 1854, it had set up 125 mission stations in Ireland, an indication of the zeal of the missionaries and the generosity of their supporters. Their main motivation was to rescue the people from the darkness of popery and to bring them the pure light of the gospel which, in turn, would render them peaceful and more open to political integration.

Of critical importance in any missionary activity is the means it adopts or is perceived to adopt. There were numerous complaints that some evangelicals used food, clothing, and other material benefits to win converts. Already in 1847, the delegation of the Catholic bishops, led by Archbishops Murray and Crolly, in their respectful memorial to Clarendon, the viceroy,

had protested against 'the unchristian abuse of public and private charities evinced by the wicked attempts at proselytism'. When he failed to address their problem, they immediately renewed their protest. A few years later Clarendon, who disliked Catholicism, himself expressed concern. When the Duke of Bedford, the prime minister's brother, told Clarendon that the Mission Society had formed a branch in Bedford, the viceroy commented apprehensively that, 'A Protestant movement is going on in the Diocese of Tuam, and I hope some of the conversions may be sincere and lasting, but one cannot feel sure when food and clothing are brought in aid of the Scriptures. If a branch is established at Bedford I suppose you can hardly avoid subscribing to it. As Lord Lieutenant I should not venture to do so as its objects are proselytising and if it effects some good, it is at the cost of much bad blood.'

Bad blood was unfortunately created. Later, the Quaker, Alfred Webb, noted perceptively in his diary:

A network of well-intentioned Protestant associations spread over the poorer parts of the country, which in return for soup and other help endeavoured to gather the people into their churches and schools, really believing that masses of our people wished to abandon Catholicism ... The movement left seeds of bitterness.'

Clarendon and Webb were correct as regards 'seeds of bitterness'. Catholics were convinced then and later that the Evangelicals made use of soup, food, clothing and money to persuade the starving poor to attend their services, a practice that Catholics labelled 'taking the soup' or 'souperism'.

A full assessment of this complex and sensitive question falls outside the scope of this volume which is principally concerned with the perception and experience of the Catholic clergy as it emerges from their correspondence. This correspondence reveals that, although anxiety existed from the beginning of the Famine, it increased during its closing years to

become a main topic in the bishop's letters in the early 1850s. From the beginning of the Famine, clergy in Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Mayo, Sligo and Dublin had complained increasingly about aggressive proselytism. In 1847, Michael Enright, parish priest of Castletown Beare, reported that 'a whole bevy of parsons is to be seen every hour of the day going from house to house distributing tracts and pouring the vilest calumnies on our religion'. The effectiveness of these efforts varied, he added. 'Indignation is excited in the minds of the great number. Others begin for the first time to entertain doubts of their religion and a few are seduced or prevailed on to act as if they had changed their religious opinions.' Reverend Edward Nangle had been an active Evangelical missionary in Achill for many years. Now, in 1848, Michael Gallagher, the parish priest, admitted that 'poverty ... has compelled ... the greater number of the population to send their children to Nangle's proselytising, villainous schools ... They are dying of hunger and rather than die, they have submitted to his impious tenets.' From Clifden, William Flannelly informed Archbishop Murray:

It cannot be wonder if a starving people be perverted in shoals, especially as they go from cabin to cabin and when they find the inmates naked and starved to death, they proffer food, money and raiment, on the express condition of becoming members of their conventicle ... They are ... saying to the poor people, 'Why not go to your priests and get money from them?'

Martin Harte, parish priest of Ballycastle, in the Killala diocese, complained that the Belfast Societies had bought land to form a colony. 'They have money in abundance and many hearers on Sunday ... They have selected my parish as the most distressed, but (I) hope in God I will be able to banish them as soon as the lumpers (cheaper, but widely-used potato) makes (sic) their appearance.'

Fr Patrick McLoughlin, of Kiltullagh, near Castlereagh, revealed a further complication:

We have here to contend with a Protestant clergyman named Blundell ... The principal landlords are Protestants and bigots, over whom he has a great ascendancy, and uses his influence with them or their agents in removing poor Catholics from their holdings, in order to have them to give to their Protestant neighbours. It is well understood that if they go to church, that they will not be disturbed. He is also well supplied with money, from English charities ... and the use he converts it to is to endeavour to make the poor barter their religion for a little meal or a few stones of seed potatoes.

Then, in an emotional description of many priests predicament, he added:

You cannot imagine what an annoyance such a character must be to poor pennyless priests, who are more than over-worked in running from one end to another of a parish 14 miles in length, badly supplied with roads, at the same time often rising before the sun to prepare to proceed to a distant point of the parish, there to break the bread of life to the Children of the Faith. Our only confidence and safeguard is God's grace and the strong faith of our poor people, who if any should yield, (it) would be at the sacrifice of snapping asunder their hearts' last dearest chords. From such a sad step may the Lord protect them.

Sister Mary O'Donel of the Presentation Convent Galway, claiming that in their zeal the missionaries spared no money to bring over the poor, catches the flavour of the Evangelical preaching: 'Money is to be no obstacle, no sum will be refused to bring over the poor. "Fly from Babylon" is, I believe, the watch word. The priests are called impostors but we (the nuns) are pitied and my darkness is awful.'

For the priests, upset and angry at Famine, fever and evictions, this spiritual torment was worse. The cry of agony that went up from some of them sprang from the fact that prose-

lytism was an issue that touched the whole meaning of their life and work. Were they failing in their primary duty of protecting their 'flock', and would they not have to answer to God on the day of judgement? Their anger at the proselytisers was often unmeasured. 'Ill-omened birds of prey', raged Fr Maher of Killeshan. 'Cursed souperism' thundered the very moderate Archdeacon O'Sullivan, who appears to have incited an attack on the local parson, who was beaten 'within an inch of his life'. Cullen was angry at O'Sullivan for his violent action, but, in the privacy of his diary, O'Sullivan defended his conduct, not without some humour:

Now I am no agitator ... (Yet) if souperism were to invade my parish in the morning, before evening would Fr John (himself) become the greatest agitator in the Country. He would be a Tenant Right man, a Defence Association man, a Repealer, anything, everything, to stir up and excite the people. Prayers and Rosaries and Missions and Forty Hours ... are the only weapons Dr Cullen depends on ... Rome knows very little and Dr Cullen seems to know less of what a priest on a country mission must recur to in order to meet soupers.

The strength of his reaction is an indication of the passions that proselytism aroused. In 1848, in their memorial to the viceroy, the bishops repeated their protest of 1847. In 1850, at the Synod of Thurles, they labelled proselytisers 'Sons of perdition' (*perditos homines*), who sought 'by money, gifts, and all kind of corruption to deprive the starving, afflicted poor of their most precious possession - their faith'. The Synod, however, was careful to point out that the more enlightened of their Protestant brethren were the first to condemn such proselytism.

The co-operation in relief work that had existed between all religions suffered. Relief committees, workhouses, hospitals, asylums and schools all now became religious battlefields. Bad blood was created which obscured the impressive relief

work of the Protestant community not only in Ireland but in the United States, Britain and throughout the British Empire.

The Exodus

If Clarendon censured proselytism, he took an enthusiastic view of another phenomenon of Ireland in the 1850s - the mass emigration. 'Priests and patriots howl over the "Exodus"', he exulted, 'but the departure of thousands of papist Celts must be a blessing to the country they quit ... Some English and Scots settlers have arrived.' Emigration, often regarded as the solution for getting rid of the surplus population, was to reach 7,000 a week in 1852 and *The Times* of London was forecasting that 'in a few years more a Celtic Irishman will be as rare in Connemara as is the Red Indian on the shores of Manhattan'. The clergy grieved to see so many people go, but as that inveterate nationalist, Fr Maher, declared, he would rather see his people 'alive in Illinois than rotting in Ireland'. Archdeacon O'Sullivan told a parliamentary committee that though he hated with all his soul the loss of the best blood of Ireland, he had advised 'every man to emigrate because he believed that every man must place his own life and happiness, and (those) of his dependents before other loyalties'. 'Everyone,' Archbishop Cullen declared in 1851, 'must deplore the sad circumstances which compel the inhabitants of this fine country to emigrate from their cherished fatherland' and he hoped for some means of keeping them at home. Bishop Moriarty of Kerry commented despondently some years later: 'The exodus of the people bids fair to solve all questions. They are all going.' The emigration continued unabated.

Although the famine was easing off towards the end of 1851, there was still much distress. 'I was in Cashel on Tuesday,' wrote Archbishop Slattery to his friend Laurence Ranehan of Maynooth, 'when I confirmed 1126 inmates of the poorhouses though in fact the town is but one vast poorhouse. I am not the better of it yet ... from the appalling spectacle of the place and the people - in truth my heart sank within me at the sight

- may God help them and us.' In Clare, especially, and in isolated pockets in Munster and Connacht, distress lingered on for another few years.

'Excess of Suffering'

Suffering on such a scale and for so long a period was more than most people could take. At Grosse Ile, Father Taschereau experienced how numbed to horrors the victims had become: 'It had always seemed to me that the presence of a dead body in a ship must arouse some kind of feeling, but ... many ... have been pointed out to me with a sort of indifference when I passed beside their beds or where we lay them while waiting for the coffins to be ready; I see this as a new mark of degradation caused by an excess of suffering ...' Apart from this numbness, what effect this 'excess of suffering' had on the people is difficult to gauge. Did it bring a sense of shame at what happened, or perhaps a deep-rooted depression and anger at the deaths? There was much heroic sacrifice by family-members, neighbours, doctors, clergymen and relief-workers, but other things had occurred that people wanted to forget. The evictions caused untold suffering. Crimes had multiplied as people strove to survive. Terrible scenes were enacted in work houses and in the indescribable holds of ships, as attendants and victims themselves became inured to the suffering around them. Not all strong farmers had been as generous as the Cullens; some had protected their crops and seed potatoes with shot-gun and trap, while others had taken the farms of the dispossessed. The Famine strengthened the strongest farmers and the graziers, who, with the extinction of the cottiers, were able to extend their holdings.

The famine and the high-level emigration it triggered had important consequences for Irish society and culture and no less for the church. The loss by Famine and emigration of some two and a half million of its faithful could not but produce a profound shock. Certainly, the countryside was forever changed as whole townlands were abandoned. 'Melancholy

starvation, heartless extermination and unexampled emigration of our people ... have rendered this poor diocese (in common with the West of Ireland) a wilderness!', Bishop French told Renehan in May 1850. Taken with that loss, the initial, and loudly-trumpeted, success of the Evangelical missions appeared, for a while, to threaten the existence of 'Catholic Ireland'. The resurgence of strident 'no-popery' in Britain sharpened this threat. Parish missions, preached by religious orders, were the means the church used to counter the Evangelicals and to strengthen the Catholic faith of their people. The decline of the Irish language and the growing knowledge of English favoured the spread of a counter-Reformation culture which, up to this, had been confined mainly to towns. These changes might not have come with the same thoroughness had the Famine not devastated the poorer classes, bearers of a more traditional Irish spirituality.

Famine emigrants created 'overseas Irish churches' which provided a distinctive Irish model for the church in all English-speaking lands. These churches were remarkably generous in their support for their kith and kin in Ireland.

Conclusion

The eyewitness accounts of priests and bishops from different parts of Ireland and from abroad, over a period of five or six years, from 1845 to 1851, provide some insight into what the Famine meant for the victims. The cumulative effect of their accounts, so similar in many ways, is to deepen one's realisation of the horror of that terrible experience.

The first reaction of the clergy – total trust in the government – gave way in the autumn of 1846 to disillusion and disbelief. This was followed by despair and hopelessness as, in the early spring of 1847, they looked on helplessly while the Famine swept away whole families, townlands, and villages. They witnessed many of the ties that bound society together come under threat as neighbours were left to lie uncoffined

and unburied in the fields and ditches, a prey to wild fowl and animals.

By 1848, evictions and assassinations and the recriminations they generated brought to the surface an anger with the government. Yet, committed to their role of counselling peace, and fearful of the evils rebellion might bring, they had opposed the ill-prepared rebellion of 1848.

When the Famine struck hard again in 1849 and government failed to take any worthwhile measures to relieve the people, this anger grew to find expression in the protest against the Queen's visit, and, in particular, in the increasing militancy of the bishop's recriminations. From 1847 on, they had criticised the inadequacy of relief, the mismanagement in the workhouses, and the misuse of relief funds for proselytism. More significantly, they had rejected the blame for the crisis which the British press and public opinion continued to cast on the peasants. The real problem, they said, was that the subordinate rights of property were given priority over the more fundamental right to life. Then, in their Address from the Synod of Thurles, they went further, fiercely denouncing the evictions taking place under the protection of the law, as no other than the 'track of the Exterminator'. At the root of this 'contempt and hard-heartedness', they identified a perception of the poor as 'a moral nuisance'. To this ideology they opposed a more compassionate one, citing the Gospel as everywhere breathing respect, love, and commiseration for the destitute as the 'special favourites and representatives of Jesus Christ'.

On the practical level, the Catholic church's worldwide relief work was a striking achievement and it reflects credit on its members, lay and clerical, Irish and foreign. On the spiritual level the priests, at deadly risk to themselves, brought the victims, in the words of Bernard O'Reilly, 'the supreme consolation of an Irish Catholic – the last rites of his church.'

Further Reading

The following list is a brief selection.

Thomas P. O'Neill, 'The Catholic Clergy and the Great Famine', *Reportorium Novum* i. (1956), 461-9; a general survey by an expert on Famine relief.

M. Coen, 'Gleanings – The Famine in Galway,' *Connaught Tribune*, March, April, May 1975. An interesting series of articles based on extensive original research.

David C. Sheehy, 'Archbishop Murray of Dublin and the Great Famine in Mayo', *Cathair na Mart*, 11 (1991) 118-28; 'Archbishop Daniel Murray of Dublin and the response of the Catholic Church to the Great Famine in Ireland', *Linkup*, December 1995, pp. 38-42; two lectures by the archivist of the Dublin Diocesan Archives based on his unrivalled knowledge of the papers of Dr Murray.

Peter Grey, 'The triumph of dogma: ideology and Famine relief', *History Ireland* (Summer 1965) pp. 26-34.

Kevin Whelan, 'Tionchar an Ghorta', Cathal Poirtéir (ed.) *Gnéithe den Ghorta* (Coiscéim, Dublin, 1995), pp 41-54.

John Cussen, 'Notes on Famine Times in Newcastle West', *Journal of the Newcastle West Historical Society*, ii (1996), 25-7.

Cormac Ó Gráda, *An Drochshaol: Béaloideas agus Anhráin* (Coiscéim, Dublin, 1994).

Donal A. Kerr, 'A Nation of Beggars?' *Priests, People, and Politics in Famine Ireland 1846-1852* (Oxford University Press, 1995); Donal A. Kerr, *Peel, Priests, and Politics: Sir Robert Peel's Administration and the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland 1841-*