

was unable to Miley the assistance he so badly needed and eventually had to recall him to Ireland to save his own face. The troubles were a microcosm of the divisions within the Irish church. The bishops' failure to solve the difficulties in the college illustrates the extent of the split within the church itself.

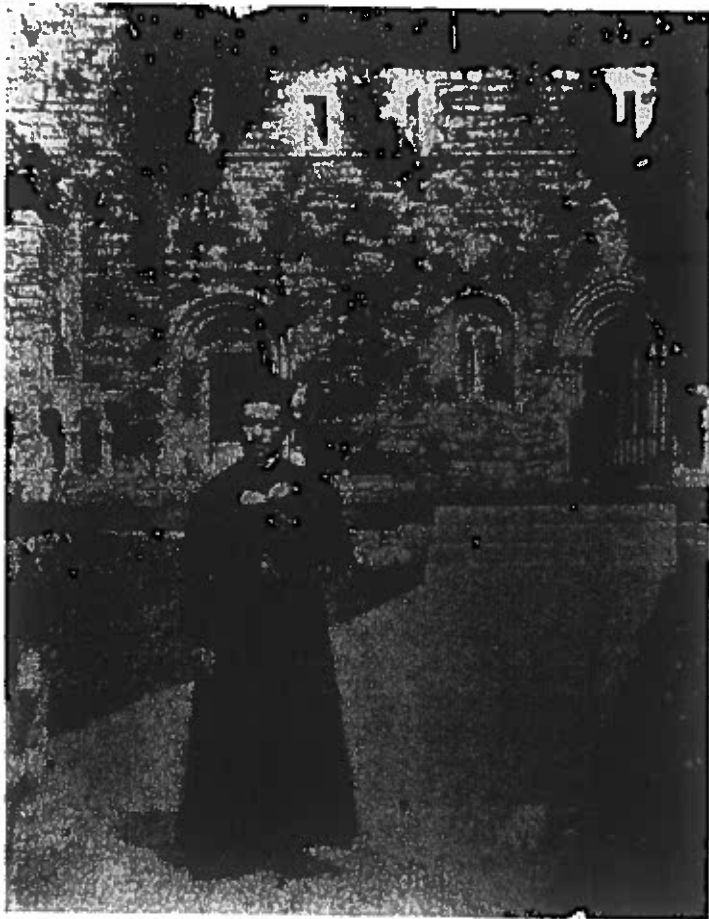
THE PROTESTANT CRUSADE IN PARTRY, 1858-61

LAVELLE AND THE EVANGELICAL CRUSADE IN PARTRY

Lavelle's tenacity and determination were not to be wasted at Mayo Abbey and in October 1858 he was transferred to a similar position in Ballovey, or Partry, as it was more commonly known. This parish was then in the grip of Church of Ireland evangelicals who were trying to convert the indigenous Catholic population to Protestantism. To understand Lavelle's future activities in Partry it is necessary to survey briefly the activities of the evangelical movement in Ireland and in Partry before Lavelle's arrival.

Between 1818 and 1850 a number of voluntary societies established a Protestant revival, or as it was to become more commonly known, 'The Second Reformation' in Ireland. Some Church of Ireland bishops, like Power le Poer Trench in Tuam in 1819, wholeheartedly espoused the evangelical crusade, the aim of which was to convert non-Protestants to 'Christianity' and to promote a more 'evangelical' faith amongst Protestants through the more extensive use of the bible. Their over-zealous approach even brought them into conflict with the more high church bishops in the Church of Ireland. The evangelicals concentrated most of their resources on the poorer regions of the south and west, which were mainly Irish-speaking. They set out to convert the local populations by printing the bible in Irish and by providing Irish-speaking scripture readers. Many willing recruits were won in these areas because of the failure of the Catholic bishops to cater for the spiritual needs of their congregations.' The evangelical societies financed their activities through subscriptions solicited from English sympathisers. Stories of evangelical missionaries harassed by Catholic bishops in the west of Ireland helped increase subscriptions. The most radical of the evangelical societies was the Irish Church Missions Society to Roman Catholics, founded in London on 29 March 1847 by Alexander Dallas, a rector from Wonston, Hampshire. It was the most important evangelical society in post-famine Ireland, employing 697 people and expending over £30,000 in 1856. Its activities were mainly confined to the north Connemara region, especially around Clifden, to south Mayo, around Lough Mask, and Achill. Here it earned the unflinching support of the local Church of Ireland bishop, Lord Thomas Plunket, eldest son of Lord Conyngham, who was also the principal landowner in Partry.'

The parish of Ballovey is situated on the western shore of Lough Mask, about four miles from Ballinrobe and extends up to the border with County



Fr Patrick Lavelle in the grounds of Cong Abbey

A Radical Priest in Mayo

FR PATRICK LAVELLE: THE RISE AND
FALL OF AN IRISH NATIONALIST, 1825-86

Gerard Moran

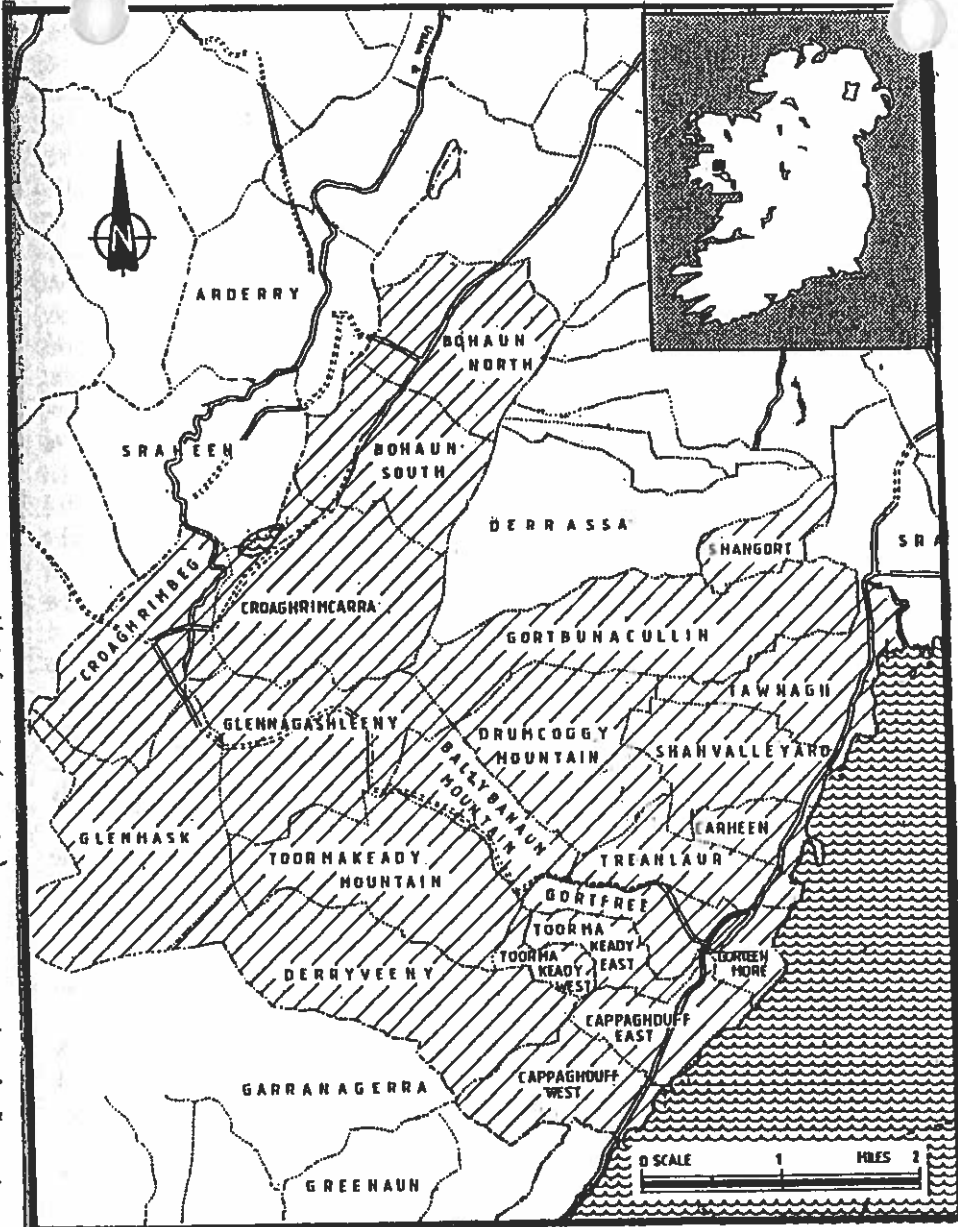


FOUR COURTS PRESS

Galway. The population of 3,073 lived on small holdings on the side of the Partry Mountains, eking out a subsistence existence from the poor, boggy soil. The annual rents averaged £5. During the great famine the principal landowner, George Henry Moore, MP, got into financial difficulties because of his attempts to provide relief for his tenants and their inability to pay their rents. As most Irish landowners depended exclusively on the rents from their estates as income, Moore, like many of his peers, was forced to sell the Ballybannon, or Partry, portion of his property. The 6,000 acres was purchased in 1854 in the landed estates court for £5,900 by Lord Thomas Plunket.¹

While Plunket was a tenant at Tourmakeady Lodge since 1832, in 1852 he added to the estate when he purchased part of Sir Robert Blosse's Partry property. With the addition of the Moore estate he owned a total property of 10,349 acres. The 203 tenants paid an annual rent of £2,000. Long before these purchases, Plunket indicated he would promote the evangelical cause in the region, which met the criteria under which the evangelical societies could hope to succeed: a large population subsisting on very small holdings and constantly facing famine. By 1854 Plunket had installed the evangelical movement in the region. In 1851 he had appointed as first resident rector in the parish, Rev. Hamilton Townsend, also a dedicated supporter of the Irish Church Missions Society. This was soon followed by the introduction of scripture readers into the region, the purchase of three schools, which became church missions schools, one of them controlled by Plunket's sister, the Hon. Catherine Plunket. A new church was opened in the parish in September 1853. Plunket was helped in his work in Partry by his nephew, W.C. Plunket, also a champion of the cause. One recent observer of Plunket has concluded 'that Thomas Plunket became as fanatical a Protestant as either Nangle or Dallas', two of the leading personalities in the evangelical crusade in Ireland.²

The question of proselytism within the educational system was contentious throughout the nineteenth century. As has been demonstrated by Thomas McGrath, the evangelical usurpation of the school system was widespread in pre-famine Tipperary, and made the Catholic clergy extremely cautious of those educational establishments set up by landlords on their estates for their tenants.³ With the establishment of the poor law system in the early 1840s, the evangelicals turned their attention to the workhouses where there were easy pickings among the largely destitute inmates.⁴ The attention of the proselytising societies only turned to the educational system in the 1850s because of the decline of poverty-related over-population in Ireland and the consequent decrease in the numbers entering the workhouses. As education in Tuam remained in a poor state due to insufficient funds for the building and maintenance of Catholic schools, it was inevitable that many of MacHale's flock in areas like Partry should become an easy prey for the proselytisers.⁵



The Plunket property in Partry

The parish priest of Partry, Fr Peter Ward, was a pugnacious individual who, in 1852, in an effort to highlight the proselytising attempts made on his parishioners, had burned a copy of the bible issued by the scripture readers.¹⁴ The evangelicals were gaining the upper hand over Ward, however, as in the increased number attending the schools, 58 of the 124 pupils were Catholics. In December 1854, Ward wrote to the *Weekly Telegraph* that the scripture readers and 'jumpers', a term used to denote Catholics who had converted to Protestantism, were attempting to proselytise the indigenous population and that 21 families, comprising 104 people, had been evicted because of their refusal to convert. Ward also complained to his bishop, John MacHale, that the schools operated by Plunket and the Church Missions Society were proselytising the children and were unsuitable for the education of Catholics. It was alleged that the scripture readers taught scripture to the children, but the parents would not withdraw them for fear of being evicted from their holdings.¹⁵ While Ward's health deteriorated under the increasing tensions with the evangelicals, his transfer from Partry was also warranted by the enemies he had made amongst the local Catholic gentry, especially George Henry Moore, over the leasing of land.¹⁶ A cleric of great tenacity and ability was required in Partry and, Fr Patrick Lavelle filled the bill.

Lavelle faced the problem that the local parents genuinely believed they would be ejected from their holdings if they did not send their children to Plunket's schools. One of the estate rules stated that it was Lord Plunket's 'earnest desire' that all his tenants should send their children to his schools, although it was not his intention 'to compel any parent, who conscientiously disapproves of this school, to send their children thither upon pain of eviction.'¹⁷ Herein lay the central issue during Lavelle's stay in Partry, the meaning of the phrase 'earnest desire'. Tenant society after the great famine felt that the landlord's desire was synonymous with compulsion and coercion. Agents, scripture readers and even the bishop's daughters went among the people urging them to send their children to these schools or face the consequences.

Against this backdrop Lavelle opened his assault on Plunket and the evangelicals. He had to perform the dual task of attacking the evangelicals and assuming the leadership of his parishioners through a combination of threats and gentle persuasion. He needed to secure total control of his parishioners, for if he was going to succeed in his campaign against the scripture readers, he wanted no dissenting voices in his flock. Throughout the whole confrontation Lavelle showed that he was prepared to use every means at his disposal to achieve his aim. His most powerful weapon was the pulpit. Sunday after Sunday, beginning on 20 October, 1858, he attacked those people who continued to send their children to the schools, declaring that they could not still receive the sacraments. If they persisted he would not allow them to come to his chapel. According to Lavelle's account his flock then flung themselves

on the floor of the church, and raising their heads and eyes to heaven, they promised to take their children out of the schools. Nevertheless, a few families continued to send their children to the schools. The decrees of the synod of Tuam of 1858 had prohibited the use of the pulpit to attack individuals by name, but this did not deter Lavelle.¹⁸ The Levys and other families were condemned from the pulpit because they refused to follow Lavelle's instructions and withdraw their children. Where families refused to comply with Lavelle's demands, he visited them and used every form of persuasion and threat to secure their agreement.¹⁹ While Lavelle reported those cases of tenants returning to the Catholic church, he never admitted that he had intimidated those who wavered to return to the fold. Given the wrath and power of the priests within the local community and the open hostility of their neighbours, most parishioners took the more pragmatic course and withdrew their children from the schools. Under such circumstances it can be seen why one of Lavelle's opponents said of him in 1861: 'He admired the ability of Father Lavelle: he admired his audacity and he admired his success. . .'²⁰

In these early days in Partry, Lavelle did not accuse Plunket outright of being a 'war-mongering' bigot, as this would only have antagonised Catholics and moderate Protestant supporters. Rather he addressed a number of letters to Bishop Plunket describing the methods used to force the tenants to send their children to the schools:

I hope it is only the work of the hungry audacious mouthing, ranting parson of the skulking bible-spellers and ignorant jumper-teachers; all of whom traffic on religion and live on the ruin of souls. But should the 'notice to quit' appear, then his Lordship's actions is made manifest, and then I hereby 'give notice' that I first, shall reveal to an astonished public the harrowing details of the dark but fruitless doing of the hypocrites and soul traders here. . .'²¹

Lavelle was here ensuring that Plunket could never maintain that he was unaware of events on his estate. He was also displaying a code of morality, for while he had been informed of Plunket's proselytising activities and was aware of the encounters with Fr Ward, he still felt duty bound to write to the landlord, calling on him to desist. Before long his moralistic approach to the problem had altered and he believed that a radical polemical stand was the only solution to the proselytising question. Much of this was due to Bishop Plunket's decision not to correspond with Lavelle.

Lavelle followed up his letters to Plunket with one addressed to the Irish Church Missions Society. It was published in the *Mayo Telegraph* on 15 December 1858, and stated that the tenants had withdrawn their children from the schools, despite 'the threatened horrors of extermination . . .' He added: 'For the hundreds and thousands expended there is absolutely nothing to show . . .'²² Evangelical success was dependent on

assuring English subscribers the increasing numbers of children enrolled in their schools. Lavelle stated that all of the tenants had withdrawn their children from the schools except one, and that the amount of money expended had not achieved any results. He also showed great pleasure in describing how John Hannigan had returned to the Catholic faith with his wife and five children, and was once more a happy man. Lavelle's tactics were to try and dissuade those subscribing to the funds of the Irish Church Missions Society on the grounds that they were wasting their money. He thereby hoped to starve the schools in Partry of the finances they needed to survive.

His attacks on the Irish Church Missions Society and his letters to Plunket forced the evangelicals to reply, if only to assure their supporters that Lavelle had not gained the initiative from them. It was the bishop's nephew and chaplain, W.C. Plunket, who replied and between December 1858 and March 1859 a public debate ensued in the newspapers about the situation in Partry. What the correspondence demonstrated was the irascibility of both Lavelle and Bishop Plunket, and in particular the over-zealous approach adopted by the evangelicals. In his opening letter on 28 December 1858 W.C. Plunket queried the Catholic church's claim to work miracles. He said: 'Do you lay claim to such a power? This is the question, with a view to which this letter has been written. You can easily answer it if you will. Do you assume to yourself this gift of working miracles' and was it not a wrong thing to allow such a false and foolish impression to exist?'

Lavelle's reply differentiated between ordinary Protestants and the evangelicals. He said:

I believe they [Protestants] are Christian. I believe the principle of 'Judge not and ye shall not be judged' is a good quote. I do not believe the Protestant doctrine to be anti-Christian. I believe many of them to be false. My belief is they were not anti-Christian, but they are not all in their entirety the doctrines of Christ."

Lavelle did not wish to alienate moderate Protestant opinion. He was aware that many of their co-religionists opposed the methods of the evangelicals and hoped to use this to his advantage. By portraying himself as a moderate in religious affairs, he hoped to win their support. Yet the more zealous Catholics and Protestants became, the more acrimonious and fanatical was the bitterness between them. The evangelical crusade polarised the whole region. Lavelle published his letters to W.C. Plunket in the Mayo Telegraph, Tuam Herald, the Nation and the Catholic Telegraph, all staunch nationalist and Catholic newspapers. Plunket confined his correspondence to the Mayo Constitution, the principal Conservative and Protestant newspaper in Connacht. At no time did either Lavelle or Plunket send their letters directly to each other. Lavelle seemed to get the better of

the debate. When Plunket stated that his uncle did not evict people for sending their children to the schools, Lavelle showed that Pat Coyne, John Coyne, Pat Kelly, Pat Boyle and Tom Boyle had been driven out of their employment by Bishop Plunket for exactly that reason. It was a point Plunket never answered. In his onslaught on the evangelical movement, Lavelle was always quick to highlight the virtues of the Church of Ireland. He said: 'In the ranks of the parsons are to be found highly respectable men; but in the region of Partry I must say they are not unlike angels' visits - "few and far" between'."

He constantly challenged Plunket to produce the names of those tenants who had converted to Protestantism or who continued to send their children to the schools. It was a challenge that was never taken up. Indeed by March 1859 Plunket had discontinued the correspondence because it was making little impact. One editorial summed up Lavelle's success: '. . . the highly gifted clergyman who has, like a faithful shepherd, placed himself between his flock and the wolves. . . Their souls are too valuable a commodity to be sacrificed without a struggle'."

Lavelle had adopted a more concerted approach to the whole problem than his predecessor, Fr Ward. From the outset he manipulated the newspapers for his own benefit and for that of the tenants. Ward had only used the newspapers to solicit subscriptions, as when evictions had occurred in December 1854, but no-one had been really made aware of the dangers that the schools controlled by the Irish Church Missions Society then posed. At the same time Ward's opponents had been able to discredit him by alluding to such incidents as the bible-burning issue. Lavelle, on the other hand, was a prolific contributor to the newspapers, often publishing up to three letters a week. Within a short time most Catholic/nationalist newspapers were carrying letters from those journals to which Lavelle had originally written. Indeed the failure of certain newspapers to adopt a specific line on the situation in Partry was regarded as an indication of their attitude to the national question. The affairs in Partry and Lavelle's messages were being conveyed to a very wide audience indeed, compounding Plunket's difficulties, especially in getting funds in England. Lavelle had the advantage that most of the nationalist newspapers were sympathetic to his cause and were prepared to allow him access to their readers whenever he needed them. Whenever the evangelicals made claims about the situation in Partry, Lavelle was able to give the public his version of the facts. He immediately reported how the evangelicals ridiculed an old woman named Murray for wearing a scapular round her neck. There was also the added advantage that everyone was fully aware of the great sacrifices Lavelle was making on behalf of his parishioners and the need for funds. Lavelle was fortunate in that in the late 1850s and 1860s there was an increase in the number of newspapers being published, especially those espousing the nationalist cause. The national school education system established 30 years earlier was producing an educated, literate laity

who were coming to rely increasingly on the newspapers for information. Ironically this educational development had been opposed by his own bishop, John MacHale.

Lavelle was also aided in Partry by developments within the newspaper industry which resulted in national newspapers like the *Nation* take a greater interest in local events at the expense of international affairs. Thus events in Partry came before the public long before their significance had disappeared through the passage of time. The incidents in Partry also received greater exposure because they were unusual at the end of the 1850s, unlike the massive clearances that had occurred on a daily basis ten years before. The newspapers also published letters of support to Lavelle from leading Irish nationalists, often without the consent of the authors, as in the case of William Smith O'Brien.⁴ This had the effect of making all nationalists look at the Partry crisis as a microcosm of the conflict between England and Ireland. It was also an invaluable method of appealing to other nationalists for badly needed funds.

Lavelle used newspapers to full effect. By painting a picture of people persecuted for their religion, he recalled to Catholics the dark days of persecution of the penal laws. In one instance he wrote of how a group of bailiffs and a posse of police had entered the house where he and his curate were hearing confession at a station mass, thereby making Catholics more conscious of their religion and encouraging them to send funds. Unfortunately this only polarised Irishmen into distinct cultural and social camps, with Protestants identified with an English ethos and Catholics with an Irish one. Lavelle also used the children as an excuse to write to the newspapers, as in June 1859 when he stated in the *Mayo Telegraph*:

... when the faith of the 'little children' of our redeemer, and, of their children for ages to come, is at stake, the task, no matter how ungrateful, is one which the priest - the maligned 'Irish priest' - will ever cheerfully undertake, and preserveringly accomplish.⁵

Lavelle's emotive descriptions of parents having to hand over their children to the scripture readers, and their attempts to conceal them under beds, proved much more powerful than any account of tenants being dismissed from Plunket's employment or being evicted. Lavelle argued that the children had become pawns in the tenants' struggle to retain their holdings. It was an angle that the evangelicals were never able to counter-act successfully, for it even pulled at the emotions of moderate Church of Ireland members. Lavelle wrote:

Fathers and mothers of Ireland, Protestants as well as Roman Catholics, I put it to you: how would you regard the man who would dare to wrest from you the child of your bosom to bring it up in a creed which you also

disbelieve - to make it outrage every tenet the most sacred of every practice the holy of that faith dearer to you than life? How could Lord Plunket himself bear to have his daughters, in their more tender years, dragged off before his eyes to be taught by priest, monk or nun, that he (their father) was only 'a minister of antichrist' and that his 'religion was damnable and idolatrous'?⁶

From these opening exchanges at the end of 1858 and early 1859 there was little doubt but that the crux of the conflict was - whether the landlords or the clergy were to have ultimate control of the people? The tenants became pawns in a struggle where they could only be the losers. They had to make a choice between using the schools or keeping their religion. Ultimately the issue boiled down to who had the greater power - the landlords or the clergy. While the advantages lay with Plunket before 1858, with Lavelle's arrival it reverted to the clergy.

Lavelle initiated his campaign against the scripture readers on 4 November 1858, only four weeks after his arrival in Partry. He convened a crowd of 100 people who succeeded in preventing the scripture readers from taking the children to the schools. He was charged with unlawful assembly before the Ballinrobe petty sessions for this act, found guilty and fined. However, he succeeded in his objective of pointing out the suspect quality of some of the scripture readers and proved in his counter-charge that one of them, Michael McGarry, carried a gun and had threatened to kill him. Over the next few months there were other direct confrontations between Lavelle and the scripture readers. A certain Bartholomew Donnelly was attacked and assaulted by a crowd led by Lavelle, and Michael McDonagh, a scripture reader, had his house burned down while he and his family were asleep. Their neighbours failed to come to their aid.

The most audacious of Lavelle's counter-attacks were now waged against the personnel of the evangelical movement and he often went beyond the limits of the law. In the atmosphere that prevailed in Partry, both sides were prepared to take the law into their own hands as they attacked and assailed their adversaries. Lavelle quickly realised that the scripture readers were the weak link in the evangelical structure and were a group that he urgently needed to defeat. As they were the people at the forefront of the evangelical crusade, it was they who secured the converts. They were generally poorly trained, ill-mannered and of suspect character. It was their polemical attitude to the Catholic church that resulted in many members of the Church of Ireland opposing them. They could not resist attacking the priests, mass, purgatory and other aspects of the Catholic faith and this made them appear as unlawful thugs in the eyes of many Catholics. In one of Lavelle's many encounters with them they described him as 'the minister of antichrist'.⁷ Lavelle's plan was to attack this group whenever possible and expose them as a confrontational group who were prepared to break the law, both alienating

was any one issue which united Irish Catholics in the 1850s, it was their total detestation of the proselytising societies.

Lavelle's main weapon against the scripture readers and the tenants who continued to send their children to the schools was intimidation. At Cappaduff on 4 November 1858 and 4 January 1859, he assembled large crowds who threatened the tenants into withholding their children and at the same time forced the scripture readers to leave without the children. There was little the police could do as mob rule prevailed. On both of these occasions the incidents had explosive possibilities and the slightest provocation on either side could have provoked a full scale riot and the loss of life. Nevertheless, Lavelle indicated he was in total control as he directed the people: 'Boys don't break the peace - let them break it first, and then we'll pitch into them, or we'll be into them'. At the same time Lavelle showed he was liable to lose his temper with friend and foe alike as had happened in Paris. When a scripture reader escaped from a mob which Lavelle was leading in Partry he became so incensed that he took his wrath out on some members of his own flock. They had to seek safety by wading into Lough Mask. Lavelle regretted these outbursts and stated that the circumstances had driven him too far.⁴

Throughout his time in Partry Lavelle was regarded as a god among his people. The scripture reader, Michael McGarry, had to implore the officials at the petty sessions in January 1859 to provide him with protection back to Partry as he feared the wrath of the rabble on his way home. On another occasion John Charles and three other Protestants were given a police escort back to Partry after a mob had twice attacked them in Ballinrobe. It was only during Lavelle's absences from the region, as in September - October 1860 when he was in Britain collecting funds, that there was a respite from this lawlessness. When he returned to Partry on 21 October 1861 after a tour of England and Scotland he was greeted with bonfires and ringing of church bells.⁵ His presence was the spark which ignited the fire.

The level of tension in the region as a result of the crusade against the scripture readers became so acute that the *Mayo Constitution* observed that since Lavelle's appearance in Partry a war of extermination upon the Protestant community had begun.⁶ What infuriated the evangelicals most was that the courts discharged most of the summons against Lavelle and his supporters. The most severe sanction levied on Lavelle during this period was being bound over to appear at Castlebar assizes.

Lavelle regarded the situation in Partry as one of war and consequently was prepared to use every means, either working outside the law, or at best barely remaining within its limits. He was assisted by the constabulary's failure to swear positively to his motives when he assembled the people to prevent the scripture readers from taking the children to Plunket's schools.⁷ Undoubtedly Lavelle's presence in the parish had disastrous implications for law and order in the region. The tenants looked to their parish priest rather than to the

an Ballinrobe at a court session excited the people in a frenzy, border on hysteria. The correspondent of the *Mayo Constitution* reported from petty sessions that the only time he had encountered such scenes was at election time.⁸

Given the level of lawlessness in the region, the reports of the Ballinrobe petty sessions court came to dominate the columns of all national and local newspapers. In most cases there were differences in the witnesses' evidence, so that it proved virtually impossible to administer justice. Often the Partry cases took up to five hours to adjudicate, and invariably Lavelle was directly or indirectly linked to the proceedings. Frequently the local press, in particular the *Mayo Telegraph* and the *Mayo Constitution*, devoted up to a full page to the court cases. The load became so heavy that the authorities transferred many of the Partry cases to the Claremorris quarter sessions in October 1859. However, this only transferred the lack of respect for the law from Ballinrobe to Claremorris and the Protestants had to be given police protection over longer distances.

The lawlessness in the region had many of the characteristics of ribbonism, the agrarian secret societies common to pre-famine Ireland. For a time the police in Partry considered the insubordination to be agrarian-based rather than stemming from religious motivation. Many of those involved in the scenes of intimidation were reputed to be from outside the parish, mainly from County Galway.⁹ This had the effect of minimising detection through local informers and in Partry the majority of the more serious crimes remained unsolved. Once an offence had been committed, the indigenous population was determined not to co-operate with the authorities. While W.E. Vaughan has indicated that there was a low detection rate to convict the perpetrators of general crime between 1852 and 1879, he fails to realise the unity that existed among the people, especially when they considered the landlords' actions to be unjust.¹⁰ The murder of Alexander Harvison in Partry, Murray in Derryveagh in 1861 and the attempted murders in Ballycohey, County Tipperary in 1868 conform to R.E. Beames' conclusions about Tipperary in the 1840s: that crime was caused by changes in the terms of land holding. In these incidents new estate rules were introduced, which resulted in a deterioration in the tenants' conditions, and which was directly attributed to the murders.¹¹

Within Partry the slightest incident was blown out of all proportion, especially when the Plunkets and Lavelle were in conflict. Lavelle's removal of stones from premises owned by Catherine Plunket resulted in letters to the newspapers and court cases for larceny. Lavelle had bought the old house from a tenant to use the stones for a new school building. Catherine Plunket implied that Lavelle had no respect for the rights of property, while Lavelle argued that it was a perfect example of the Plunkets' uncompromising attitude towards the Partry population. All of the Plunket's attempts to

undermine Lavelle's position were unsuccessful. The endeavours of Plunket's agent, John M. [redacted], in September 1859, to state that the bishop was not the source of the problem proved to be a disaster. Lavelle undermined this approach by calling for the appointment of an independent commission to investigate the situation in Partry and 'if my statement be not borne out, I shall allow myself to be branded forever a liar . . . if, my statements are so "unwarrantable" has not the "bishop" a clear legal remedy?'"

As lawlessness continued in Partry, Lavelle was blamed for not bringing the mob under control. He was given no credit when he intervened directly to save a number of evangelicals from being attacked and assaulted. These few cases were played down by the Protestant newspapers who considered Lavelle to be the principal obstacle to the maintenance of law and order. The fact that Lavelle was prepared to pay the fines for those convicted of assault and to go bail for others only strengthened the evangelicals' hatred of him.

While the conflict was in essence religious, aspects of it highlighted the problems of landlord-tenant relations. As Plunket's attempts to curtail Lavelle's activities floundered in the courts, the bishop finally moved against the most vulnerable part of Lavelle's position, the tenants themselves. He now used his power as a landlord, which up to Gladstone's land act of 1870 was supreme, to evict his tenants for reasons other than the non-payment of rent.³ In March 1859, a set of rules was drawn up which stated that tenants who interfered with other people on the estate would be evicted and a system was inaugurated whereby tenants would be issued with a notice to quit every six months.⁴ The latter rule was introduced to ensure that the tenants behaved themselves, with the landlord now invested with the power to have them removed immediately. Other landlords had also employed this system to keep their tenants in check, the most notable being the earl of Leitrim. Plunket's tenants were also summoned to court for breaking estate rules, such as the burning of land. This was a common agricultural practice on many estates in order to renew the land, but it was opposed by most landowners. Other misdemeanours, such as damage to property and the cutting of turf, were met with summons and contributed to the overall state of lawlessness in Partry.⁵

By far the most contentious issue was the impounding of the tenants' stock found trespassing on Plunket's unfenced property. The stock could be restored after the tenants had paid the fines imposed, but these were often beyond their resources. The main motive behind the initiation of these penalties was to prevent the tenants from supporting Lavelle. As Lavelle declared, did the Plunkets believe that the land was made for them alone and 'the rich alone have a right to live on the earth?'"

In all of these cases Lavelle orchestrated the tenants' defence, and if they were convicted, paid their fines. As the Plunkets had inaugurated an agrarian dimension to the case, Lavelle ensured that they endured as much inconvenience as possible. On one occasion he ordered that Plunket and his sister attend the petty sessions in person, as it was they who had taken an action

against a number of tenants for burning land. It would thus be foolhardy and incorrect to view the conflict in Partry as one rooted in the events of the 'Second Reformation'. Peripheral matters, such as tithes payments and agrarian issues, were often as important as the Plunkets' proselytising efforts.

Lavelle was both revered and feared by his parishioners and the rumour of an attempt on his life caused great alarm amongst the people. It was alleged that on 5 October 1859, a Protestant clergyman, Richard Goodison of Aasleagh, had tried to shoot Lavelle. The incident illustrates the hostility that existed between Lavelle and the evangelical clergymen in the region, and the uncompromising enmity between himself and members of the Irish Church Missions Society. Even a casual encounter on the road held the prospect of a row. The fact that Mr Goodison, who was visiting the area from an adjoining parish, felt it necessary to take two loaded pistols with him into Partry and that he was prepared to use them when confronting Lavelle, indicates the state of heightened tension in which the evangelicals lived in the region.⁶ Goodison overreacted to Lavelle, but Lavelle ensured that the episode received maximum exposure in the press, helping to undermine further the credibility of the evangelicals while exalting his own reputation. The episode exacerbated the tensions in the region. Additional police were drafted into Partry, the constabulary having to fire at rioting crowds. Church of Ireland clergymen also had to demand protection when travelling to and from Ballinrobe.

On 31 January 1860 one of Plunket's herdsmen, Alexander Harvison, a Protestant and an innocuous individual who had never been involved in any altercation with Lavelle, was killed. While the murder had little to do with Lavelle directly, its significance for him lay in the subsequent events.⁷ Officially the murder was regarded as an agrarian outrage, but in most people's minds the motive was sectarian. Such outrages against landlords or their associates were few between 1857 and 1878, and the murder shocked the country. The Protestant newspapers made Lavelle the scapegoat for Harvison's murder, maintaining that he had incited the population to such a fever that an employee of Plunket's was bound to lose his life. The *Irish Times* stated: 'Mr Lavelle has been for the last eighteen months constantly urging the people to "banish the Protestants", and we can see the meaning of his teachings'.⁸

While the evangelicals accused Catholics of the murder, Lavelle replied that it was the result of an internal dispute amongst the Protestants. According to Lavelle, large quantities of arms had been imported into the region in the weeks before the murder. While the importation of arms made sense given the fears of the evangelicals, Lavelle did not explain the reason for divisions within the Protestant ranks. No police records or other information give any indication about the substance of this alleged friction. Lavelle argued that on a number of occasions the evangelicals had tried to shoot him, thereby shifting the blame on to the evangelicals. One of his parishioners, Edward

Joyce, swore that he saw one of Harvison's companions and a fellow Protestant, Thomas Smith, leave the scene of the crime with a gun in his hand.⁴ This was afterwards found to be untrue, though it shifted the suspicion of guilt from Lavelle and his parishioners on to the Protestant community in the immediate, critical weeks following the actual murder. Indeed Joyce only made his allegations against Smith when advised to do so by Lavelle.

All this suggests that Joyce committed perjury, but Lavelle refused to wash his hands of him. Throughout Joyce's ordeal between July 1860 and 1864, during which four different juries failed to reach agreement that he had committed perjury, Lavelle stood solidly behind him, and gave bail sureties for Joyce each time he required them. Lavelle defended his actions on the grounds that he believed Joyce to be innocent and by putting up his bail he was able to keep an eye on Joyce and ensure that he remained in the country.⁵ This involvement with Joyce explains the continued apprehension that the evangelicals felt towards Lavelle.

The Harvison murder was to have important consequences for Partry. It was only in spring 1860 that the authorities took a more positive attitude to the issue of crime. While additional constabulary were sent to Partry in October 1859, a more resolute approach was adopted only after the murder. Extra police were drafted into the region and an additional £20 a month was charged on 21 townlands.⁶ The district was also proclaimed under the provisions of the Crime and Outrage Act. These measures infuriated Lavelle and the rest of the inhabitants as the extra taxation was imposed until 1864, long after law and order had been restored. Furthermore the authorities decided in March 1860 to revoke the right to carry arms from Lavelle and his brother, Francis, thereby laying the blame for the collapse in law and order in the region at their feet.⁷ At the same time the authorities' decision created difficulties for Lavelle, for in the past members of the Irish Church Missions Society, such as Garry and Goodison, had threatened to shoot him. Given the level of tension after the murder these threats were formidable. However, the decision by Plunket and the tenants to come to an agreement in March 1860 was to bring a brief though important respite in the controversy.

Lavelle's enemies were not confined to the evangelical movement. He quickly learned that he would have to be as resolute with these others as with Plunket, and he brought three legal actions against some of Plunket's leading supporters. The first was against John Bole, proprietor of the *Mayo Constitution*. By the spring of 1859 the balance of power rested with Lavelle. Most of the Catholic parents had withdrawn their children from the schools and the efforts of the evangelicals were on the decline. In an attempt to mar Lavelle's increasing fame in Ireland, and to influence the moderate Protestant support for him, the *Mayo Constitution* published a series of articles between 3 May and 11 June 1859 to undermine his popularity, casting aspersions on his past. The first, under the heading 'Father Lavelle - the would be martyr', declared that Lavelle appeared determined to earn notoriety amongst his native moun-

with a more profitable wreath than he had won in his St. Patrick's Day escapades in Paris. In outlining his activities at the Irish College in Paris it stated: '... it appears this clerical firebrand is resolved on forcing himself before the public by a return to his dirty work, and the exhibition of his intolerance . . .'⁸

In each of the following six issues an editorial was addressed to Lavelle. The editorials christened him 'The Mount Partry ecclesiastic Abbé Lavelle' and alleged that his motives in this campaign were to secure money for himself. The most vicious attack came in a poem entitled 'The biography of Father Lavelle', part of which said:

A pugilist born, who can ne'er be at peace;
Boasting and lying are paltry things,
And begging epistles but venial sins.⁹

These attacks spurred Lavelle into action to silence his adversaries. If intimidation and threats failed to achieve the desired effect, he was prepared to use the legal system against them, even though he had indicated in the past a readiness to disregard the law whenever it suited him.

Lavelle warned John Bole about libelling him after the sixth editorial had appeared on 14 June 1859. Lavelle said in his letter that he could ignore the personal attacks on him:

but when he once outsteps the boundaries of mere vulgar, mercenary abuse, and dips his clumsy shaft in the gall of calumny, silence on my part would become a crime, and might by some be construed into a tacit admission of his slanderous imputations . . . this is a very serious charge on the character of any man, and above all a minister of religion, - so serious, indeed, that there seems only one way of rebutting it effectively, and that by the verdict of twelve men.¹⁰

This had the desired effect in stopping Bole's attacks and forced restraint for a year on the *Mayo Constitution*, but Lavelle issued a writ for libel for £1,000 against him, which was heard before Serjeant Howley on 27 July 1860 in Galway City. The court case contains valuable information about Lavelle's period in Paris and his crusade against the Partry evangelicals. The trial was largely an exposé of Lavelle's past rather than an investigation into whether he had been libelled or not by the *Mayo Constitution*. The *Constitution* expended large sums of money on the trial, probably in excess of £600. People were sent to Paris to get evidence and John Miley was brought to Galway to testify against Lavelle. The case also raised the level of fear in the region. Bole alleged from the outset that if the case were to be heard in Mayo, or even in Galway, the witnesses would be intimidated and the course of justice impeded. If, on the other hand, the case had been heard in Dublin,

Lavelle would have been unable to afford to bring witnesses from Partry for his defence. Despite Bole's attempts to have the case transferred to Dublin the trial took place in Galway.

While the *Mayo Constitution* insisted that the essence of the case was whether the press had the right to freedom of speech without recourse to the law, in most quarters it was viewed as a deliberate attempt to try and curtail Lavelle's activities in Partry. In the 1850s the press was kept in check by sensitive libel laws. It was commonplace for the newspapers to be made the scapegoat for all varieties of problems and social maladies.²⁹ The jury in Galway failed to agree on a verdict after a three and a half hour deliberation, but the result had the desired effect for Lavelle. It forced the *Mayo Constitution* to cease its personal attacks and to be still more cautious. The case also added to Lavelle's reputation as the champion of the poor of Partry, for it gave him a platform to highlight the situation in the parish. The *Nation* said: '... verdict or no verdict . . . It has rent the veil from a system of persecution the most mean, cruel, and tyrannous that ever strove to crush and debase a conquered people, or challenged the abhorrence of man and the justice of God'.³⁰ The verdict was achieved at a price. Both Lavelle and Bole had to meet their own legal expenses, which neither of them could afford, especially Lavelle. It also indicated the polarisation of Irish society over the activities of the evangelical societies. While Lavelle's contributors were mainly from exiles or small tenant farmers, Bole's supporters tended to be Protestants and landlords. Within four months over £600 had been contributed to the *Mayo Constitution* Defence Fund, the leading subscribers being Lord Plunket, Lord Oranmore and Browne and Sir Francis O'Donel.

Lavelle's continuing newspaper correspondence had a dual purpose. It undermined Plunket's activities in Partry, but also appealed to Irishmen at home and abroad for badly needed funds. While Lavelle singled out Plunket's schools as the crux of the problem, he was unable to provide alternative schools without funding. The Third Order of St Francis, an order used by John MacHale to counteract the activities of the proselytisers in his diocese and under his direct control, had established a school in the parish in 1848, but it was unable to cater for all of the children in the parish requiring education.³¹ Under these circumstances, Lavelle tried to set up his own schools under the national school system and by February 1859 five were in existence. MacHale contributed some of the money for these schools and collections were held in Lecanvy, Westport, Castlebar and Ballinrobe, but Lavelle still had to appeal to the public for the rest.³²

He realised the importance of establishing a fund for reasons other than the provision of schools. Money was needed for the legal defence and protection of the tenantry, many of whom were dragged before the courts each week on assault charges against the scripture readers. This money would also be used to pay the fines for those tenants convicted. Finance was also required for relief for the people from the perennial destitution. Given Plunket's

indifference to the people's plight during the great famine, there is little likelihood of his providing relief for his tenants during times of distress.

Lavelle's appeals struck the right chord in a church that was united only on the issue of proselytism. He was courting the role of popular leadership. Like the clergy during the penal days or during the great famine, he was prepared to suffer in defence of his parishioners. He pointed out that he had been repeatedly brought before the courts to vindicate his people and that he was prepared to be imprisoned for them. In his letters he continuously asked if he had to carry the burden on his own. This was a clever tactic as it implied that if Plunket and the Irish Church Missions Society were to be successful in Partry then the blame would rest with those who had not contributed to his fight. In this Lavelle had the wholehearted support of all nationalist newspapers in the country.³³ One of his methods of securing funds was to target specific groups. He addressed his letters to 'The Catholics of Mayo,' 'The Catholics of Ireland' or 'The Liberal Protestants of Ireland,' depending on which newspaper he was writing to:

Will you permit one man, who happened to pick up some money during the awful days of starvation, to turn into an engine of proselytising the land which this 'price of souls' brought him . . . Come to Partry – come in God's name and visit one by one the tenants of Lord Plunket and judge for yourselves.³⁴

Lavelle placed the onus on his fellow Catholics to save his parishioners, telling them that if they refused to assist him, the people of Partry would lose their children to proselytism. He wrote: 'Parents of Mayo! Imagine yourselves at this moment the parents of Partry, and, in the name of religion and humanity, do now as would they be done by'.³⁵ These appeals brought funds from bishops, priests and prominent laymen, and led to the establishment of the Partry Defence Fund, chaired by Rev. Michael Waldron, P.P. of Cong.³⁶ Many clerics subscribed because they considered Lavelle's fight to be their own. While the evangelicals might have seemed miles away in the remote mountains of Partry, to many priests Lavelle was carrying on their struggle. Many had first-hand experience of the 'Second Reformation' during the great famine and realised the dangers it could inflict on a parish. They viewed Lavelle as their champion. As Rev. Peter Conway of Headford declared at the Ballinrobe petty sessions: ' . . . another, and another, and another would be found to step into his [Lavelle's] shoes and that were he [Mr Conway] in Mr Lavelle's place he would consider it his greatest'.³⁷ Despite the establishment of the Partry Defence Fund, Lavelle was constantly in need of money, making some Catholic priests wonder why more was not being done. This mood is reflected in a letter from Father Curley of Chicago who asked why he was having to fight on single-handed: 'Let every priest in Mayo make Father Lavelle's cause their own; it's as much theirs as Father Lavelle's'.³⁸

Lavelle's financial position was at its gravest after his unsuccessful litigation against John Bole and he had to make a lecture tour of England and Scotland to raise money. The first demonstration on his behalf was held at the Concert Hall, Lord Nelson St, Liverpool on 18 September 1860. A large crowd assembled and paid between 6d and 1/6 each. All the speeches on the tour were confined to the plight of his Partry parishioners. As in his letters to the newspapers, Lavelle appealed to the emotions of his audiences, discoursing at great length about events since his arrival in Partry and how the tenants were forced to send their children to the schools.⁵⁹ These were issues that his audiences wanted to hear and Lavelle realised this. At the Manchester meeting he said of the coming battle that if he was defeated: 'from my blood will rise up thousands to avenge it - not merely on the individual, but on the class of which he is the type'. He added:

Are we then in Ireland to tolerate these outrages any longer? Shall it be said that in this country boasting of religious liberty, one man can by law drive to ruin and death thousands, for not denying their faith?(hear, hear) The Irish landlord has more power than the Queen of England. She cannot put to death without a crime. The Irish landlord can legally execute, not indeed with the musket, or the gibbet, but equally certain with the crowbar and the 'notice to quit', not merely an innocent man but an innocent man for the performance of the noblest virtue, devotion to faith, and fidelity to God. (Great cheering).⁶⁰

Lavelle found much support amongst the Irish communities in Britain. He was describing what they had witnessed when they lived in Ireland. As with his parishioners in Partry, Lavelle was able to whip his audiences into a frenzy. During his lectures he was repeatedly interrupted by loud cheering and applause. Many of those he spoke to had been evicted from their holdings in Ireland in the years immediately after the great famine and forced into exile. They had encountered bitterness and opposition to their Catholicism also in Britain. The Stockport riots of 1852, when a Catholic church was attacked, and the anti-Catholic activities of the convert Irish bigot, William Murphy, in the English midlands and Lancashire, made Lavelle a hero in the eyes of the Irish in Britain.⁶¹ They were more than willing to contribute their few pence to his cause. Committees were also established in those English cities with large Irish communities to assist with money. The lack of similar organisations in the west of Ireland supported the view that Lavelle's fame tended to be greater among the Irish in Britain than in Ireland itself.

Lavelle's absence from Partry involved a certain risk. Relations between Plunket and his tenants were reaching crisis point, as the threat of eviction hung over fifteen families. There was the possibility that Plunket would embark on the evictions while Lavelle was out of the country and thus undermine all his work in Partry. The other worry was of lawlessness in his

absence. While Lavelle had sometimes incited the tenants to go beyond the limits of the law, it was never in such a way as could undermine public confidence in their cause. Lavelle's absence from the parish at this critical juncture shows his desperate financial position. Unfortunately it was not to be long before another flashpoint would ignite.

THE EVICTIONS

From a very early stage Plunket made it clear that he was prepared to invoke his powers as a landlord to control his tenants. By February 1860 the region was bracing itself for the eviction of sixty families. While Plunket argued that evictions were necessary to carry out the stripping of the land, there was little doubt that he was exacting retribution for the tenants' refusal to send their children to his schools. The stripping - the dividing up of the land for reallocation - occurred on three townlands - Shangort, Gurteenacullen and Derryveeney. These were also the most vocal centres of opposition to Plunket's schools and were most active in supporting Lavelle.⁶² Plunket claimed the evictions were not sectarian, but Lavelle contested this. While Plunket described his activities as agrarian management, Lavelle was not deceived. In his letters to the newspapers Lavelle argued that Plunket was using his powers as a landlord to gain supremacy over the tenants and he was caustic in his attack on the system that permitted this: 'Is it not a cruel law that enables him to banish and ruin them for ever - to drive many of them to death for the very thing which ought to raise them in the estimation of an honourable man . . .'.⁶³ Lavelle widened the debate from its narrow religious angle and at the same time broadened the popular base to which he could appeal. He brought to the fore the hitherto neglected area of landlord-tenant relations which became more prominent in the 1860s in Ireland, proving his capacity to pursue and discredit Plunket at all times, as 'the cleverest and most unscrupulous priest in Ireland'.⁶⁴ He was prepared to write and plead with anyone who could exert influence over Plunket to prevent the threatened evictions, as in his three letters to the secretary of state for Ireland, the Rt Hon. E.W. Cardwell. Again he described all the main events of the Partry affair and said that he was not responsible for the situation in Partry for he had found it thus upon his appointment.⁶⁵

By spring 1860, it appeared that the situation in Partry had reached a total impasse. Certainly this is how the authorities in Dublin perceived the situation and in early March a troop of cavalry was dispatched from Dublin to Ballinrobe to assist in the evictions. Catastrophe was only prevented by the intervention of Archbishop John MacHale, who sent Fr Patrick Conway, P.P. Headford, to negotiate a compromise between the two parties. Under the agreement, which became known as the 'Castlebar Settlement', Plunket promised to leave the tenants alone, while Lavelle consented to drop his assault charges against Rev. Richard Goodison. The tenants issued an address

WILLIAM CROLLY

ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH, 1835-49

AMBROSE MACAULAY



FOUR COURTS PRESS



Most of the charitable work done by religious groups during the famine transcended denominational lines. Clergy of the established church in parts of Ireland where their congregations were small, helped the destitute Catholics in their districts, and the Society of Friends won particular esteem for its selfless dedication to relief of the needy. However, there was another element involved in relief work, which has passed into folklore as pauperism, namely, the distribution of food and alms by Protestant missionaries to those who would embrace their faith. Though not extensive, this form of proselytism gave serious offence, not only to Catholics, but also to many Protestants. A typical example of this kind of denominational aggrandisement was to be found in an appeal in the Belfast News Letter to the members of the established church:

In numberless cases an opening has been made for conveying the light of the Gospel into the darkened minds of the Roman Catholic peasantry thus severely suffering: they have listened with the deepest attention to the ministers of the church proclaiming the way of salvation while humanely engaged in efforts to rescue their bodies from famine and disease. A wide and effectual door is thus thrown open to our brethren in the hitherto benighted parts of Ireland. In order that advantage be taken of these providential circumstances, in the hope and belief that their spiritual as well as temporal necessities may with God's blessing, be in great measure alleviated, a fund has been commenced for the relief of the temporal sufferings of our fellow countrymen of all denominations.⁴⁰

This robust attitude to Irish Catholicism later manifested itself in opposition to schemes for assisted emigration to Canada. The News Letter feared that such projects would be too favourable to Romish propagandism and rejoiced when these proposals were abandoned.⁴¹

The religious consequences of emigration continued to trouble some zealots. James Morgan, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, bemoaned the failure of his church to enlighten the Catholics who were about to carry their false faith abroad:

These people are blinded and bigoted children of a fallen church. They hold their errors and cleave to their superstitions with a tenacity altogether remarkable. Wherever they go they carry their principles and habits with them. They are filled with the spirit of proselytism . . . The settlement of these people through other lands is therefore a solemn consideration. . . Have we not reason to fear that God is visiting us with this punishment for our neglect? We did not send the gospel to them. They were abandoned to their Sabbath desecrations and they have now become a host

which we are unable to withstand. A mighty torrent of impure water has allowed to send forth its streams and overflow the lands.⁴²

The helpless and disheartened refugees fleeing the famine would not have recognized themselves in the guise of active and enthusiastic proselytizers.

Some Protestant missionaries had been working in Kerry and Connacht before the famine. The Presbyterian Church also had a mission to Connacht, for which £5,000 had been subscribed, and during the famine some of their clergy certainly attracted converts by offering food and clothing. Elsewhere there were Catholics who passed over to Protestant churches for material reasons, but, fortunately, most religiously-inspired aid was untainted by these motives. Croll did not have to face a problem which greatly concerned the archbishop of Tuam and the bishop of Kerry. But he did have several Irish schools in his diocese, in which Presbyterian teachers taught Catholic children with special emphasis on scripture through the medium of Irish. In 1848 the home mission claimed to have seventy such schools between Tyrone and Galway—and these were designed to serve the same purpose.⁴³ But probably many of those in Tyrone, like those in the Glens of Antrim, often existed only in the imaginations of the 'teachers', when they went to collect their pay packets.

The contemptuous dislike of some Ulster Protestants for poor Catholic peasants was increased by official policy during the famine. To alleviate the pressures on the heavily indebted poor law unions in the most distressed parts of the country, proposals were mooted early in 1849 for the institution of a rate-in-aid, or an increase in the rates in all unions to help out those which had borne the brunt of famine relief.

This suggestion was decidedly unpopular especially in the unions of the north of Ireland. The *Belfast News Letter* asked impatiently why a rate-in-aid should be raised only in Ireland and not throughout the whole United Kingdom, and, referring disdainfully to the reports of collections which Irish dioceses were organizing for the pope, insisted that there was no excuse 'for the robbery of generous and industrious Ulster to mitigate the burden of pauperism in districts which can afford to subscribe their thousands as a "rate-in-aid" to a fugitive Italian priest'. In view of the funds being gathered for the pope it wondered how Lord John Russell could plead the shadow of a necessity for plundering the enterprising, benevolent and improving Protestants of Ulster.⁴⁴ Even some of the more

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9 July 1847. ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 11 July 1848.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 23 Feb, 2 Mar. 1849.

⁴⁰ *B.N.L.*, 8 Jan. 1847. ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 16 Apr. 1847.

liberally-minded Protestants of Belfast united with their conservative co-religionists in calling for a rejection of this proposal.⁴⁵ Their resistance, however, was unavailing.

IV

Crolly's predictions in July 1847 about the abundance of the harvest proved wildly optimistic. The shortage of seed due to the losses of the previous crop meant that the acreage of potatoes sown in 1847 was greatly reduced; in fact it was only one seventh of that of 1846 and one ninth of the acreage of 1845. Though raised again in the spring of 1848 to three times the 1847 level, the wet summer and the blight cut the yield of 1848 to about half of that of 1847.⁴⁶ The same problems of hunger and unemployment arose in the autumn. The Armagh guardians resolved in October to increase workhouse accommodation by 500 places to enable them to apply the workhouse test strictly and avoid the heavy and increasing expense of outdoor relief.⁴⁷ The workhouse in Lurgan which had less than 800 inmates in September had nearly 1,300 by the end of the year, and by March 1848 the number had risen to 1,350.⁴⁸ At the same time the numbers in Magherafelt workhouse climbed from 600 to 1,000.⁴⁹ The coadjutor bishop of Derry claimed in January that there was not 'in the North of Ireland a diocese or a parish in which the half of the Catholic population is not starving'⁵⁰

The impatience of the government with the duration of the famine and the donor fatigue of the British public was met by increasing frustration and anxiety by the bishops and other leaders of public opinion in Ireland. At their meeting in October 1847 the hierarchy drew up a memorial to the Lord Lieutenant protesting at the inadequacy of the official remedies and asking for the provision of employment. Explaining that there were insufficient resources available to prevent 'an extensive destruction of human life', the bishops claimed that the distress derived not from any idleness or indolence on the part of the people but from the violation of the principles of justice and Christian morality inherent in the penal enactments that deprived them of the rights of property in other days. Defending their people's respect for law and order under 'unheard of

privations', the prelates pointed out that the right to life was more sacred than the rights of property, and argued that, if that scale of values had not been frequently reversed, they would not have witnessed such heartrending scenes of evictions. Recalling the Christian axioms of the labourer being worthy of his hire and of doing to others what one should like done to oneself, they maintained that it was a violation of those maxims to appropriate the entire crops of the husbandman without compensating him for the seed or the labour expended on the cultivation of the soil. Describing the current arrangements for relief as totally insufficient, they begged the viceroy to use his influence to procure measures commensurate with the magnitude of the calamity, and expressed their preference for employment of a productive nature. They remarked that gratuitous relief had a demoralizing tendency and had been 'perverted by many into a means of proselytism, thus abusing what was destined for saving the lives of the starving into most annoying and vexatious aggression on the faith as well as on the morals of the poor'. They concluded by referring to the necessity of an equitable arrangement of the relations between landlords and tenants as the only guarantee of employment and protection for the poor.

The memorial was presented to the Lord Lieutenant on 25 October by Crolly, Murray and MacHale and the bishop of Killaloe, representing the archbishop of Cashel. Lord Clarendon in his reply made favourable reference to some of the points raised by the bishops and promised that the government would fulfill its duty to preserve human life but gave no specific commitments. He pointed out that the maxims quoted by the bishops were not more applicable in any country in the world than in Ireland. He agreed that the axioms were violated if an exorbitant or disproportionate rent were charged, but insisted that a similar infringement occurred if the owner could not obtain rent or the surrender of his land. If necessary, more workhouses would be provided, outdoor relief made available and the government would ensure that the laws regulating those matters would be carried out. He asked if men who would not make sacrifices themselves should insist that others put the precepts of religion into practice. In those districts where dreadful misery existed and local exertion was incapable of relieving it, the government would ensure that its first duty, the preservation of human life, was performed. He trusted that parliament would place the relations of landlord and tenant on a sounder footing and, in conclusion, told the prelates that he was pleased to meet them and would be anxious at all times to communicate with them and their colleagues when they came to Dublin, convinced as he was

⁴⁵ N.W., 1 Mar. 1849. ⁴⁶ Donnelly, 'Production Prices and Exports 1846-51' in N.H.I., V, 288.

⁴⁷ PRONI, BG/2/A/5. ⁴⁸ Ibid., BG 22/A/6. ⁴⁹ Ibid., BG 23/A/1-2.

⁵⁰ Maginn to Cullen, 27 Jan. 1848, AICR.

of their enormous influence with the majority of the people of Ireland.⁵¹

However, Clarendon's honeyed words belied his real sentiments. He described the memorial in private as 'about as mischievous a document as could have been devised at the present moment'. He explained that in answering he attempted 'to speak the truth without giving offence'. He said he was agreeably surprized by MacHale, who read the document and was the chief spokesman, and he was happy to note that Crolly, whom he described as 'an excellent man', was complimentary about his response and said that 'it ought to induce every man in Ireland to make exertions'.⁵²

After the presentation of the memorial, some of the bishops—mainly the *politici*—did not resume their meeting. That of the *zelanti* reassembled and among the resolutions they passed was one expressing regret at the viceroy's ignoring their comment about gratuitous relief being pressed into the service of proselytism and another arranging for a deputation to the queen to lay their petition before her, if the Lord Lieutenant were unable to carry his humane wishes into effect.⁵³

Paul Cullen, who was visiting Ireland at that time, reported that 'it was with difficulty' the bishops could be got to represent the great destitution of the country to the Lord Lieutenant. He went on to explain that Bishop McGettigan of Raphoe had stated that things were going so well in his diocese that they had sent back to the government £1,500, which had been given to them for relief, but that on the following day 'when there was question of the Pope, he said the distress indeed was tremendous and that he could not obtain or give anything'. Cullen noted that Crolly had spoken in the same way, and then added the gloss: 'see how hard it is to get anything done when people are connected with government. They were afraid to embarrass the ministry . . .'⁵⁴

It is difficult to gauge the accuracy of this story. Cullen's information doubtless came from his friends in the hierarchy, who were staunch opponents of both Crolly and McGettigan, and whose version of events may not be fully reliable.⁵⁵ Crolly's connection with the government did not subsequently prevent him from opposing state payment of the clergy, and there seems no reason to suspect that he would have objected to a temperate plea for gainful employment for the poor.

⁵¹ F.J., 26 Oct. 1847.

⁵² Clarendon to Lansdowne and Russell, 26 Oct. 1847, Clarendon Papers, Lb i, ff 94v-98v.

⁵³ D.E.P., 28 Oct. 1847.

⁵⁴ Cullen to Kirby, 1 Nov. 1847, AICR.

⁵⁵ Bishop Maginn, the coadjutor of Derry, later denounced a northern bishop for returning the money sent to him by Cardinal Fransoni. But he based this charge on information he had received from MacHale and not from the cardinal. (Maginn to Cullen, 27 Jan 1848, AICR.)

Since the outbreak of famine MacHale had been writing angrily-worded letters to the prime minister, and his complaints had become more vigorous with time. Others, especially O'Higgins and Maginn of Derry, joined him in berating the government for its inaction. O'Higgins denounced 'the privileged class' which 'in defiance of the law of nature, and the revealed law of our common Creator, has the legal right of starving to death the people of these islands . . . and, whilst many of that class daily practise the most hideous forms of murder, they have at their command, to carry on their abominations, that noble soldiery of England, Ireland and Scotland . . .' He regretted the power of the 'absolute dictator' on whose mercy and caprice their lives and liberties depended and, remarked that while he kept 'the law for the relief of the poor in very charitable and becoming abeyance', his Irish fellow subjects 'for want of the application of that law, were dying of hunger by hundreds, by the day'.⁵⁶

O'Higgins had some of the poorest parishes of Ireland in Longford and Leitrim and he witnessed the ravages of the famine at their worst. On another occasion he lamented to Rome the loss of very many of his best priests, 'victims to pestilence caught in the faithful discharge of their Sacred duties', and the death from hunger and disease during the previous season of 711 people in Gortleitra, in one of his 'ordinary country parishes', most of whom 'were buried by night in bogs, cabbage plots and in the cabins where they departed'.⁵⁷

In general the bishops who supported the government on the Charitable Bequests and Colleges acts tended to assume it was doing what it could in the famine, while some of the *zelanti* (or 'orthodox' as Bishops Maginn and Cantwell described themselves) denounced it vigorously for its cruel and callous indifference to the sufferings of the poor. Cantwell declared that England 'will now, as she has ever done, do only what she is compelled to' and 'will give us nothing which she is not afraid to withhold'. Though the markets were cheap, the poor throughout Ireland were 'dying of hunger in the midst of plenty tho' subjects of the most wealthy & powerful Kingdom'. Maginn describing the terrible condition of the country where 'starvation & death the constant companions of our poor people—despair—disaffection, bordering on madness in the breasts of many' were everywhere, argued that the controlling influence of the Catholic clergy was never more necessary to bridle the impetuosity of

⁵⁶ N.W., 27 Jan. 1848.

⁵⁷ O'Higgins to Kirby, 4 Dec. 1847, AICR.