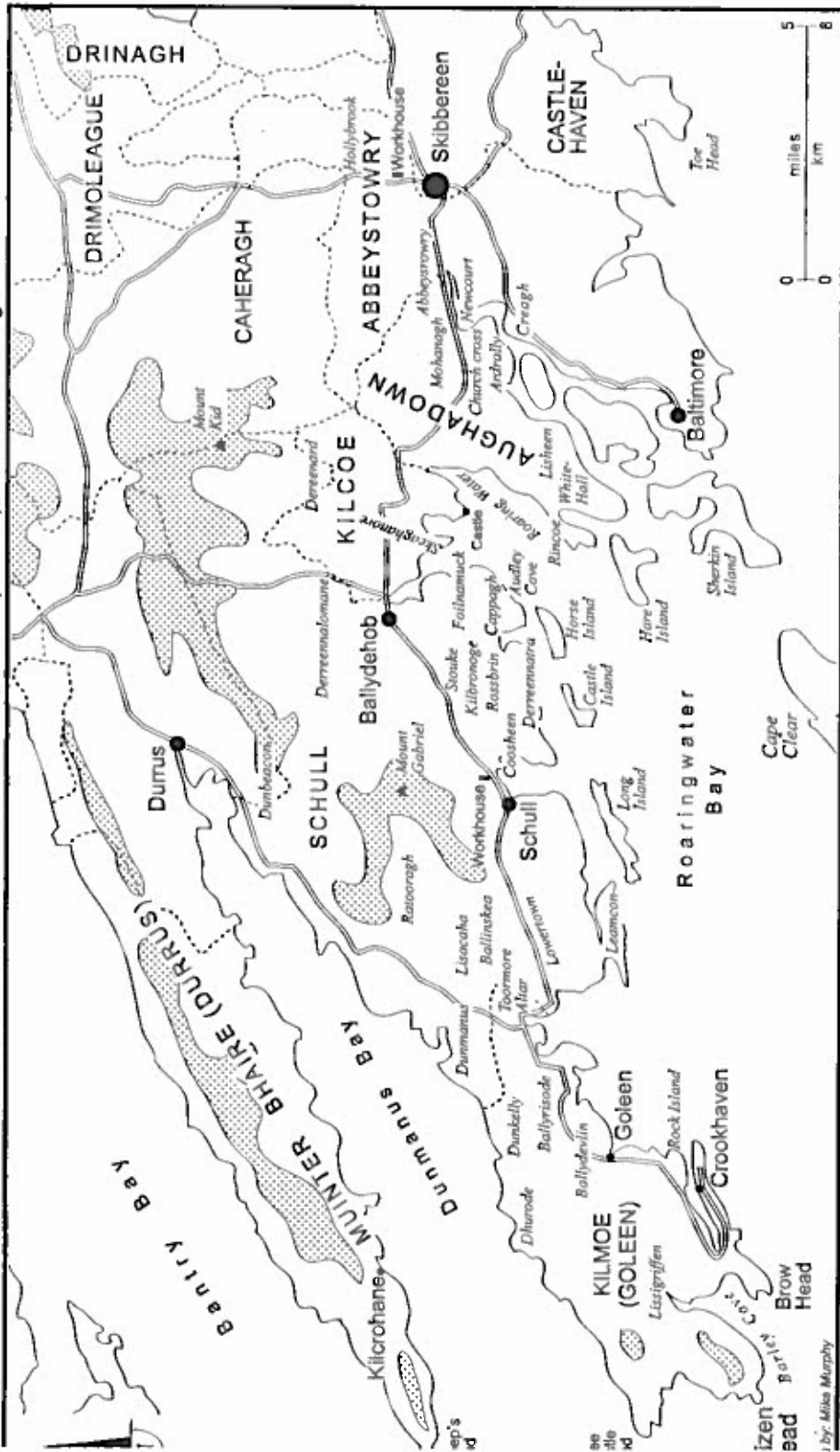


The Mizen Peninsula: Parishes; Kilmoë (Goleen), Schull, Kilcoe/Aughadown



FAMINE IN WEST CORK

THE MIZEN PENINSULA LAND AND PEOPLE, 1800–1852

A local study of pre-famine and famine Ireland

PATRICK HICKEY



and bantry was only ten miles from its other extremity, Dunmanus. If so few of the inhabitants of Kilmoe emigrated it was not for the want of harbours. These people got caught in the poverty/famine trap and many were forced to take the hinged-coffin rather than the coffin-ship.

POT OF SOUP OR THE WORD OF GOD? *RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY, 1847-52*

The time has come to try to break the great enchantment which for too long has made myth so much more congenial than reality.'

F. S. L. LYONS

THE 'SECOND REFORMATION'

Controversy concerning religion and famine relief had begun some time before 1847. Rev. Edmund Nangle on Achill Island and Rev. Charles Gayer in Dingle were involved in such difficulties in the early 1830s. As already stated in Chapter III, Rev. Thomas O'Grady arrived in Kilmoe from County Limerick in 1831 as vicar to the absentee rector, Francis Langford, and remained there until he was transferred to Castletownbere in 1839. He was succeeded in Kilmoe by William Fisher who gave him great credit in that he had 'spread the Word of God widely and successfully' and thus had made some converts from the Catholic Church. Yet there seems to have been no controversy about it. Fisher himself, however, soon became the subject of a debate with 'some Popish fellows', probably including the parish priest, Laurence O'Sullivan, over his 'little charity' to the poor in 1840. Nevertheless, when the potato disease struck we have seen that there did not seem to have been any difficulties but co-operation between himself and O'Sullivan, a member of the relief committee of which Fisher was chairman. At the end of 1846 both proposed a resolution condemning the government's lack of response to their appeal for aid, as has been seen in Chapter VII.

Thomas O'Grady became involved in controversy in Castletownbere also. In the summer of 1846 he distributed soup to hungry people and conversions to Protestantism followed - somehow. One of the converts was made overseer on the local road-works but as the men refused to work under him he was dismissed. The overseer brought his case to court where he was supported by Rev. O'Grady but opposed by the parish priest, Fr Healy. The priest shouted at the minister, "Tis you that are the cause of all this, purchasing a few wretches with your Soup! Soup!" The minister replied that it was the Word of God that was the cause of the conversions and declared that there was no justice for poor Protestants. Whereupon the priest retorted that they were not really Protestants only 'souters'. The magistrates dismissed the case. Henceforth a distinction would be made between 'genuine Protestants' and 'souters'. This is an early usage of the epithet 'souper' in West Cork. 'Poor Protestants' was how people such as O'Grady would usually designate such converts.'

The word 'souper' had been used earlier by another priest in Dingle which



Rev. W. A. Fisher, 1808-80

is the *locus classicus* for such religious controversy in Munster at this time. A well-known definition of a 'souper' comes from another priest, Patrick Lavello of Partry, County Mayo, and is as follows: 'a person who traffics in religion by inducing starving creatures to abandon a creed which they believe for one which in their hearts they reprobate, and this for some temporal consideration, be that meal, or money or soup, possession of a house and land.' But in West Cork and Kerry, 'souper' usually designates the recipient of such relief rather than the giver. The argument between Rev. O'Grady and Fr Healy as to whether these conversions were caused by the Word of God or by soup is the kernel of the whole controversy about souperism. Evangelicals like O'Grady and Fisher seldom made any secret of their intention to wean or win the Catholics from the 'superstition of Popery'; indeed they boasted of their successes in order to attract funds. Neither did the Catholics usually deny such successes because they also sought donations. Protestants did not see why they should have anything to hide; on the contrary, this was the mission of their Church ever since the Reformation, a mission which had recently been renewed by Archbishop Magee of Dublin speaking in St Patrick's cathedral in 1822. They did indeed place great emphasis on the Word of God, in Irish too, and abandoned the mentality of the Penal Laws which they saw as having failed in any case. Catholics such as Fr Healy maintained that it was not the Word of God which inspired these conversions but soup, money, employment, or land. In sum, one side put forward reasons of conscience and the other side reasons of hunger or soup, so to speak.

As has been seen in Chapter VII, Fisher, O'Sullivan and Barrett worked together on the one relief committee to try to save the people from starvation. This united front, however, did not last. On 7 February 1847 William Bishop,

the commissariat officer, reported to Randolph Routh that 'At Crookhaven and Goleen the Soup Committee is exerting itself to afford relief ... An unfortunate dissension between the clergymen of the respective Churches acts injuriously upon the efforts of the committee in carrying out the benevolent instructions under which funds have been constituted'. The priests withdrew from the committee. As stated in Chapter VIII, O'Sullivan went on a fundraising mission to Cork and gave his reasons in a letter written from St Vincent's Seminary (now St Finbarr's) to the *Cork Examiner*, the *Nation* and the *Tablet*. He informed the public that the average mortality from famine was now nearly 100 a week and rapidly rising in a population of 12,000 souls. He was convinced that the Temporary Relief Act (Soup Kitchen Act) would be too little and especially too late as it would be some weeks before it would be put into operation. We have seen that it was to be three months. His parish was remote 'across from Cape Clear' and had few resident gentry, he continued:

With greater destitution I have received less aid than has been afforded to other districts and I am therefore compelled to leave the death-bed which has been the scene of my incessant labours during the last three months - in order to beg food for that portion of my flock who still drag out a miserable existence. As by far the greater portion of the soil under cultivation in this district was occupied by the potato crop, its fatal failure caused us to feel the visitation of Famine as early as the middle of October. No public employment was given until the strength of the majority of labourers was exhausted - and at present no less than one-fourth of the employed are suffering from actual disease - dropsy, dysentery, etc. Of the hundreds that are borne to the grave-yard, not more than one-half are enclosed in coffins ... The people have neither seed nor the means to purchase it - and the answer made by a poor fisherman of mine to a gentleman who inquired about the quantity of soil now under cultivation in this district, is almost literally true, 'that there is no red ground in Kilmoe but the grave-yard'.

He asked that subscriptions be sent to Fr Michael O'Sullivan, founder-president of the seminary and a native of Bantry. It could appear that since the priests left the committee that they might have forfeited the grants corresponding to their subscriptions but they sent their applications through the Schull committee. For example, they acknowledged a donation of £8 from Archbishop Murray of Dublin. He sent a like sum to James Barry.

Peter Somerville-Large states that the success of Fisher in gaining converts was partly due to the absence of the parish priest. Desmond Bowen goes further and writes that while Fisher was ill with famine fever 'the people were completely demoralised; they had quarrelled with their priest [Laurence O'Sullivan] who fled the community, leaving them without the paternalistic direction he had once given them'. But he gives no source for this allegation.

Souper Sullivan is a play by Eoghan Harris about the famine in Kilmoe and was first staged in the Abbey in 1985. This character, Sullivan, is a 'souper' or convert. Fisher is quite rightly represented as being very active in the relief of the starving people. However I hold that Laurence O'Sullivan is portrayed as deserting them. This is also the understanding of many critics such as Fintan

O'Toole who stated that the play is based on 'the story of the soupers of Toormore ... abandoned by their Catholic pastor.'" Irene Whelan later wrote that it may well have been that the 'priest fled the district during the height of the famine.'" Nonetheless, the following points must be noted. The diocesan seminary would have been an unlikely hide-out for a priest abandoning his parish. Furthermore Laurence O'Sullivan cannot have been away for very long in any case; his letter is dated 6 February and he was back in Schull by 15 February at the latest. Traill wrote on that date: 'It was stated in the committee room this morning by the Rev. L. O'Sullivan of Kilmoe that every second person in the Roman Catholic population is in fever and that it was computed that *one thousand* had already fallen.'" O'Sullivan would have been at this committee meeting because part of his parish was in the civil parish of Schull. On 15 February Richard Notter complained that 'besides the rector, the curate, the Roman Catholic clergymen, the physician and the coast-guards, there were only five persons who could afford the slightest aid to the multitudes.'" If O'Sullivan, a fellow member of the relief committee, had abandoned the parish would Notter not have referred to it? The longest O'Sullivan can have been away is nine days although it was probably much less. Moreover, his parish was up to 100 miles from Cork. The reasons he gave in his letter justify his temporary absence; he decided it was more Christian to leave the souls of his people to the mercy of God rather than leave their bodies to the mercy of famine.

It should also be noted that O'Sullivan already had a certain experience of famine and fever since he had been involved in the relief of the 1822 famine together with the Protestant curate at the time, John Jagoe. O'Sullivan had also seen the cholera in 1832. We find him now in 1847 co-operating with Traill in an attempt to save the people. Why could he not likewise work with Fisher? O'Sullivan had written about his difficulties to a Fr Thomas of St George's church, Southwark, London, who published an extract in the *Tablet*:

What the sword of the persecutor vainly attempted, viz., the spiritual ruin of our people, this new mode of assault accomplishes. By the instrumentality of funds forwarded by fanatics at your side of the water, the Protestant clergymen of this parish have got three private soup boilers in their schoolhouse, and the starving Catholics are enticed to barter their faith for a mess of pottage. The people do not hesitate to tell their deeply afflicted pastor that they will become the members of that Church that gives them food.

These are the words of a faithful pastor and not of a deserter and they had the desired effect of winning moral support and funds.

The Protestant clergymen may well have been giving large amounts of food to the schools, which they certainly were by September as the accounts of a John Courcay will soon show. Fr Thomas of St George's asked the editor, Frederick Lucas, urgently to send £5, with more soon to follow, to O'Sullivan because "These fiends in human shape are availing themselves of the poor Catholic's state of bodily and mental prostration to lead him into apostasy by

the smell of their soup pots'. He pleaded, 'Give to Rev. Laurence O'Sullivan the means of establishing soup boilers, and face these miscreants with their own weapons'. Fr Thomas also sent £5 from 'some poor working men at Vauxhall'." Many subscriptions came from various parts of England. The vicar apostolic or Catholic archbishop of York, Dr Briggs, sent £15 to Bishop John Murphy of Cork for Laurence O'Sullivan and thanked their 'liberal benefactor in England'. Another such benefactor was Fr Jeremiah Cotter, a native of Bantry, who worked in St George's, Southwark, London, where there had already been a large Irish immigrant population. (In 1852 he was to celebrate the marriage of Michael Reagan, labourer and a Catherine Mulcahy, grandparents of President Ronald Reagan.)" Fr Cotter sent Fr Michael O'Sullivan of St Vincent's Seminary £10 for the 'afflicted pastor', Laurence O'Sullivan; this had been given by some parishioners who had formed themselves into a committee to aid Kilmoe. Michael O'Sullivan wrote:

I am sorry to inform you that mortality is daily on the increase in this parish. But the calamity of famine is aggravated by the fact that attempts are being made, and I am sorry to state with success, to pervert the poor, and in their misery tempt them to barter their heaven-born right for a morsel of bread.

It must be noted that neither of the O'Sullivan priests attempts to cover up the success of the Protestants in winning converts from their flocks.

Kilmoe received £9 while Skibbereen got £80 from London. One donor was glad to pull out yet another sovereign from his pocket for Laurence O'Sullivan 'in aid of the now grievously afflicted co-parishioners among whom I was born' and felt sure that when the scourge of famine would be over, his people 'will pitch the religion, soup, etc., as well as the said vulpine imps in sheep' clothing to their prompter, promoter and father - the Old Gentleman'. Quite a number of such donors were Irish immigrants and Fr Thomas rebuked the 'Irish tap-room man' who spent 'a shameful portion' of his money on drink while his 'brethren are dying in the fields for want of food'." James Barry also wrote to the *Tablet* for subscriptions and acknowledged the following donations, including some from the president and staff of the Royal College of Maynooth. (It was their wish that £10 of this be sent to Laurence O'Sullivan.) Dr Briggs of York, £10; Dr Murphy of Cork (from England), £50; Dr Renehan President, Maynooth, £12; Dr Callan, £3; Dr O'Reilly, £5; Dr Dixon, £5; other professors, £13. Nicholas Callan was a distinguished scientist. Dr O'Reilly soon joined the Jesuits and founded the Jesuit House of Studies in Milltown Park, Dublin. Joseph Dixon became archbishop of Armagh, 1852, in succession to Dr Cullen." A subscription of £30 came from William Crolly, archbishop of Armagh. John Hogan, the sculptor, gave £20 for the relief of West Cork (his mother was a Cox from Dunmanway). £5 of this was for Kilmoe." Laurence O'Sullivan acknowledged many subscriptions in May including £10 from Fr Cotter of St George's London through Michael O'Sullivan and other donations from England through the *Tablet*. Laurence O'Sullivan regretted that he was not able to do this sooner because he had been 'confined by fever fi

nearly the last two months'.² The general famine conditions, of course, rendered fever more fatal and recovery more difficult. Count Strzelecki reported: 'In some instances where priests were confined with fever, I found in their cabins nothing available beyond stirabout ... there was no tea, no sugar, no provisions whatever; in some of their huts, the wind blew, the snow came in and the rain dripped'.³ In September Laurence O'Sullivan acknowledged £13 from the new bishop, William Delany, and £10 from the United States per Michael O'Sullivan.⁴

Even at the height of the famine the Catholics were able to win back some converts. In February a John and Ellen King are entered in the parish records as 'reformed soupers' and one Hegarty is described as 'a souper's child rebaptised'. In June Fr Barrett complained to the readers of the *Tablet* that the funds contributed to the relief committee were 'withheld on the grounds that they were given for one side only [Protestant], and thus numbers beyond belief die of starvation'. He wrote that Fisher's 'zeal leads him to confine his bounty to those of his creed, and to famine-constrained proselytes'. He also alleged that Captain Harston of the British Relief Association picked five Protestants from the relief committee and excluded himself and all other Catholics from any share in the distribution of its bounty. When he complained to Fisher 'who in reality is this committee', he was told by him 'that had English contributors known that a Popish priest sat on the same seat with himself, sooner would they have cast it away than give a single shilling to relieve those whose religion he himself had sworn to be idolatrous, etc., and which he, in common with English contributors, believed to be the sole cause of blight, disease, death, etc'. Barrett added, with some irony, that the reason why he had to withdraw from such a committee was that 'a "Romanist", idolatrous, damnable population of seven thousand was being placed at the mercy of our relief rector'.⁵ Have we not here the reasons from the Catholic side for the dissension which had broken out in February? No doubt it was for the same reasons that Laurence O'Sullivan also left this committee and went to Cork instead to raise funds.

Fisher's son-in-law and biographer, R. B. Carson, later gave a different version of events, claiming that the motivation of the converts was far more spiritual. One day Fisher was in his vestry room:

He was surprised by the entrance of a Roman Catholic man who ... began a confession. Mr Fisher vainly endeavoured ... to stop it, but he was unable to do so; This man was followed by others and week after week they came to him in crowds ... He never precisely traced the cause of all this but the result was that his Church was filled with converts.⁶

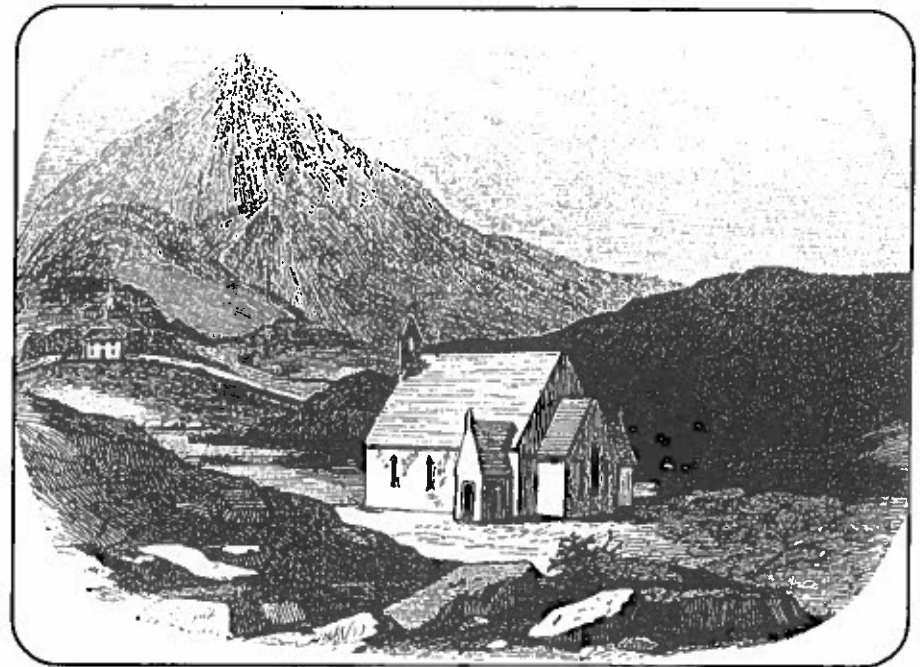
Fortunately we have an account of what happened from Fisher himself rather than having to depend on what his son-in-law wrote more than thirty years later. Fisher tells how the generous aid sent from England gave rise to the 'difficulty of giving relief without injuring the recipients'. But the solution came from the Holy Book (2 Th. 3:10) where Paul said 'If any man will not

work, neither let him eat'. Therefore it was decided to build a school at Toormore 'inhabited chiefly by Protestants'. Funds were soon obtained for timber and slate and the means of employing the poor. Before the site was even decided on, however, so much money had been given for the employment of the poor that it would pay for a far greater building; therefore it was resolved to build a church instead. Fisher himself now takes up the story:

Everything – quarrying, drawing stones, getting gravel for mortar, was done by contract, so as to employ the able-bodied that were in want. But there was great difficulty experienced in getting funds to buy materials, as all that was given was for the employment of the destitute. While the minds of the projectors were perplexed on this point, the post brought in an anonymous letter enclosing £30, stating it was given to help the erection of the church, on this condition, that the seats should be all free; and that should stand in a conspicuous place (the second, third and fourth verses of the second chapter of St James). For this reason and because it was built by alms for the poor it was called 'Teampall-na-mBocht' or 'the church of the poor'. It is built after the pattern of the old Irish churches. The vestry and southern porch giving it a cruciform appearance ... Its gable is an equilateral triangle. Like all old Irish churches, it has a recess in the north wall of the chancel which serves for a credence table.

One fact I think worthy to be noted, that during the famine scarcely any persons perished in the hamlets near the church, who were made to work for what they got; Whilst in other portions of this district, where a larger amount of alms was bestowed, gratuitously given, many died.⁷

The reference to St James concerns respect for the poor in church; at the time both Protestant and Catholic churches had special seats which were reserved



Teampall na mBocht or the Church of the Poor, Toormore, 1847

for those who could pay for them. The text from St James was duly painted over the side door and the church's official name became *Teampall na mBocht*, i.e., 'The Church of the Poor', also called the 'Altar Church' from the townland of Altar where it is situated. According to W. M. Brady, an historian of the Church of Ireland, 'No horses were employed in it, all the work was done by hand'. This was to reserve employment for labourers and not farmers. Brady also states that 'The money sent to Mr Fisher for the relief of the destitute, instead of being distributed gratuitously, was employed in giving labour, and procuring materials to erect the church.'* We have seen however that Fisher makes it clear that the donation for the building materials was specifically given for that purpose. This church was Celtic Romanesque in style rather than any variety of Gothic. The choice of style underlined the fact that many members of the Church of Ireland especially the Irish speaking people of the Irish Society regarded their church as more authentically Irish than the Catholic church which they looked on as excessively Roman. Fisher had his own printing press from which he published appeals for his church. Lord George John Beresford, archbishop of Armagh, was among the subscribers.*

A certain John Courcey, later a national teacher in the parish, left an account of some donations he had given on behalf of Rev. Fisher in Kilmoe, from May 1847 to April 1848. He states: 'This act was written ... from tickets which I issued to give the persons mentioned to get paid'.* He gave rations to the Church Education Society schools at Gortduv, Gortnacarriga, Rock Island, Ballydevlin, Crookhaven, Balteen and Cloughankilla. A typical entry reads: 'To rations for 180 for 7 days = 1,260 rations or 68 stone at 1s 4d a stone, £4 7s 3d'. The school at Altar was given 8 stone and its teacher 14 stone. Individuals were given from 4 stone to 12 stone each but one, Bat Downey, obtained 37 stone. A Robin Love received a half stone of flour, a pound of sugar and half an ounce of tea. Widows and orphans were also helped and some seed potatoes were given to the poor. Other donations were granted to encourage fishing, e.g., 'William King and crew, 2 weeks fishing, £1 4s 0d. In one week in July the crews of six boats received £5 14s 0d in wages.'* Many donations were given for work done, e.g., 'James Goggin and gang', £7 7s 11d. A man got 10s 6d for tending masons at Ballydevlin school. An Eliza Lee was paid for 'tending at Ballydevlin school, turf, salt, etc.' A smith received wages and another man also received money 'for work at Glebe'. Nowhere however is any mention made of the building of the church. But John Courcey does refer to a quarry and, as already stated, Fisher tells that stones were quarried for it. Courcey's supplies of food to the schools, no doubt, help to explain why the number of children attending them increased dramatically in 1847. In 1845 Altar school had 70 pupils but by 1847 this had increased to 289 and declined to 180 in 1848. By 1852 it had drastically fallen to 64.* Whatever about the conditions of aid, implicit or explicit, Fisher organised the distribution of large supplies of food and thus saved many lives. The Society of St Vincent de Paul was soon to do similar work among the Catholics there as shall be seen later.

Although Kilmoe and especially Toormore was the centre of Protestant

missionary activity in these parishes it was not confined to that district; it also took place in Aughadown parish, for instance, on Hare Island. This was a small island consisting of only 380 acres but in 1841 it had a large population of 358 persons.* In 1848 the island's National School had 75 pupils on the rolls.* This did not forestall the establishment of a Church Education Society school on the island that year with 73 pupils on roll.* The islanders were visited by Rev. Daniel Foley of the Irish Society in 1849. He found 50 children in the school which he described as Edward Spring's. He also reported an increase in the number of converts in spite of the priests who had told the people not to speak to one convert, Daniel Carty.* Edward Spring, a graduate of Trinity College, came from Castlemaine, County Kerry. He was curate at Tullagh, Baltimore, but was also involved with a society, the Irish Islands and Coast Society, which was quite similar to the Irish Society. Cape Clear, Sherkin and Hare Island were regarded as 'missionary stations' of this society. Spring made converts in Baltimore. One of them, a Catherine O'Brien, later returned to the Catholic Church and made the following recantation in the church at Rath near Baltimore:

I solemnly declare in presence of the Almighty and this congregation that it was hunger and hunger alone made me go to church for I expected that Mr Spring would support me as he supported others who turned with him. He was good to me since I commenced going there ... I was always a Catholic in my heart, but I pretended to be a Protestant for the support I was getting from Mr Spring ... My mind was very uneasy for I was going against my conscience ... I am now very sorry I ever went to church and I will never go there again.

Spring denied that he used famine relief in this manner and asserted that he had actually turned one prospective convert away from his Church warning him of the sin of professing one religion on his lips while he had another in his heart.*

Early in 1849 Spring became resident curate of Cape Clear at a salary of £100 a year from the Islands Society. The missions on these islands received grants each quarter from the society. The following amounts would be typical; Cape Clear, £29 10s 6d, Sherkin, £6 3s 0d and Hare Island, £9 15s 0d. Revs Spring and James Freke of Kilcoe and Thomas O'Grady of Castletownbere were official 'visitors' or inspectors of the society. Rev. William Crosthwaite, vicar of Durrus, also received some financial aid. There is an interesting entry in relation to Thomas O'Grady, 'O'Grady gets [to] enable him to hold out against the priest a farm worth £5 per annum ... for school master'. Here we see land as well as food being used to support such missions.* This farm would consist of at least twenty acres of land. Can this be called ordinary remuneration or is it to be viewed as bribery or souterism?

In October 1849 Spring opened a new church on Cape Clear. The ceremony was attended by James Freke of Kilcoe, Charles Caulfield of Creagh, Baltimore, William Crosthwaite of Durrus and Charles Donovan of Ballydehob. Spring spoke in Irish and the special preacher was Rev. Thomas Mori-

arty from Dingle who spoke both in Irish and in English. He was a convert who had been ordained a clergyman of the Church of Ireland and was called *Tomás an Éithigh* or 'Tom the Liar' by the Catholics." Upwards of 100 people were reported to be present in the church and they 'joined in most fervently in their own language'."

The 'Second Reformation' had won many converts in the Mizen Peninsula parishes by 1848. Its agents openly admitted that they had taken advantage of the famine but only in a very indirect and sophisticated manner. They strongly denied that they simply bribed the people with food; rather they maintained that the great catastrophe somehow gave the people a liberating shock. It was supposed to be the 'arm of God smiting' them. A member of the Irish Society explained: "The effects of the famine have been two-fold; on the one hand, it has softened the hearts of the Irish people generally - humbled and broken them; on the other hand it has exposed the deceit of the priests." The famine was supposed to have freed the people from 'the chains by which they were bound in slavery to the priests'. The Irish Society was determined 'to rend the tottering wall of Romanism ... rush into the breach and plant the standards of the Gospel on the ruins'." George Hingston, curate of Ballycotton in East Cork, who had started a fishery as a relief measure, wrote a pamphlet entitled 'The Blessing of the Blight'." Such was the vocabulary of the Church of Ireland militant, for the zeal of these leaders of the 'Second Reformation' was great. It was no wonder that it should provoke an equally vigorous Catholic reaction or 'Second Counter-Reformation'.

THE 'SECOND COUNTER-REFORMATION'

Bishop John Murphy died in April 1847 and was succeeded in July by William Delany, parish priest of Bandon, already mentioned. Michael O'Sullivan of St Vincent's Seminary preached at his consecration and was soon appointed vicar general of the diocese. The new bishop stayed with O'Sullivan at the seminary in Cork until the arrival of the Vincentian Fathers in December; he then went to his future permanent residence in Blackrock. He appointed Dominic Murphy, his theological adviser, to succeed himself in Bandon. It was only to be expected that the new bishop should promptly face the problem that significant numbers of his flock were abandoning their faith whether for reasons of conscience or reasons of hunger. In January 1848 he asked Dominic Murphy to tell the priests of the conference to distribute to the children in the schools some Indian meal he had received in the hope that it might 'in some measure counteract the efforts of corrupt proselytism'. He asked Murphy to inform him if such things were happening because 'anything of that sort should be communicated to Rome'. He had also promised Murphy that he would send an assistant priest to him if he could afford to support him."

This assistant turned out to be the remarkable Fr John Murphy who was a nephew of the late Bishop John Murphy and a son of a wealthy Cork merchant. The young John Murphy went on a voyage to China as a midshipman



Fr John Murphy, 1793-1883

and then worked with the Hudson Bay Company in the Canadian fur trade. He was said to have become an Indian chief called the 'Black Eagle of the North', a sobriquet which remained with him all his life. He next engaged in commercial pursuits in Liverpool where he became wealthy, albeit generous to the poor. Still he abandoned it all to study theology in Rome where he was ordained in 1845. He returned to a newly formed parish in Liverpool where many newly arrived famine stricken immigrants were living or squatting. In 1848 he was recalled by Bishop Delany and appointed chaplain to the convent and to the workhouse in Bandon. We are told that he soon requested to be sent on a mission to Kilmoe to win back those who had been converted or 'perverted' by Rev. Fisher." According to Murphy's biographer, A. J. Reilly, 'the Black Eagle' rode into Goleen on a spirited black horse, wearing a tall black hat and a flowing black cloak. The people were said to gaze upon him as if he were the warrior archangel, Michael. On the following Sunday morning he proceeded to the new Protestant church or *Teampall na mBocht*, mounted the wall and exhorted the converts to return to their former faith. This dramatic gesture was of course a tremendous success. Those who returned were obliged to go to Fisher's own gates and there publicly recant their heresy." This account however must be treated with caution. There seems to be no contemporary source for any such one-man warrior mission and neither was it the practice of his Church at the time. Fr Murphy however did take part in a different manner of mission as shall be seen later.

Fr Michael O'Sullivan of St Vincent's Seminary was a friend of Paul Cullen, president of the Irish College in Rome, where he stayed on a visit to that city in 1841. For some time he had hoped to join the Vincentian Congregation but

was unable to do so. If he could not join the Vincentians he thought that perhaps they would join him. In September 1847 Philip Dowley, President of the Vincentian college of Castleknock, County Dublin, held a meeting with his council whose minutes record the following:

An application on the part of Very Rev. Michael O'Sullivan ... sanctioned and approved by Bishop Delany, to solicit and obtain with as little delay as may be, a branch house of 'The Mission' for that diocese to take charge of the said St Vincent's Seminary, and conduct missions as usual in that quarter.

This application was accepted unanimously and Dowley informed O'Sullivan accordingly. Dowley sought permission from the Superior General in Rome, Jean-Baptiste Etienne. He pleaded that Cork was the second city of Ireland and that they could easily send down two or three of their *confrères* at Christmas to take charge of the school. 'A few months later,' he added, 'we can send some others to give missions in that diocese, where there is a special need for the little works of our missions.' Etienne gave his consent. Fr O'Sullivan and Bishop Delany went to Castleknock and all was arranged expeditiously. In October Roger Kickham was appointed superior of the Cork foundation with Laurence Gilhooly and Philip Burton on his staff. O'Sullivan himself joined the congregation in February 1848 and was the first to be admitted into the new Irish Province with Philip Dowley as Provincial.²⁸

On 17 June 1848 Philip Dowley's provincial council instructed that 'the mission at West Schull (Kilmoe) be opened on 23 July; that Messrs Kickham, Burton, O'Grady, Dowling and Martin be named to conduct it'.²⁹ (Roger Kickham, an uncle of the Fenian, Charles J. Kickham, was one of the founders of the Irish Vincentians.)³⁰ Roger Kickham preached in the first Vincentian mission of this kind in Athy in 1842 and he as well as O'Grady and Martin had been preaching on the Dingle mission in 1846 in order to win back Rev. Gayer's converts. O'Grady had preached there in Irish as presumably he did also in Kilmoe. These early missions stirred up great excitement; every day the streets of a town would be as full as for a fair or market. One missionary described how the people were inclined to create 'tumult and strife' in their 'holy ardour' to receive the sacrament of confession.³¹ The mission duly opened in Kilmoe on 23 July, Kickham and Burton coming from Cork and O'Grady, Dowling and Martin from Castleknock. On 9 August Fr James Lynch of Castleknock sent the following news to a friend in their *Maison Mère* or Mother House in Paris:

Our mission in West Schull (Kilmoe) you will be glad to hear is doing much good. A great number of the poor who were perverted in the time of the famine by relief given for that purpose by the Protestants, have returned already. The chapels, even in week-days, are not able to contain the congregation and the confessional is crowded far beyond the power of our *confrères* to accomplish its work.³¹

These missionaries had been encouraged by their council to found the 'Society of St Vincent de Paul and to consolidate the confraternities of Christian Doc-

trine with a promise of pecuniary aid from the conference here in Dublin'.³² The conference of St Vincent de Paul was founded on 23 August and it was called after St Charles Borromeo, a leading figure in the sixteenth-century Counter-Reformation. A conference had also been founded in Dingle. Since the conference of Charles Borromeo was founded on 23 August the mission must have lasted for a month at least. The report of the Society of St Vincent de Paul acknowledged funds received from France through the Council of Ireland and then reported on the mission as follows (the original is in French):

The holy missionaries of St Vincent de Paul came, God blessed their work with much success as one would expect from their zeal. The greater part of those who perverted gave in to the exhortations of the missionaries. The regrets that they publicly gave and their promises in the future give reason to hope that their conversion is as durable as it is sincere. In order to strengthen the faith of these penitents, the missionaries before leaving founded a conference.³³

In September Fr Dowley of Castleknock made his first canonical visitation to the new foundation in Cork. He reported to the Superior General, J.-B. Etienne, in Paris that the bishop and clergy were, *singulièrement touchés*, 'particularly touched' by the blessings which God had bestowed on the recent mission. 'The famine,' he continued, 'aided by the severity of the proselytisers who had recourse to all sorts of intrigues made apostates in great number (*en grande nombre*) but the abundance of divine graces poured from heaven during the work of our poor missionaries brought back these unfortunate people on the right road reconciling them to the Church'.³⁴

Such is the Catholic account of the mission in Kilmoe. The Protestant account is given in a statement published in the press and signed by Fisher himself, John Triphook, now rector of Schull in succession to Traill, the curate, Charles Donovan and Rev. Crosthwaite of Durrus. They accused John Murphy, the Vincentians and the Society of Vincent de Paul of failing to come during the horrors of famine and arriving only now in the harvest 'to propagate Romanism'. When Crosthwaite was visiting Fisher, Murphy came and told them that the reason the Vincentians had come was to bring back members of their faith who had abandoned it. According to the statement these missionaries also brought with them 'Roman Catholic controversial books', and a number of 'wonder-working medals ... inculcating the worship of the Virgin Mary, who is stated in these medals to have been conceived without sin' and also some crucifixes. The people who came to listen to these missionaries would fall on their knees and make the Sign of the Cross whenever they met a Protestant. This was only following the example of missionaries themselves who did so 'to show their horror of heretics'.³⁵ The medals to which Fisher referred are known as 'miraculous medals'. (According to the Catholic Church, the Virgin Mary asked Catherine Labouré, a Daughter of Charity of Vincent de Paul, to have these medals struck when she appeared to her in Paris in 1830.) The arrival of such objects of piety in Kilmoe could be seen as an early example of the new devotions which Emmet Larkin called the 'Devotional

Revolution’.*

The conference of St Charles Borromeo had twenty-two members and was extremely active for the remainder of 1848. The Council of Ireland told of a ‘glorious’ case of a girl from Kilmoe parish. Although she was dying of hunger she was said to have cried, ‘Mother, when I am too weak to speak, remember never to accept any money from the Protestant minister to prolong my life’.* The number of families relieved was 68 comprising 252 individuals. The number of visits made to the poor was 210. The quantity of the relief distributed was 540 pounds of biscuits, 20 stone of meal, 53 pounds of rice meal, and 161 stone of potatoes. This food was all given gratuitously and does not appear in the tables below. The only cash which was spent was £1 10s 9d on tea, sugar and cocoa.* These may appear to be luxuries or bribes but such stimulants were regarded as medicinal and had also been distributed by the Society of Friends in Ballydehob in 1847 as has been seen in Chapter VIII.

Charles Donovan of Ballydehob was deeply involved in the work of conversion and indeed was co-ordinator of the West Carbery Branch of the Irish Society. In 1848 this branch had 134 scripture readers, 334 spellers, 124 translators of the Bible and 810 pupils in 25 different schools. Donovan claimed a large number of converts and gives the reasons for his success:

The prestige of priestcraft is fast dissolving ... In the parish of ____, numbers have and are joining our church; in fact, in many places there is a gradual dislocation of the mystery of iniquity and indifference to ecclesiastical terrorism ... Many Romanists have solicited my attendance at their dying beds. I have just reckoned up thirty-four who within the past year in this parish alone have renounced Romanism.*

This was typical of the vocabulary of the agents of the Irish Society. The Catholics claimed that the converts turned for soup while people like Donovan maintained that it was to be able to read the Word of God and to escape from what they called the terrorism and iniquity of the priests. The Society of St Vincent de Paul soon extended its activities into the parish of Schull; its full title now became ‘The conference of St Charles Borromeo, Kilmoe and West Schull’. It met in the National School in Schull on Sunday afternoons. Expenditure was £285 and nearly 1,000 families were visited and relieved, mainly with food, though £14 was handed out in cash. The food was improved not only in quantity but in quality; it included some 590 pounds of bread, 120 quarts of new milk, 63 pounds of tea, 370 pounds of coffee and 283 pounds of sugar.* Food was now being used by the Catholic Church in order to hold on to its flock and win back the lost sheep. Did hunger tempt them to stray in the first instance? Were they now coming back because they were simply going to the church which would give them the most food as some of them had bluntly told Fr Laurence O’Sullivan?

What is most surprising is the extraordinary number of converts that this conference claimed to have won back by its influence on the ‘morality and religion of the people’. The following list was given:

Number of Protestants in 1841	600
Number of persons who prevaricated in 1847 ... ‘Soupers’	1,500
Number of Protestants in 1849	300
Number of ‘Soupers’	60

The conference therefore claimed that as many as 1,440 soupers had been won back and that as many as 300 persons who had always been Protestants were also converted.* This confidential report fell into the hands of a Protestant in Schull who published it in the *Cork Constitution*.* He asserted that these figures were ‘pure imagination’ and that even if they were true, it was obvious that the conference was a ‘proselytising society that labours to convert Protestants’. He gave one example of a Protestant who was converted. This was a Richard Talbot who received a stone of meal and a shilling a week. Others similarly converted were six hungry children who were either orphans or abandoned. Therefore, ‘Onlooker’ concluded that only eight Protestants were converted and not 300. In all likelihood the claims made by the conference were grossly exaggerated. Probably not quite as many as 1,500 persons turned soupers in 1847; certainly not as low a number as 60 remained two years later. It is difficult to determine precise numbers at this stage but an attempt will be made here later. Did both Catholic and Protestant propagandists exaggerate their victories in order to boost morale and attract funds? The *Cork Constitution* reported in October 1848 that there were 400 Protestant children confirmed in Schull church and 160 in Bantry.* It is likely that the children from Kilmoe came to Schull too. This very high figure of 400 indicated that there was indeed a great number of conversions made in this district and that they were not returning to their former religion now that the worst of the famine was over.

We read on the records of Lowertown NS for 21 July 1848 that ‘the inspector reports the resignation of Rev. L. O’Sullivan through ill-health, present manager is Rev. John Barry’. Fr O’Sullivan did leave the parish towards the end of 1848 and was succeeded by John Foley who had been curate in Kilmurry in mid-Cork. O’Sullivan was evidently seriously ill since he does not seem to have taken up any official appointment for another year, that is until he became parish priest of Douglas in 1849. He had spent nearly thirty years in Kilmoe both as curate and parish priest.* We have seen that in this time that he had helped to relieve the people during the famine of 1822, to build the chapel at Ballinskea, to survive the cholera plague of 1832 and finally to face the famine, fever and religious troubles of this period, 1845–8. He said that he had also been stricken by fever himself.

Although the Protestants did not hold parish missions in the manner of the Vincentians they had visiting preachers who occasionally stirred up the new faith of the people. One such preacher was Rev. Daniel Foley who visited West Cork early in 1849 as already mentioned. He found on Cape Clear 95 persons assembled in prayer of whom all but 8 had originally been Catholics. At Ballydehob he addressed a large congregation in Irish, half of which consisted of Catholics. Donovan exhorted his parishioners to bring one Catholic

each to the service. Three of these Catholics attended service again the following Sunday. 'The work of conversion among Romanists there, already prosperous, has been stimulated,' Daniel Foley was pleased to relate. He preached mainly to Protestants and tried 'to enforce the responsibility and duty to the Romanists as taught and practised with zeal and success by their rector, Mr Triphook'. It must be noted that such evangelists passionately believed that it was their 'duty and responsibility' to rescue Catholics from their own religion or superstition. What Daniel Foley had already heard about Fisher led him to have high expectations as he headed for Kilmoe. But his expectations were even surpassed at 'the sight of 250 to 300 people assembled in their own building for it was called *Teampall na mBocht*'. He was impressed by the inscription over the door citing St James' condemnation of snobbery in church. He found them a warm-hearted people who responded to his preaching with sighs and sobs; they complimented his preaching as *blasta*, i.e., savoury. He had spoken in Irish and stated that it was the first time the Irish service was read. Later on he heard it had been used regularly since then. He was informed that when Rev. Thomas O'Grady arrived in the parish there had been only 5 Protestant families in Toormore but that now there were 80. At an average of 5 persons per family that would come to at least 400. That was not counting the 300 Protestants who according to Foley had emigrated. Nonetheless this mission was less than one-third the size of Rev. Gayer's mission in Dingle which had won 255 families or 1,100 persons between 1833 and 1847. Even the curate of the neighbouring parish of Ballyferriter, Denis Brasbie, became a convert."

Foley attacked the Society of St Vincent de Paul and the Vincentian priests. 'The Society of St Vincent de Paul sent an array of proselytising monks with medals for sale or gratuitous distribution and also with money which is daily offered to converts if they would return, while the people of the Romish religion were left to die of want'. He condemned the Kilmoe conference of St Vincent de Paul as 'fraudulent'. We have seen how Fr Barrett accused the Protestants of keeping relief supplies to themselves and their proselytes with the result that others died. Now the Catholics faced counter charges of proselytism and souperism and of even leaving their own die of starvation. Daniel Foley visited the Church Education Society school at Three Castle Head north of Mizen Head. He assured the pupils of the 'folly of the Romish priests in supposing that their medals and gods of brass and copper could stop the progress of Christ's Gospel in their own tongue'. In a dramatic gesture he showed the children 'a bunch of these lying vanities and let them drop on the still undried mud floor'. One convert remarked 'Queer gods!' Foley was then accompanied by Fisher on the journey to Durrus to Rev. Crosthwaite's parish. From there the itinerant preacher intended to travel on to Castletownbere to encourage Rev. Thomas O'Grady's converts there."

Rev. J. D'Arcy Sirr, a member of the Royal Irish Academy and biographer of the most Rev. Power le Poer Trench, archbishop of Tuam, also visited the Toormore mission and spoke to Widow Jack Donovan whose husband and four sons had died in the famine. She had been accustomed to repeating rosaries

to the Virgin, 'I have no desire for them now,' she said, 'I have no provider but Jesus'. He alleged that a member of the confraternity of Vincent de Paul was lending a pound or two to farmers but then 'takes it out by living off them' for a period to see that they said the rosary and kept to their duty." It is evident from these accounts that the efforts of the Vincentians, Fr John Murphy and the local clergy were not quite as successful as they themselves would have us believe.

In the autumn of 1849 Fisher received a visit from another itinerant preacher, an Englishman, who signed himself 'J. E.'. He saw the cottages of about eighty families of converts, some of whom were being addressed in Irish by Rev. Crosthwaite. The visitor was impressed by the manner in which one of them argued with a Catholic that sinners were cleansed by the Blood of Christ alone and not by the 'merits of the Virgin or the holy fires of purgatory'.⁴ Fisher tells that Rev. John Gregg came on 'a preaching tour' as mentioned in Chapter III.⁵ He was a fluent Irish speaker from County Clare who came preaching to Dingle as early as 1829 where he converted the young Thomas Moriarty.⁶ (Gregg became bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross in 1862 and built the cathedral of St Finbarre.)

Fisher received aid from the Irish Society so it was only natural that he should have given it an account of his mission. He told the society how opposition to his converts followed them even beyond the grave. Fables were told of how converts were seen after their deaths. They were always 'full of misery either scorched up like a cinder or with their teeth chattering with the cold and without a stitch of clothing'. The apparition usually asked that a friend should wear a penitential garment at Mass on so many Sundays for the repose of his or her soul, Fisher related. He himself knew of one dying convert; vain efforts had been made to persuade him to send for the priest and to 'deny his sole trust in Christ and mix up the grace of the sacrament of extreme unction with faith in His precious blood'. On another occasion, however, Fisher visited the home of a man who had been nearly drowned and deplored the fact that 'the people's thoughts were chiefly busied about crosses and beads and the lifting up of the hands of the priest'.⁷

What the Council of Trent did to oppose the Reformation in the sixteenth century, the Synod of Thurles 1850 did to oppose the 'Second Reformation' in Ireland. Seven of its decrees were entitled *De Fidei Periculis Evitandis*, i.e., 'On the necessity of avoiding dangers to the Faith'. It was admitted that 'some famine-afflicted Catholics had been seduced from the faith by means of money, food, and all kinds of corruption'. Missions were to be preached by the Vincentians and others in parishes where the proselytisers had gained converts. Pious sodalities were to be established and Catholic books and medals were to be circulated in place of the Protestant bibles and tracts.⁸ This, of course, is what had already been happening in Kilmoe.

Although famine was under some kind of control at this stage fever still remained lurking in many places, for example, the workhouse in Skibbereen. Here it struck the vicar, R. B. Townsend and swept him off. The Protestant

clergy at his funeral were joined by the priests wearing crape and black hatbands as a sign of mourning." As has been seen in Chapter II, he had also helped to relieve the famine of 1822. He was never accused of souperism.

A dispute, however, broke out in 1851 between Robert Troy, parish priest of Aughadown, and his curate, Edmund Mulcahy, on the one hand, and James Freke, vicar of Kilcoe, and Donovan of Ballydehob, on the other. Freke had an embroidery school near Ballydehob. The teacher was a Catholic; no religious instruction or book was used in order to avoid the very suspicion of proselytism and thus promote the temporal good of the poor girls. In any case this was what Freke claimed. He reported Mulcahy to his parish priest for denouncing the school and threatening all who attended it and of having 'absolutely forced his stick with such violence into the mouth of one of the girls that she has since been in medical care'. The priest was also accused of going to the house of another girl and cursing her mother and family to the seventh generation. Troy failed to reply to this letter of complaint and so Freke published it in the *Cork Constitution*.²⁷ This drew a sharp reply from Mulcahy. He denied that he had hurt the girl but did reveal his attitude to the school in no uncertain terms:

I denounced it before it was opened and since and will, while a single Catholic child attends it. The mistress is a Catholic ... No books are used. Perhaps so. But the bigoted fanatical evangelical puritans of Ballydehob whose touch is contagion to the uneducated, starving Catholic females, to their faith and morals, these - some of the apostates - are the frequent visitors of this industrial school.

Mulcahy pointed out that if Freke was so interested in the temporal welfare of the children he would have supported the National School where there was an embroidery class, but, that of course he was an enemy of the National System. Mulcahy went on to accuse Freke of forcing Catholic labourers to work at drainage on a Church holiday for which they had to do public penance. He also accused him of ceasing to distribute relief for three weeks during the famine with the result that 400 people died of starvation. The priest concluded by advising the vicar to mind his own flock, small as it was, and to leave the spiritual and temporal welfare of the Catholics to the priests.²⁸ In his reply to this letter Freke denied that he ever made any man work on a Church holiday and asserted that the mortality in the parish during the famine was not half of 400. He also denied stopping relief for any reason whatsoever. He remarked that it was ridiculous that the priest should have objected to a man working on a Church holiday since he outraged the Sabbath by 'pouring out of the altar denunciation and virulent invective' against himself.²⁹ Mulcahy was probably exaggerating famine mortality. According to Marshall's Return the percentage of people who had died in the famine was the lowest of all the six parishes in the larger study area so it is unlikely that relief had been stopped for three weeks. In any case Freke was chairman of the relief committee at the time while Mulcahy did not arrive from Aghabullogue, i.e., Coachford until January or February 1848.³⁰

Whatever about the truth of the mutual accusations in the dispute between these Catholic and Protestant clergymen there can be no doubt about the vigour of their efforts to bring children into their respective schools. The importance of education as a means of promoting or countering proselytism was recognised by all. It gradually emerges however that the ownership of land was important too, since a landlord could influence the choice of religion of a tenant. Rev. Donovan who was also a landlord and magistrate summoned one of his tenants, Michael Hegarty, to court on a trifling charge of trespass. It appears that both sides were well aware that the real issue was not trespass but religion. Donovan, the clerical magistrate, reminded his tenant/defendant that if he had conducted himself 'respectfully and with courtesy' he would never have been summoned. The tenant/defendant replied frankly: 'I see I might take the rough with the smooth; I never showed you any disrespect but by taking my children from your school when Fr Barry desired me.' The defendant was fined.³¹

There was also controversy over a school in Kilmoe. Fisher obtained a grant of some land through the kindness of Lionel Fleming. A dispute arose between Fisher and the Poor Law guardians over the question of paying rates for it. The clergyman alleged that if the land were attached to a National School or other 'Romanising school' it would be exempt from rates. According to him this had actually been the case when it had been previously occupied by 'Rev. Mr Barry, the Roman Catholic missionary, in the district, commonly called the parish priest'.³² We learn from this reference that James Barry took part in the general mission against Fisher. The Poor Law guardians denied that the land had ever been exempt from rates. Fisher lamented the dilemma of a Protestant clergyman: 'If he gives only a little charity he is accused of living off the fat of the land, but if he denies himself and his family to relieve the poor he is publicly reprobated as one taking advantage of the misery of the poor in order to bribe them into a hypocritical profession of a religion that they do not believe'.³³ J. F. Maguire of the *Cork Examiner*, was quite convinced that the explanation of the whole dispute was that Fisher refused to have any relief given without the 'bible test'.³⁴

The latest threat however to the 'Second Reformation' in these parishes came not from Rome but from Encumbered Estates Court. The large estate of R. H. H. Becher would be for sale in October 1851.³⁵ Fisher had extra reason to be concerned because his new church, rectory and schools had been built on a part of the estate which had now become 'Lot no. 14, Altar and Toormore, 897 acres'. The clergyman was determined to purchase this property. He told how in April 1851 he sent out an urgent appeal for funds 'to a few persons ... who would feel an interest in our cause' in Ireland and England. The appeal was private because he did not want the Catholics to know of his purpose. The church had not been consecrated for worship, 'for want of legal provision'. Its position was outlined by Fisher as follows:

Therefore it has no legal existence and consequently may, most probably will, ere long

be closed unless the present appeal saves it. If not, the congregation will suffer the same fate as that which, in the beginning of the century, used to crowd the old Protestant church, near Protestant Hill [Crookhaven] and whose descendants are now through a similar process, among the bitterest of Romanists. If this appeal goes unheeded, I feel assured that all the noble efforts at present being made for Irish Reformation will prove a failure, if where substantial work had manifestly been done, it is suffered to depend for its continuance on societies, whose funds are great or small in proportion to the degree of public interest expressed on their behalf.

Fisher thanked the Irish Society but feared that its aid would soon be withdrawn from him because of the decline of the use of the Irish language in his parish. He assured prospective benefactors that if there were any local means 'to rescue his church from many threatening dangers' he would gladly have used them. The rents from these lands would endow the church and 'their inhabitants would be saved from extermination which surely awaits them if an enemy became the purchaser'. These inhabitants numbered 400 and most of them were once 'Romanist', Fisher pointed out. The appeal was strengthened by the fact that some prominent persons had allowed reference to be made to them with respect to the truth of the statement. Among them were Dr Kyle, bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, Viscount Bernard of Bandon, Archdeacon Stuart of Aughadown and Rev. Dr Carson, a fellow of Trinity College. The response to the appeal was good. An Englishman sent £125 and Archbishop Beresford of Armagh gave £10. Miss Burdett Coutts sent £15; she was a well-known philanthropist in England and a friend and co-worker of the novelist, Charles Dickens. Other subscriptions brought the total to £687 19s 0d. It was obvious that this would not be sufficient to purchase the land, but just before the sale two gentlemen 'who knew the circumstances' gave Fisher a loan of £926, so he now had a total of £1,614 at his disposal.

McCarthy Downing, a Catholic solicitor, was suspected of having been instructed to buy the land in trust for Foley, the parish priest. The auctioneer declared that he had been informed by the commissioners of Encumbered Estates Court 'that in all cases of churches, chapels and school houses they would confirm the original lettings and would not allow possession to be disturbed'. When the lot containing the church came under the hammer, the first bid came from McCarthy Downing, £700, but it was finally sold for £1,210 to a representative of Fisher's. A press reporter noticed that 'no small interest was occasioned during the sale of this lot, as it was understood the Protestant clergyman and the Roman Catholic priest were opposed to each other in the purchase. It was said that the place had become a Protestant colony'. Now that the lands had been securely purchased on his behalf Fisher could afford to reveal the fact to the general public. Between November 1851 and May 1852, £324 was collected, leaving £605 to be repaid on the loan. Only then did he publish his original appeal in the *Cork Constitution*.⁶⁴ He repeated that the purchase had already meant 'the preservation from certain extermination of over 400 Protestants and converts which certainly awaited them if the purchaser were an enemy of the Truth'. Contributions could be sent to either of his cur-

ates, Edward Hopley of Ballyrisode or J. P. Myles of Goleen Glebe. Money could also be sent to Triphook, rector of Schull or to his curate, Donovan.

Fisher held that the 'biddings for this lot far exceed those of any other portions similarly situated in this large estate. This shows the animus of our opponents'. But these townlands of Altar and Toormore did not fetch an unusually high price; in fact, they were bought cheaply. The bleak townland of Ratouragh under Mount Gabriel made £2 per acre which was expensive when compared with the £1 6s 5d per acre paid by Fisher for land beside the main road and the sea with its valuable manure. The animus of Fisher's enemies and their desire to exterminate his converts were not quite as strong as he imagined or wanted his benefactors to believe. It was highly unlikely that the parish priest, Foley, would have been willing or able to buy nearly 900 acres of land at an extremity of his parish. He must have had a different sort of project in mind since his parish church was only 'a crazy and miserable shed' as shall be seen later.

This purchase by Fisher certainly did consolidate his mission making it something similar to Gayer's colony in Dingle, or Nangle's on Achill Island. If any of the converts wished to return to the Catholic religion it would be more difficult now that he had a rector/landlord. According to local Catholic tradition, Fisher evicted people who refused to become converts and some 'turned' to save their lands. Professor B. G. McCarthy of UCC wrote that 'in his dual role of landlord cum parson, he bore down on the starving people who 'verted in great numbers'.⁶⁵ In the absence of any contemporary evidence such allegations cannot be accepted. We shall see that some tenants were evicted from the lands of his predecessor, Thomas O'Grady, in Kilmoe but there was no report of religion being the cause. According to Mícheál Ó Mainín the local landlord in Ventry, David Peter Thompson, evicted Catholics to make way for Protestant colonies, but he himself denied it.⁶⁶ Catholics claimed that Rev. Spring did likewise in Cape Clear.⁶⁷ It does seem that Donovan was able to exert some pressure on Hegarty as to what school he should send his children. Isaac Notter, a Protestant historian who lived in the Toormore/Goleen locality, told me that some people 'turned' for land rather than soup. Land also enters into the definition of 'souper' given by Fr Lavelle above. These colonies always possessed a fair amount of land. Evidently land is a matter which must not be excluded from souperism. Perhaps the sixteenth-century Reformation principle, *cuius regio eius religio*, 'whoever owns the territory determines the religion' had a certain subtle validity in the 'Second Reformation' also, especially when the *rex* or ruler was a rector who desired to make or to keep converts.

The schools of the Church Education Society were well attended from 1839 to 1845 as has been seen in Chapter III. How they fared during the famine and afterwards can be seen from the following table:

TABLE 23: CHURCH EDUCATION SOCIETY²⁶
NUMBERS ON ROLLS AND LOCAL FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS, 1845-52

Parish	School	1845	1847	1848	1849	1850	1851	1852
Aughadown	Aughadown	23	80	84	36	42	40	38
	Roaring Water	40	90	97	84	closed	-	-
	Whitehall	52	80	90	48	48	62	15
	Newcourt	77	120	124	100	73	21	48
	Hare Island	-	69	73	39	26	55	16
Kilcoe Schull	Kilcoe	61	70	76	73	62	60	57
	Schull	40	76	83	52	69	61	81
	Schull (infant)	-	-	-	-	54	31	closed
	Lisheenacreagh	50	130	130	92	65	65	72
	Gubeen	106	200	94	73	73	70	72
	Leamcon	72	141	129	57	48	42	44
	Lissacaha	174	115	108	96	83	81	42
	Ballydehob	88	158	160	111	109	78	99
	Dunmanus	-	-	-	38	36	30	35
	Rosstrin	-	-	72	48	closed	-	-
	Cashelane	-	138	145	37	closed	-	-
	Kilmoe	Altar	70	289	180	113	99	82
Ballydevlin		84	130	177	148	96	81	120
Crookhaven		41	42	29	21	10	10	closed
Rock Island		39	70	85	31	28	20	17
Gortdub		-	-	116	closed	-	-	-
Three Castle Head		29	78	71	17	20	18	21
TOTAL		1046	2076	2123	1314	1041	907	841
Local Contribution		£162	£100	£145	£89	£65	£95	£124

It is clear from the table that attendance at these schools increased and decreased in direct proportion to the pressure of famine. The number on rolls nearly doubled between 1845 and 1847 while attendance at the National Schools fell catastrophically, as will be seen in Chapter XIII. This lends credence to the claim of Frs Laurence O'Sullivan and John Foley that extra food and clothing were distributed to the children of the Church Education Society's schools. The high number on their rolls was maintained during 1848 partly owing to the donations of food from the British Relief Association. In 1849, however, the numbers dropped seriously as happened all over the country. According to the Church Education Society, this was caused by emigration, the withdrawal of donations by the British Relief Association, and the more than usual degree of fierce opposition on the part of the Catholic priests."

The years 1849 and 1850 were crucial. The society closed four schools. It now had to admit that the 'violent opposition' of the priests had reduced some schools to 'mere skeletons'. Several National Schools were built during 1849 as shall also be seen in Chapter XIII. The Church Education Society claimed that in other schools 'the tide had turned in their favour'. It had not;

in fact, it was generally turning against them, as has been shown in the above table. There was also a serious decline in the society's financial receipts which it attempted to explain away by pointing out that it received money from certain English sources only every second year. It reassured its members that there was 'no just cause for alarm'. Regret was expressed that the government still refused to subsidise its schools unlike the National Schools." As also shown in the table there was also a serious decline in the local contribution to each school. This dropped to its lowest point in 1850 when it amounted to only £65, mainly because the schools in Kilmoe parish paid nothing at all. Although the schools of these parishes made a reasonably good recovery in 1851 and 1852, it is clear that they were under financial strain. Their existence rested on the sandy foundations of voluntary subscriptions. This explains Fisher's concern to build on the rock, so to speak, and seek land as a more secure source of revenue for his colony than the sand of voluntary contributions. The poorer schools all over the country eventually broke under the financial strain. In 1860 John Beresford, archbishop of Armagh, realistically advised such schools to join the National System, for which he was publicly denounced as a Judas Iscariot by the zealots of the Church Education Society."

The fundamental difficulties of the Church Education Society, however, were not primarily financial. As a system of scriptural education it was failing to attract the majority of the children of Ireland who were flocking instead to the National Schools. This partly explains why the number on the rolls in the Church Education Society schools in these parishes dropped drastically from 2,076 in 1847 to 841 in 1852. On the other hand the numbers of children going to the National Schools soared from 447 in 1847 to 1,865 in 1852 as will be shown in Chapter XIII. The heaviest losses of all for the Church Education Society schools were suffered in Fisher's own stronghold, Altar, which plummeted from 289 to 64. Two National Schools, a boys' and a girls', were opened nearby at Toormore and Kilthomane. Six out of twenty-two Church Education Society schools had to be closed. This dramatic fall in attendance was a true indication that the 'Second Reformation' was now beginning to lose momentum and to be pushed back to some extent by the 'Second Counter-Reformation'.

As late as January 1851 Fisher founded a society 'to rescue from inevitable death many poor Protestants who, through successive failure of their crops, have been reduced to absolute want'. These 'poor Protestants' must have been mostly converts. Thanks to this society, £76 had been collected, 232 individuals had been 'kept from the Poorhouse', 219 had planted potato gardens who otherwise could not have planted any and 273 more had sown considerably more. In June he still appealed for '280 starving individuals'. The famine died hard in the west.

The Protestant missionary movement still had vast resources. The Preachers' Book at Kilcoe church records the efforts of its clergymen during the Lent of 1852. Archdeacon Stuart of Aughadown, Freke, the local vicar, Charles Caulfield, rector of Creagh, and Donovan 'preached controversial'."

In this summer a man of extraordinary talent, Rev. James Goodman, was sent as a missionary to Creagh, Baltimore, by the Irish Society but his district comprised all of West Carbery. He had been a brilliant student at Trinity College winning prizes in Hebrew and in Irish of which he was a native speaker – ó dhúchas. He was a son of Thomas Chute Goodman, curate of Dingle, to whom Rev. Robert Gayer had been sent as assistant in 1833. Thomas Chute Goodman does not seem to have been too enthusiastic about the mission to Catholics. In 1844 Lord Ventry received a note threatening him with a bullet if he would not send Gayer out of the country but conceding that 'Parson Goodman is a good man, he interferes with no man's religion. I love him to you.' Nonetheless, Thomas Chute Goodman's son, James, was clearly more interested in other men's religion than was his father. In July 1852 James Goodman reported to the Irish Society that in Kilmoe parish he had conducted one meeting attended by 24 Protestants and also by 2 'Romanists' who were anxious for instruction. At another meeting, 18 were Protestants and 4 were 'Romanists'. At Schull he met 45 Protestants, 3 'Romanists' and 8 converts from 'Popery'. He had a congregation of over 80 in a school-house at Ballydehob; more than 20 of these were labourers (presumably Catholic mostly) brought along by Protestant farmers who promised to continue to do so. It seems that these services were conducted in English as he stated that he had an Irish service in Caheragh. He also had 30 converts in Castletownshend. He signed himself 'James Goodman, Missionary'."

Goodman was deeply interested in the Irish language, traditions and music. He was present at the inaugural meeting of the Ossianic Society in Dublin on St Patrick's Day 1853 and soon became a member of its council. This was a great honour because among its members were the leading Irish scholars of the day, John O'Donovan, John Windele and Standish Hayes O'Grady* (not to be confused with Standish James O'Grady, son of Thomas O'Grady of Kilmoe and Castletownbere). Shortly after the meeting of the Ossianic Society in Dublin we find Goodman at meeting of clergymen in Kilcoe church on 30 March 1853. The subject was: 'How far the clergy of this district ought or ought not identify themselves with the difference at present existing between the committees of the Irish Society (Dublin) and the Irish Society (London) respecting work, territory, jurisdiction and finance?' Others present at the meeting were Edward Spring, now rector of Kilcoe and Cape Clear, Joseph Lamphier, his curate, an Englishman, Alexander Stuart of Aughadown, Charles Caulfield and William Fisher. Goodman as usual signed himself 'Irish Missionary'." A decision on the above question was postponed.

Goodman used his poetic talent in his work. He soon wrote a long poem entitled *Agallamh Bhriain agus Airt* or 'Dialogue of Bryan and Art' in which Bryan defends the Catholic faith while Art, a convert, denounces it. Its first line runs *Is mairg, a Art, do thréig an t-aon chreidimh cóir* or 'Woe unto the person, Art, who abandoned the one true faith'. A *spéirbhean* literally a 'sky woman' appears in an *Aisling* or vision poem. She is not *Éire* or *Bamba*, the personification of Ireland suffering under English rule, but the personification of the



Rev. James Goodman, 1826–96

Bible. She is weeping because Rome and the priests had banished her from Ireland by putting the *púicín* or blindfold on the people who now were *go dorcha dall ag siúl san oiche*; 'dark blind walking in the night'. Catholic devotions are condemned:

*An scaipléir crón agus an éide,
Coimle céarach agus Ola Dhéanach,
Aithrí, troscadh agus ceirtencha bearmaithe,
Tobair, turais, agus Laidean dá stealladh libh.*

*The brown scapular and the habit,
Wax candles and Last Anointing,
Penance, fasting and holy rags,
Wells, pilgrimages, and Latin spouted at you.*

On the other hand, when the people become Protestant, there will be plenty of milk and potatoes and barns will be full; there will be a sort of *Tír na nÓg* or heaven on earth.

*Beidh síocháin ghrámhar againn le chéile,
Beidh againn cuigeann is cruach is maothal,
An Bíobla naofa líofa d léamh linn,
Fairsinge, flúirse is beannacht Dé againn.*

*We will have love and peace with one another,
We will have churn and reek and new milk,
Reading the holy Bible fluently,
We will have generosity and plenty and the blessing of God.**

The spring of 1852 was one of change in Church and State. Lord John Russell's Whig government fell and was replaced by Lord Stanley, Earl of Derby, and the Tories. Clarendon, the lord lieutenant, was succeeded by Lord Eglinton. Archbishop Murray of Dublin died at the age of eighty-two; he had been a link with the later Penal Law period, the rebellion of 1798 and the Veto controversy. His successor was Paul Cullen who was to introduce his Ultramontane policies and extend his authority over the Irish Church.*

Just as the building of the church, *Teampall na mBocht*, had provided a focus for the 'Second Reformation' it was probably thought that the building of a new Catholic chapel would consolidate the gains of the 'Second Counter-Reformation'. So a new parish chapel was begun in Goleen in the spring of 1852. Fr Foley had to make an appeal to the public on account of the following 'distressing circumstances':

There are in his parish two chapels, eight miles asunder. Of these, one can scarcely contain 800 out of a congregation of 2,500; it was badly built ... its roof is falling in. Besides, since the famine began, bribes were offered, schools where children got food and clothing were opened and other inducements-held out to the people to adjure their faith ... Newspapers circulated calumnies against the present parish priest with the avowed object of raising subscriptions to relieve the perverts; and huge sums are now being expended in this demoralising work ... He therefore calls on the good and charitable, to give him the means of employing poor people whose faith is thus endangered and putting an end among them, to that vile traffic of religion - of which he is falsely charged by the Derry papers of encouraging among Protestants.

This is a good summary of the controversy over souperism from the Catholic viewpoint. The employment which would be given by the church building was emphasised. Employment of course had also been provided in the building of the church, *Teampall na mBocht*; perhaps some came merely to work or even scoff but remained to pray. Foley also quoted a letter from Bishop Delany encouraging the building of the chapel. The bishop declared that there was no spot in the Christian world in which a chapel was so badly needed because of the danger that the Atlantic storms would reduce the old one, 'a crazy and miserable shed', to a heap of ruins. He called on Catholics to support the people of Kilmoe. They well deserved it because of 'their noble fortitude in resisting the insidious attempts made to corrupt their Faith by the base and demoralising means of bribery'. Foley thanked those who had subscribed already; the bishop himself gave £20. Thomas Barry, parish priest of St Finbarr's and formerly of Bantry, gave £3. James Barry of Bantry, former parish priest of Schull, gave a like sum. John Murphy, the 'Black Eagle', now administrator of the parish of SS Peter and Paul, contributed £5, as also did the former parish priest of Kilmoe parish, Laurence O'Sullivan. Other subscriptions nearly all from priests brought the total to £69. The only lay subscriber mentioned was

a Protestant, Mr Notter of Lissacaha House near Goleen.**

Special attention was drawn to Foley's appeal by J. F. Maguire. He was glad that the 'extraordinary efforts' made to 'pervert' the people through the medium of soup had 'proved abortive' in what had been the 'stronghold of proselytism'. He was giving the same sort of publicity to Foley as the *Cork Constitution* was affording Fisher and he published lists of subscriptions.*** This appeal was also printed in handbills and sent to England and America.*** The chapel was opened two years later on 11 October 1854 and dedicated to 'Mary, Star of the Sea and St Patrick'.*** It is a handsome building, clearly Gothic in style, and contrasting favourably with the more humble pre-famine, barn-style, chapels in Schull, Ballydehob. Just as the church, *Teampall na mBocht*, is a symbol of the spirit of the Protestants, especially of the converts during the 'Second Reformation', the new Goleen chapel, worthy of being called a church, is a symbol of the faith and growing confidence of Catholics during the 'Second Counter-Reformation'.

CONCLUSION

An attempt must now be made to discover approximately how many Catholics turned Protestant in Kilmoe between 1831, the year of Rev. Thomas O'Grady's arrival, and 1852. Unfortunately, the census of 1851 does not include religious statistics. The claims made by both Protestant and Catholic propagandists must naturally be treated with caution. As already mentioned Rev. Daniel Foley of the Irish Society claimed in 1849 that there were 75 families of converts in Toormore which would amount to about 375 persons. This presumably excludes the 300 who he claimed had already emigrated. In 1851 Fisher informed the Irish Society that there were 400 Protestants in Toormore and that they had been 'mostly Romanist'.*** This is the figure which he also gave in his appeal for funds to buy land as has been seen. Brady (the authoritative Church of Ireland source) stated that in 1860 there were 509 Protestants in the Toormore side of Kilmoe parish.*** This is a significant number and reveals that Fisher and Foley were not much exaggerating when they claimed that there were upwards of 400 converts at Toormore. What was the maximum number of converts then? How many did the Catholic Counter-Reformation win back? The claim by St Vincent de Paul that 1,500 Catholics 'perverted' is probably a gross exaggeration as certainly is their claim that only sixty 'souters' remained after the Vincentian mission.

Brady states that in 1860 there were 1,022 Protestants in all of Kilmoe parish which was an increase of 392 since 1830 when there had been only 630 Protestants in the whole parish. This increase took place mainly at Toormore and it tallies nicely with the estimate of Fisher and Foley that upwards of 400 converts had been made since Rev. O'Grady began the missionary work in 1831. The total population was then 6,889, so Protestants numbered only 9% of the population. By 1861 the total population had decreased to 3,779, but the Protestant population had risen to 1,022 so now it numbered 27% of total population. One was obliged to depend on Brady for figures for the Protestant popu-

lation up to 1860, but the 1861 census gave the numbers for each denomination and records 826 Protestants for Kilmoe;¹⁰⁰ this is 196 lower than Brady's figure, which must be noted. Nevertheless, even according to the census, Protestants still made up 22% of the population of that parish.

In the parish of Schull, however, the Protestant population fell from 1,898 in 1830 to 1,240 in 1860 according to Brady, a decrease of 35%. According to the census it fell to only 1,435, a decrease of 24%. In Aughadown the Protestant population fell from 506 in 1834 to 316 in 1860, a fall of 34%. No figure is given in the census for Aughadown. In Kilcoe there was a marginal increase in the Protestant population from 1830 to 1860, i.e., from 218 to 220, according to Brady, but according to the census it decreased to 169, i.e., by 22%. This was in line with the rest of the country where from 1834 to 1861 the Protestant population decreased by 158,707 persons but was still 12% of the population as compared with 11% in 1834.¹⁰¹ The fact that the Protestant population of Kilmoe increased by at least 22% (census) confirms that Fisher made great and successful efforts to win converts while the decline of at least 24% (census) in Schull similarly confirms that Traill or even Triphook had made no such efforts.

The number of Protestants in Kilmoe, 826 (census), was of course remarkably high. By now the number of Protestants in Dingle/Ventry had declined to 478 (census). As already stated the number of families that converted in that district was over three times as large as at Toormore. The founder of that Dingle/Ventry mission, Rev. Gayer, died of fever in 1848. Cholera swept off his opponent, Fr Devine, the following year.¹⁰² The outbreak of the Crimean war in 1854 distracted English attention and charitable funds from Ireland. The work of Florence Nightingale quickly became the more fashionable and patriotic charity. Houses in the colony in Ventry were being advertised for leasing for holidays. A correspondent of the *Dingle and Ventry Mission* for 1855 saw Ireland 'reverting to the obscurity of the dark ages'.¹⁰³

Edward Nangle was transferred from Achill to be rector of Skreen, County Sligo in 1852. Irene Whelan observes that the colony 'did not prosper greatly after his passing'; converts either emigrated or returned to their former faith.¹⁰⁴ Spring's mission in Cape Clear did not prosper either.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, Fisher even consolidated his position in 1855 by arguing that the price of corn had increased since the tithe composition of 1827 and thus secured an increase in the tithes of 3s 2d in the pound amounting to an increase from £500 to £580 per annum in a parish where the tithes were already extremely high.¹⁰⁶ This unjust and anachronistic tax would before very long be abolished with the Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869. Nevertheless, considering the relative positions of Gayer in Dingle, Nangle in Achill and Spring in Cape Clear at the end of the 1850s, it was Fisher who was holding out best of all against the undoubted vigour of the Catholic 'Counter-Reformation'.

Clergymen such as Gayer and Fisher would not have been so successful had it not been for the active or at least tacit support of the gentry such as Lord Ventry, Viscount Bernard, R. B. Hungerford and Lionel Fleming. Bernard assured a meeting of the Irish Society in London that the Irish were in-

deed grateful for the famine relief, that the Catholic Church was 'shaken to the foundations' and that every effort was now needed 'to complete its downfall'.¹⁰⁷ Rev. J. R. Cotter, rector of Donoughmore in Mid-Cork, was a rare exception as he was rebuked by the local Protestant landlords and the Justices of the Peace, W. Crook and S. T. W. French, at a large meeting held in March 1847. The following resolution was passed 'by 10,000 to 1':

At this time of unexampled privations, when the exertions of all parties, lay and clerical, are necessary to alleviate the misery of the poor, we emphatically condemn as mischievous and fraught with danger, any attempt, in any way, to take advantage of the wretched condition of a famine-stricken people to force on them any peculiar notions of religion, contrary to their present belief or that of their ancestors.

Rev. Cotter denied seeking to promote conversion by bribery and was determined to continue his missionary work. But Mr French retorted that he deplored 'all attempts to shake the faith of the ignorant and the uninformed, whether it is done by meal or milk, by soup or tracts'. Cotter resigned as secretary of the relief committee.¹⁰⁸ In Kilmoe, however, it was the priests, Laurence O'Sullivan and Thomas Barrett, who felt obliged to leave the committee.

At this stage the question must be posed: 'Were the numerous successes of the Protestant missionary movement in these parishes the result of pastoral neglect by the Catholic Church?' Dr Paul Cullen lamented the 'continued absence' of the parish priest in Oughterard, County Galway, the 'inability' of the two curates and the 'lack of energy' of the bishop.¹⁰⁹ So there were indeed some examples of pastoral neglect even allowing for the fact that Paul Cullen could at times be a rather harsh and unfair critic of fellow clergymen. There was no absenteeism, however, among the priests in the parishes of the Mizen Peninsula; indeed they were very active in providing churches and schools for their people in pre-famine times.¹¹⁰ It is often held that the Evangelical missions had their greatest successes in John MacHale's own archdiocese of Tuam because of his opposition to the National Schools.¹¹¹ But in Kilmoe parish there was a National School in Crookhaven and another at Lowertown only three miles from Toormore. The National School set up on Hare Island by Fr Troy in 1845 did not forestall the establishment of a Church Education Society school and a congregation of converts in 1849.

Although the priests were certainly concerned for the welfare of their people, it is clear that some of these pastors were beginning to lose some contact with their flocks, since they had been rapidly increasing in numbers before the famine. We have seen in Chapter III that Fr Michael Collins of Skibbereen admitted it. There were not enough priests and particularly there were not enough chapels which were sufficiently large to accommodate the people. In 1841 there were as many as 4,583 Catholics for each priest in these parishes. Since communications in general and educational facilities such as chapels and schools were so inadequate, it was physically impossible for a pastor to tend his flock properly. On the other hand each Protestant clergyman had an average of only 705 persons to care for.¹¹² It was only to be expected that he should have

been tempted to increase his flock especially if he had an 'evangelical' conscience. Catholics who were hungry spiritually and temporally must have felt attracted to the Protestant clergyman especially in hard times if he were found to be 'charitable'.

Between 1841 and 1861, the number of Catholics for each priest in the parishes fell by 48%, from 4,583 to 2,400. The national average in 1861 was one priest to every 1,500 Catholics.¹²⁸ The fall in the ratio of laity to clergy was even more dramatic among the Protestants in these parishes. The number of laity decreased from 3,512 to 2,285 while the number of clergy increased from five to seven.¹²⁹ Therefore the number of Protestants per clergyman dropped from 705 to 326, i.e., by 54%. The practice of religion undoubtedly increased steadily among Catholics and Protestants; there was consequently less straying from one fold to the other.

If there had been any pastoral neglect earlier in the century perhaps it was the Church of Ireland which was guilty. As already stated, Fisher himself criticised his own Church for being indifferent to his poor and remote parish with the result that it lost members to the Methodists and the Catholics.¹³⁰ For example in the early part of the century there had been only one curate representing the absentee rector, Francis Langford. Now in 1852 there was a resident rector, Fisher, and two curates, J. P. Myles and E. H. Hopley, to care for about 1,022 laity (including converts). In the Catholic parish, on the other hand, there were two priests for 2,500 laity. The Protestant effort of the period 1831–52 was not a case of a zealous Protestant Church winning converts at the expense of a lax Catholic Church. It was rather a case of converts being won or lost as a result of a bitter struggle between two rival and zealous Churches for the allegiance of people in this parish of Kilmoe and to a lesser extent in the other parishes, the Protestants tending to be Evangelical and the Catholics to be Ultramontane. The efforts made to convert Catholics all over the country were described by a Catholic historian, E. J. Quigley, as 'a form of persecution and proselytism and fraud ... of such ferocity, of such venom, of such magnitude, that even great priests feared for the faith.'¹³¹ This has been the traditional Catholic assessment and is rather severe. Nevertheless, when taking into account the certain reserve which Protestants have adopted since Disestablishment in 1869, the daring and persistence of the evangelicals is amazing; their own term for it was 'aggressiveness'. By 1856, this approach was generally seen to be counter-productive and was gradually abandoned. A controversial preacher admitted that he had been given good advice by a convert: 'If your riverence was going to catch birds, would you begin by throwin' stones at them'.¹³² It had indeed been a bitter struggle. As James Goodman's fictional character, Bryan, warned, *Is mairg, Art, do thréig an t-aon chreideamh cóir*, 'Woe unto the person, Art, who abandoned the one true faith'. No matter who it was, John Henry Newman of the Oxford Movement or Widow Jack Donovan of Toormore, changing religion was often a traumatic and costly experience.

There is a further question to be asked: To what extent did the general body of the clergy of the Church of Ireland support the proselytising drive of

some of their brethren, clerical and lay? Desmond Bowen states that the clergymen of the dioceses of Killala and Achonry were not guilty of proselytism or souperism during 1847. He holds that there is no evidence to indicate that these clergymen were 'any different from the rest of their Established Church clergymen when they showed great reluctance to support missions to the Catholics'.¹³³ It is obvious however that several of the parsons of these West Cork parishes did enthusiastically support the Irish Society and made no secret of, or apology for, trying to win converts. We have seen how Fisher even published it in the press. Between 1831 and 1852, at least thirteen Protestant clergymen ministered in these parishes at various times. Eleven of them, Thomas O'Grady, his successor, Fisher, his two curates, Myles and Hopley, also Triphook and Donovan of Schull, Stuart of Aughadown, Freke and Lamphier of Kilcoe, Spring of Kilcoe and Cape Clear, and Goodman all gained converts. The only exceptions were Traill and his curate, Alexander McCabe. The Trench clergymen did not attempt to make converts either. Thus, of the resident clergymen, eleven out of thirteen made varying degrees of effort to increase their flocks during the famine or to fulfil 'their duty and responsibility to the Romanists' as one of themselves put it.

It must always be recognised, of course, that it was extremely difficult for a Protestant clergyman to be genuinely charitable without leaving himself open to charges of trying to make converts as Fisher himself pointed out. It was indeed difficult but by no means impossible. It has been already noted that a Catholic clergyman, undoubtedly James Barry, publicly acknowledged the great success of F. F. Trench in saving the lives of the people but pointed out that he 'had not made the least attempt to interfere in the religion of the people'. It must be admitted, however, that there was not always a clear line to determine precisely where charity ended and attempts to convert began. Any charity given by a clergyman of one denomination can never be absolutely undenominational or neutral. Professor R. C. Trench outlined his own guiding principle on this question:

The lives of the people of that district [the Mizen Peninsula] seem to be marvellously given into our hands, and who can tell what a blessed influence our charity may have on their spiritual welfare! Yes ... while loathing from my innermost soul the iniquity of holding out an inducement to the miserable to do that which their poverty and not their will might consent, still I say, who can tell the extent to which in this very district the Saviour's words may not ultimately be fulfilled – 'Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father which is in heaven.'¹³⁴

There ought to be little objection to this approach. The primary purpose of Professor Trench and of F. F. Trench was to give charity and save the lives of the people without interfering in their religion. This is implicit in Barry's vote of thanks to F. F. Trench published in the press.¹³⁵ Trench never made any direct attempt to interfere with the religion of the recipients of his genuinely Christian, though necessarily Protestant, charity. The members of the Society of Friends were excellent examples of persons who gave charity without any question of attempting to win converts. This was explicitly and publicly ack-

nowledged at a meeting held in Ballydehob chapel in September 1848 as shall be seen in the next chapter.¹⁷

Some Church of Ireland clergymen did not agree with the close association between famine relief and attempts to make conversions. Dr Whately, Church of Ireland archbishop of Dublin, thus addressed his clergy in 1847:

There cannot be a more emphatically unsuitable occasion for urging anyone to change his religion and adopt ours, than when we are proposing to relieve his physical distress; because the grace of a charitable action is in this way destroyed, and we present ourselves to his mind as seeking to take an ungenerous advantage of his misery, and as converting our benefactions into a bribe to induce him to do violence to his conscience.¹⁸

Whately himself later admitted that 'attempts were made ... in some instances to induce persons to carry on a system of covert proselytism by holding out relief to bodily wants and suffering as a kind of bribe for conversion'.¹⁹ Fisher and most of his fellow clergymen did indeed win converts in hungry or famine times. The vital question is whether they were guilty of souperism; in other words, did they directly or indirectly take undue advantage of the famine to influence these people to change their religion? Let us consider the case of Fisher since, according to Desmond Bowen, he was regarded as being 'a paradigm souper'.²⁰ Why did so many Catholics at Toormore turn Protestant? The fact that they changed religion in time of famine implies reasons of hunger. The fact however that some of them refused to return to the fold, in spite of the Vincentian mission and the improvement in the times, implies reasons of conscience. Similarly, the fact that other converts did return to the fold after the mission and the improvement in the times implies reasons of hunger. It could also be held that they returned partly on account of the relief offered by the Society of St Vincent de Paul. We have seen that the Catholics accused the Protestants of souperism and the Protestants made counter accusations of souperism against them. There seems to be little documentary evidence which can prove or disprove these allegations. I sense, however, that both souperism and counter-souperism occurred at Toormore. Yet in justice it must be pointed out that it was the Protestants who began this abuse of famine relief. They could have relieved the hungry people without getting excessively involved in religious matters as recommended by Dr Whately and as actually practised by other clergymen such as Traill, the Trenches, Webb of Caheragh, R. B. Townsend of Abbeystrowry. On the other hand, Fisher and his fellow clergymen who made converts associated relief and religion too closely which must be part of the reason too for their undeniable success. It must be fully acknowledged, however, that they did in fact save many lives. The endeavours of Protestants to make converts was greatest from 1830 to 1850 which must be the period in Irish history in which the people suffered most from hunger. These efforts were most intense in the poorer parts of the country. The manner in which such efforts and poverty coincided both in time and in place must be observed. There seems to have been some sort of correlation between such con-

versions and poverty. A Quaker, Alfred Webb, wrote after the famine:

A network of well-intentioned Protestant associations spread over the poor 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 that have not yet died out, and Protestants, not altogether excluding Friends, sacrificed much of the influence for good they would have had if they had been satisfied to leave the belief of the people alone.

As Donal Kerr affirms, 'there is much truth in this assertion'.²¹ Although souperism was a reality around Toormore, one story of it taking place in another part of these parishes seems mythical. I was told by a local inhabitant at Kilbronoge (where the Trench cousins had an 'eating-house') that during the famine soup was given out by the Protestants in order to convert the Catholics. 'But not even the dogs would take the soup,' he declared defiantly. This man was named Regan. F. F. Trench relates how he visited several families of that name and fed them, for which they expressed their gratitude.²² Regan admitted, however, that many people at Toormore 'took the soup and turned'. It is regrettable that the genuine and, indeed, heroic charity of men like the Trenches or Dr Traill should have been preserved in folk memory in this distorted fashion as a result of the questionable charity of people like Fisher. According to the myth the hungry people who 'took the soup' nearly all 'turned'. But more than three millions were on soup rations in the summer of 1847 and of course they did not 'turn' nor was any pressure put on them to do so; it was simply government or state relief. So to Desmond Bowen's question 'Souperism: myth or reality?' my answer is 'both myth and reality, but far more myth than reality'.

However, one must not be too delicate about these matters. Christianity is a religion of incarnation; there cannot be any absolute dichotomy between the spiritual and the material. When a people accept the faith of any denomination it sometimes results in some kind of material gain also such as schools and hospitals. An economist might wryly remark that increased competition in the market for souls at Toormore attracted greater supplies of food for the body; if there had been less controversy there might have been more mortality. Surely the most important matter in time of famine is that people survive it. If the government had made an effort similar to that of the Churches – even for the selfish political motive of killing repeal with kindness – not so many lives would have been lost. If there had been more of the spirit of the London Tavern Committee of 1822 and less of *laissez-faire*, the union might have been cemented rather than strained. Mary Daly states that lack of co-operation between Catholic and Protestant clergy 'probably cost lives'.²³ As has been seen, Fr Barrett accused the Protestants of holding on to the funds for themselves while others died. They in turn accused the Catholics of lavishing food on converts trying to win them back while others of their own flocks starved to death. If there had been greater co-operation between clergymen there would indeed have been a more equitable distribution of food in some places. Yet, as al-

ready stated, religious controversy meant that much larger supplies of food arrived. Other districts suffered as much and in silence. We have seen that in Drinagh, for example, mortality in 1847-8 was practically as high as in Kilmoe (18.4% compared with 18.8%). We have seen too that according to the local magistrate, George Robinson, one of the reasons for this was that Drinagh had no resident rector. It could be argued that if there had been a man like Fisher there, so many would not have died in a place which had the highest Poor Law Valuation in all six parishes while Kilmoe had the lowest.

Fisher's biographer, R. B. Carson, informs us of this pastor's dismay when later he saw some of his converts abandon him. Carson realised, as probably did Fisher as well, that the peasants possessed a 'shrewdness that they term "crabbinness"'.¹⁵ If they were independent enough to desert the priest one day they would similarly abandon the minister another day - if they so wished. Fr Daniel O'Sullivan, parish priest of Enniskeane at this period, expressed what he called this '*duplex attitude*' in a verse he put in the mouth of a 'convert':

*But, Mother, wait awhile, we'll try to treat them civil,
Nuair a fhásfaidh na prátaí nua, we'll pitch them to the devil.*¹⁶

Yes, when the new potatoes would grow they were prepared to get rid of such givers of relief. A proverb went, *An uair a thigeas na Lumpers / Imitheochuid na Lumpers*. 'When the Lumpers [potatoes] will come / The Lumpers [soupers] will go.' Such 'crabbin' soupers survived the famine whether they took food from the likes of Fisher or the likes of the Society of St Vincent de Paul or indeed from both. *Laissez-faire* and indifference were far more fatal than religious controversy. Political economy allowed far more people to die than did the Bible or the rosary bead - far more perished of philosophy than of theology.

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CHAPTER XI: POT OF SOUP OR WORD OF GOD?

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 133 Daly, *Famine*, p. 68.
 134 Carson, *Parson*, pp. 31, 36.
 135 Galvin, *Black blight*, p. 228.

CHAPTER XII: TOWARDS LOCAL 'PAUPER HOME RULE'

- 1 Woodham-Smith, *Hunger*, p. 308; Kinealy, *Calamity*, pp. 177, 181.
 2 This William Gregory was a son of William Gregory, under-secretary (1821–31).
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 There was a severe shortage of food in Trujillo, Peru, in 1991 and the priests and nuns of the Cork and Ross mission fed almost 30,000 people by means of soup-kitchens. Yet they received a death-threat from the Maoist organisation, *Sendero Luminoso*, 'Muerte a los imperialistas Irlandeses', 'Death to the Irish imperialists'. The *Sendero* held that if food and the means of its production were distributed justly there would not have been any hunger in the first instance. In the eyes of these revolutionaries the Irish were only collaborating with, and propping up the internationalist capitalist system which was robbing the country in the same way as Mitchel and the *Nation* maintained that England was robbing Ireland. Source: conversations with Murray J., Brophy, R. and Crowley, E. on the mission.
 E, 2 Feb., 1847.
 E, 26 Mar. 1847.
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 o create and to foster public opinion in Ireland and to make it racy of the soil.
 Ówlan, K. B., 'The political background', Edwards & Williams, *Famine*, pp. 170–1.
 †, 30 Nov. 1847.
 ‡, 4 Nov. 1847.

- 28 SR, 30 Nov. 1847.
 29 CE, 17 Nov. 47.
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 31 Woodham-Smith, *Hunger*, 409.
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 33 SR, 29 Nov. 1847.
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 35 SR, 4 Mar. 1847; SR, 23 Sept.; 29 Nov. 1847.
 36 Donovan, 'Observations', 12^o.
 37 CE, 20 Aug. 1847; CC, 24 Aug. 1847.
 38 CC, 24 Aug. 1847.
 39 CE, 10 Sept. 1847.
 40 SR, 23 Sept. 1847.
 41 CC, 25 Sept. 1847.
 42 SR, 23 Sept. 1847.
 43 CE, 10 Sept. 1847.
 44 CC, 16, 17 Nov. 1847.
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 51 *Appendix to the sixteenth report of the Commissioners of Public Works*, pp. 58–9.
 52 CE, 14 Feb. 1848.
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 55 CC, 22 Aug. 1848.
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 57 Commissioners to Marshall, *State of Unions*, P.P., *Famine*, ii, p. 225.
 58 Woodham-Smith, *Hunger*, pp. 314, 318.
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 71 Marshall to Commissioners, 17 Mar. 1848, P.P., *Famine*, iii, p. 535.
 72 *State of the Unions*, P.P. *Famine*, iii, pp. 538–40.