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‘Violently Democratic and Anti-Conservative’? An Analysis of Presbyterian ‘Radicalism’ in Ulster, c1800-1852.

A thesis presented for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
by

Julie Louise Nelson

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November 2005



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31 MAY 2006

ABSTRACT**‘Violently Democratic and Anti-Conservative’? An Analysis of Presbyterian
‘Radicalism’ in Ulster, c.1800-1852****Julie L. Nelson****Durham University**

This thesis sets out to challenge the belief that Presbyterianism in the north of Ulster was transformed from a radical into a conservative political force in the period from 1800 to 1852, as so much historiography has suggested. Moving away from the traditional focus on the influence of the evangelical revival, the significance of the Rev. Henry Cooke, and the internal theological schism within the largest of the Presbyterian synods, this thesis endeavours to highlight the significant continuity with the later eighteenth century, when significant numbers of the north’s Presbyterians had rebelled against British rule. It analyses the Presbyterian community, with particular emphasis on County Down and Belfast, and on the Presbyterian clergy. Chapters One to Three examine Presbyterian relations with, and attitudes towards, the British Government, the Irish established church and Irish landlords. These chapters argue that Presbyterians in the north of Ireland continued to demonstrate suspicion and hostility towards these institutions long after the failed rebellion of 1798. Chapter Four deals with their relations with their Roman Catholic countrymen and the impact of the repeal of the Union campaign. Chapter Five analyses Presbyterian parliamentary and electoral politics emphasising the continuities with the late eighteenth century in the belief of many Presbyterians in the panacea of radical political reform. Throughout the thesis there is particular emphasis on the Presbyterian campaign for tenant right, and the subsequent involvement of many of the community’s ministers in the Dublin-based Tenant League. The thesis concludes that Presbyterianism in Ulster – whilst as typically internally divided in 1852 as in 1798 – retained its radical and anti-establishment complexion long into the nineteenth century, in attitudes to both clerical and political establishments. Although alive and well, this radicalism was, however, increasingly circumscribed by a firm belief that Union with Britain offered the only security for civil and religious liberty.

DECLARATION

I declare that no material presented in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other university. The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published in any form without the author's prior written consent. All information derived from this thesis must be acknowledged appropriately.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BAI	Belfast Academical Institute
<i>BMM</i>	<i>Belfast Monthly Magazine</i>
<i>BNL</i>	<i>Belfast Newsletter</i>
<i>BU</i>	<i>Banner of Ulster</i>
DCRO	Durham County Record Office
<i>DR</i>	<i>Downpatrick Recorder</i>
<i>IHS</i>	<i>Irish Historical Studies</i>
<i>LS</i>	<i>Londonderry Standard (sometimes referred to as the Derry Standard)</i>
<i>NW</i>	<i>Northern Whig</i>
PHSI	Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
QUB	Queen's University Belfast
RGSU	Records of the General Synod of Ulster
UT	<i>Ulster Times</i>

INTRODUCTION

‘Violently democratic and anti-conservative’ was used to describe mainstream Presbyterianism, not as might be imagined, in the aftermath of the 1798 rebellion, but rather in 1852 at the height of the tenant right campaign in the north. The conservative *Belfast Newsletter* used it to denounce the stance of the *Banner of Ulster* – a paper established in 1842 as the organ of orthodox Presbyterianism and Ireland’s largest Presbyterian synod. In his 1956 thesis, A.T.Q. Stewart argued that after 1798, indeed even before, Presbyterianism became an essentially conservative force in Ulster. Subsequent historiography has similarly labelled the period in this way, with much emphasis placed on the influence of the conservative Rev. Henry Cooke, regarded essentially as both the pioneer and the symbol of that shift. Whilst more recent research – notably that of Finlay Holmes and Ian McBride – has developed beyond the idea of a simple ‘transformation’ to conservatism, there remains much to say on the nature of Presbyterian ‘radicalism’ after 1798. It is the aim of this thesis to examine to what extent that ‘radicalism’ survived in the Presbyterian community, and to highlight the continuities between the years preceding the rebellion and the first half of the nineteenth century, arguing that many Presbyterians maintained their independent and radical stance on a variety of political and social issues.

Chapters One to Three examine the survival of Presbyterian ‘anti-establishment’ radicalism, analysing attitudes to, and relations with, the British Government, the Irish established church, and Irish landlords respectively. These three institutions had been the source and focus of Irish Presbyterian grievances before and during the United Irish campaign for radical reform of parliament, and ultimately, separation from England. Chapters Four and Five examine the ways in which they attempted to remedy those grievances – some seeking alliances with their Roman Catholic countrymen, but primarily through significant political reforms. The attacks on the exclusively landlord representation of Presbyterian constituencies was accompanied, from the 1840s, by a growing movement for proper Presbyterian parliamentary representation. Whilst Catholics continued to provide the focus of religious antipathy they nevertheless remained potential allies in challenging Ireland’s ‘Protestant Establishment’. This is seen most clearly in the tenant right campaign and the Tenant League, the collapse of which forms a useful closing point for the span of this research. Within each of these thematic chapters, there is a largely



chronological approach, for the period encompassed is a relatively long one, in which the evolution and development of factors over time is significant.

The theological divisions within Irish Presbyterianism – and the often hostile stance of certain Presbyterian sects towards each other – add an additional layer to any examination of Presbyterianism at this time. As the largest and generally most influential grouping, there is particular focus on the Synod of Ulster (after 1840, the General Assembly), as most ‘representative’ of mainstream Presbyterian opinion. However, where possible I have also considered the significance of the smaller Covenanting and Seceding synods, and in particular the Remonstrant Synod, composed of the ‘Arians’ who were officially isolated in 1830 from the Synod of Ulster. From within these groupings of course, divisions continued based around both theological and broader political issues. Under Cooke’s influence, the Presbyterian church underwent significant upheaval, with the imposition of religious orthodoxy amongst the members of its largest synod. But, as this research demonstrates Cooke’s increasing isolation and unpopularity among many of his own brethren, emphasize his failure to create a more submissive, politically conservative and acquiescent ministry and church, more closely allied with the ‘Protestant establishment’.

As well as internal theological division, external factors did of course impact on the Presbyterian community after 1798, most notably the development of a broad-based Catholic political movement under the leadership of Daniel O’Connell. In many ways, O’Connell personified the worst fears of Presbyterians for whom, as McBride has emphasized, ‘No Popery’ had been, and remained, an intrinsic element of even the most enlightened Presbyterian psyche. Chastened by spectacular defeat at the hands of British military might in 1798, and with the potential of a more aggressive and independent Catholicism (ruling Ireland in the event of its independence), most Presbyterians came to regard the union with Britain as an essential element of their religious and political freedom. Yet ‘radicalism’ was far from incompatible with this stance. Although a very significant factor in re-shaping the Presbyterian sense of identity, the threat of political Catholicism and repeal of the Union did *not* prevent co-operation between priest and minister on distinctly ‘anti-establishment’ issues, focusing on social and economic grievances which were ultimately linked to the political dominance of Irish landlords.

Much of this research has focused on the Presbyterian ministers, both collectively as part of their respective synods, and also individually. The nature of the source material available has led to an inevitable concentration on the behaviour and attitudes of the Presbyterian ministry, with their plethora of written material in the form of sermons, pamphlets, printed speeches, and records of the proceedings of the various Synods. Sadly, such written material does not exist to a similar extent for the individual Presbyterian tenant farmer. The voice of the laity is, however, heard in the frequent correspondence to various newspapers, particularly the *Northern Whig*, the *Banner of Ulster* and the *Belfast Newsletter*, and in parliamentary petitions. The preoccupation with the Presbyterian ministers is not without justification, as these men frequently played a central role in Presbyterian society: in 1852 some of the most radical of these men were more than merely religious and spiritual leaders, but also the political and moral voices of their flocks – the very situation which had caused so much concern in the late eighteenth century. Men such as the Rev. John Rogers and the Rev. Julius McCullough became – indeed actively sought the role of – Presbyterian ‘representatives’ in contrast to the land-owning elite formally ‘representing’ Ulster’s Presbyterian population in parliament.

In particular, the prominent role of Presbyterian ministers in the tenant right campaign and its resultant anti-landlord and political agitation around the years 1848 to 1852, is a central element of this work. That approximately two thirds of Presbyterian ministers came from ‘farming-backgrounds’ in the period 1840-70¹ certainly helps to explain why land and tenant issues were taken up so zealously by many. Furthermore, as Holmes has emphasized, ‘the tenant farmers were the backbone of the Presbyterian Church’.² Hence, the significant focus of this research on the tenant right campaign, Presbyterian involvement in the Tenant League and its political implications.

The constraints of time and length have made it impossible to make this anything like an exhaustive or entirely comprehensive northern-wide study of every aspect of Presbyterianism in the period 1800-1852. For example, issues such as the impact of evangelicalism upon the Presbyterian Church and its members has not been fully explored. Similarly, other aspects that have already received detailed treatment previously by historians, are dealt with in less depth here. Moreover, I have focused on particular

¹ Kenneth Brown, ‘Life After Death? A Preliminary Survey of the Irish Presbyterian Ministry in the Nineteenth Century’, *Irish Economic and Social History*, 22 (1995), pp.49-63, at p.55.

² R.F.G. [Finlay] Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterian Heritage* (1985; Belfast, 1992), p.130.

geographic areas to the frequent exclusion of others, based on the relevance and significance of events. Inevitably, this has resulted in a heavier weighting towards Belfast and its environs, and most particularly County Down. The focus on Down has resulted from a number of factors, perhaps most notably because the county was *the* Presbyterian heartland of Ireland, and as such it had played a pivotal role in the events of the 1790s, and the rebellion itself, as a core centre of United Irish support. As the most prosperous county in Ireland, and one with significant political connections, many of Down's elections were played out on the national stage, possessing a significance and a pre-eminence in their influence, most notably, 1805, 1831 and 1852. The tenant right campaign also had its centre of influence in Down, not least because of the struggle it witnessed between Presbyterians and the county's prominent landlord, the Third Marquis of Londonderry. Down was home not only to Lord Londonderry, who came to symbolise the tyrannical landlordism so many Presbyterians resented, but also to the veteran political radical, William Sharman Crawford. This electoral significance and its central position during the tenant right campaign, have resulted in a wealth of source material relating to the county. Moreover, in the 1840s over a quarter of Ireland's Presbyterian ministers were recruited from Down alone.³

Newspapers have provided a large element of the primary sources used in this research, both for the variety of editorial voices and the vast contributions in the form of letters to the editor, and written debates between contributors. The written word and the press played a pivotal role in Presbyterian life at this time, and this is reflected in the lively newspaper press, centred largely in Belfast. This included a significant array of electioneering squibs and propaganda. There has also been extensive use of the rich printed pamphlets and sermons, often, though not exclusively, the work of Presbyterian ministers. The records and proceedings of the various synods, in particular the annual general meetings of the Synod of Ulster (after 1840 the General Assembly), also receive particular attention in this research. As the largest and therefore in many ways the most influential of the Presbyterian synods, especially after its union with the Seceders in 1840, this body was extremely important to Presbyterian life. Indeed, at times of crisis, most notably the Marriages question and the Scottish Church disruption – when faced with alienation from an apparently hostile British Government and a set of unsympathetic landlord

³ Brown, 'Life After Death?', p.53.

representatives – the Assembly in many ways performed the role of an extra-parliamentary body. The private papers of a number of individuals have also proved extremely valuable, in particular, the vast Irish papers of the Third Marquis of Londonderry, a leading landlord to Presbyterian tenants in Down; those of Belfast radicals such as the Tennent family; and those of Lord Clarendon, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland at the time of the tenant right agitation.

Background: the 1798 rebellion.

The participation of Presbyterian tenant farmers and weavers in the ranks of the United Irish rebel armies in Counties Down and Antrim in June of 1798, is well known.⁴ By 1852 there were certainly very few Presbyterians who would have contemplated armed resistance against the British state, but the relationship between government and the Irish Presbyterians remained complex and ambiguous, with the majority of the Presbyterian community retaining what Ian McBride has defined as their ‘almost instinctively anti-government’⁵ character.

It is important to consider just how far the Presbyterians of the 1790s adhered to republican or separatist ideals of an independent Ireland. How many were truly politicized with the United Irish message or influenced by Enlightenment thinking? The advanced political radicalism of the movement’s Presbyterian middle-class leadership (centred in Belfast) is clear⁶ but such ideals, whilst influencing many rank and file recruits in east Ulster, do not tell the whole story of Presbyterian ‘radicalism’. The significance of specifically local issues in motivating rebel involvement was clearly important,⁷ suggesting that the grievances of some Presbyterian rebels were clearly more attuned to their exclusion and oppression at the hands of the combined power of Anglican Church and landlord, rather than specifically towards the British connection. Above all, other historians, most notably David Miller, have emphasized the role of conservative millennial predictions in motivating a high number of Presbyterians to turn out for rebellion. Many theologically

⁴ Ian McBride states that in May 1797, recruitment figures for the United Irish movement were recorded as around 118,000 in the north, of which almost 50,000 were from the two Presbyterian counties of Down and Antrim alone. See, McBride, *Scripture Politics*, p.189.

⁵ McBride, ‘Ulster Presbyterians and... the Act of Union’, p.75.

⁶ N.J. Curtin, *The United Irishmen: popular politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798* (Oxford, 1994)

⁷ Trevor McCavery, ‘“As the plague of locusts came in Egypt”: Rebel Motivation in north Down’, in T. Bartlett, D. Dickson, D. Keogh and K. Whelan (eds.), *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective* (Dublin, 2003), pp.212-25.

conservative Presbyterians such as the Covenanters regarded the rebellion as a crusade to overthrow an uncovenanted king and predicted the destruction of the British monarchy. Indeed, millenarian speculation, which was rife during the French Revolution, contributed to the large numbers of ‘old light’ Presbyterians who made up the Presbyterian radical movement.⁸ It is evident therefore, that a significant number of Presbyterians on the fundamentalist fringes, were motivated by a religious ideology which identified the government alongside the Papacy as a force of Anti-Christ.⁹ This explains the appearance of Paine’s *Rights of Man* alongside prophetic texts on the pages of the *Northern Star*, a strange blend of secularism and fundamentalism.¹⁰ However, the tone and content of the Rev. James Porter’s satirical *Wind and Weather Sermon* preached from the pulpit to his congregation in Greyabbey in February 1797, suggests a degree of wider politicization among many lay Presbyterians. In the north Down area at least, many had a clear enough understanding of the activities of the British government, and the war with France. Parochialism and religious superstition, although both important factors in encouraging Presbyterian rebels, do not tell the whole story.¹¹

Moreover, J.R.R. Adams emphasized the proliferation of reading societies which sprang up, particularly in the heart of Presbyterian Ulster – Antrim and Down – in the eighteenth century. This emphasizes the impact of the political events in America and France, the widespread high levels of literacy among east Ulster Presbyterians, and the ‘traditional presbyterian love of information’. Adams noted that these societies were frequently ‘hotbeds of radicalism’, viewed by the authorities with ‘deep suspicion’.¹² Similarly, S.J. Connolly has highlighted the significance of learning and the numerous book societies, which, when combined with traditional Presbyterian grievances against the establishment, encouraged recruits for the rebel cause among Presbyterian farmers and

⁸ David Miller, ‘Presbyterianism and “Modernisation” in Ulster’, *Past and Present*, 80 (1978), pp.80-4; Holmes, ‘United Irishmen and Unionists: Irish Presbyterians, 1791 and 1886’, *Studies in Church History*, 25 (19), p.181.

⁹ Myrtle Hill, ‘Popular Protestantism in Ulster in the Post-Rebellion Period, c.1790-1810’, *Studies in Church History* 25 (19), p.193.

¹⁰ Indeed, Miller has suggested that, in fact, very few Presbyterian tenant farmers or weavers were actually imbued with the enlightenment ideas behind the original United Irish message. See his ‘Presbyterianism and “Modernization”’, p.84.

¹¹ Rev. James Porter, *Wind and Weather: A Sermon on the Late Providential Storm which Dispersed the French Fleet off Bantry Bay. Preached to the Congregation of Gray-Abbey on Thursday the 16th February, Being the Fast Day appointed by Government for Thanksgiving* (Belfast, 1797).

¹² J.R.R. Adams, ‘Reading Societies in Ulster’, *Ulster Folklife*, 26 (1980), p.56.

weavers in that area.¹³ Therefore, it is evident that Presbyterian radicalism, and ultimately the willingness of so many rank and file Presbyterians to turn out as rebels in May and June of 1798, was inspired by a ‘coalition of widely different elements’¹⁴ – some clearly more ‘enlightened’ than others. Finally of course, it is worth re-emphasizing that not all Presbyterians were rebels against Britain in 1798. Indeed, whilst significant numbers fought in the United Irish ranks, others fought on the ‘loyalist’ side, in the government’s newly formed Yeomanry armies.¹⁵

At leadership level, those Presbyterians involved in the United Irish movement in the north of Ireland by the latter 1790s – businessmen and merchants such as the Simms brothers, William and John Tennent, and radical ministers such as the Rev. William Steel Dickson – were by 1795-6 engaged in plans for an uprising which involved the promise of French assistance, at a time when Britain was engaged in a protracted war with her continental neighbour.¹⁶ But, even these most active of radical Presbyterians were far from committed separatists from the outset, despite the rhetoric of works such as Drennan’s *Letters to Orellana* in 1784, criticising Britain and paying lip-service to notions – albeit fairly romanticized – of ‘Ierne free’. In the 1780s and early 1790s most United Irishmen would have settled for a radical programme of reform for Ireland, with a meaningful degree of self-government.¹⁷ As Nancy Curtin notes ‘They were willing enough to accept the connection with Britain as long as Ireland could pursue its own interests’. Indeed, the United Irishmen ‘showed themselves to be deeply immersed in British radical whig culture’.¹⁸ When separation from Britain did eventually become the goal, it was argues Curtin, viewed above all in terms of a political and economic ‘liberation’ from Britain,¹⁹ rather than the pursuit of an Irish nationalist dream, in racial or cultural terms. As Elliott

¹³ S.J. Connolly, ‘Ulster Presbyterians: Religion, Culture and Politics, 1660-1850, in H. Tyler Blethen and Chris Woods (eds.), *Ulster and North America: Transatlantic Perspectives on the Scotch-Irish* (Tuscaloosa and London, 1997), p.35.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Holmes, ‘United Irishmen and Unionists’, p.180.

¹⁶ See Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* (1982; New Haven, 1989).

¹⁷ In his prepared defence for court in 1794, Drennan denied any revolutionary intent, arguing that his sole motivation had been ‘an enthusiastic desire for an equal representation of all my countrymen in their own House of Parliament’. William Drennan, *Intended Defence, on a Trial for Sedition, in the Year 1794* reprinted in John Larkin (ed.), *The Trial of William Drennan* (Dublin, 1991), p.122. Of course, this was a testimony designed to extricate him from a guilty verdict and should be read against what Elliott has described as Drennan’s ‘brush with prison’.

¹⁸ Curtin, *United Irishmen*, p.36.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.34.

has emphasized, for most radicals prior to 1795 ‘their dispute had not initially been with England but with the “wretched set of politicians” in Dublin’.²⁰

However, this was changed dramatically by the series of events between 1793 and 1795, with Britain’s declaration of war with France, the outlawing of Volunteering and the United Irish societies, and the recall of the Viceroy, Fitzwilliam. Ian McBride has indeed emphasized the distinct and powerful series of external events that assisted in propelling many radical Presbyterians along the road to outright rebellion against the British in Ireland.²¹ It was evident that the Government had firmly shut the door on any possibility of reform or ‘concessions’ to Ireland. With armed rebellion in mind, mass recruitment became the order of the day, and the resultant shift in propaganda can be seen clearly in the often crudely reductionist anti-English hostility reflected in popular works such as the *Paddy’s Resource* song books of 1795 and 1796.²² The King, the Prince of Wales and William Pitt were the favourite targets of the United Irish propagandists in the *Paddy’s Resource* series. The shift in tone between even the 1795 and 1796 songbooks is discernible, the latter volume pronouncing that soon ‘we’ll possess Hibernia’s Isle’.²³ Writing on the fate of Ireland under the pseudonym the ‘Rev. James Glass’ in a series of poems in the *Northern Star* as early as 1792, the Rev. James Porter

‘...curs’d the fatal day,
When despots landed on her hapless coast’.²⁴

Above all, the war with France was denounced with particular enthusiasm by the United Irish propagandists – a defiant attack on British policy. Little wonder then, that the government endeavoured to clamp down on this Irish ‘fifth column’.²⁵

²⁰ Elliott, *Partners*, p.32.

²¹ McBride, *Scripture Politics*, p.178.

²² ‘For the poor out of bread, what a fine consolation...

Winter at hand and all trade in stagnation...

Nothing to swallow but, but LUMPS OF TAXATION...

Billy’s undone by the war’. *Paddy’s Resource: Being a Select Collection of Original and Modern Patriotic Songs, Toasts and Sentiments, Compiled for the Use of the People of Ireland* (Belfast, 1795), p.40, and also the second volume published in 1796. The opening song of the 1795 volume (p.4) declared,

‘We always are ready,
To banish Oppression from our native land’.

²³ *Paddy’s Resource*, 1796, p.71 (my underlining).

²⁴ *Northern Star*, 15 February 1792.

²⁵ In 1797 the Monaghan Militia destroyed the *Northern Star* offices – the heart of the propaganda machine. Songs included, ‘Demanding Freedom’, ‘See Your Country Righted’, ‘The Tree of Liberty’, ‘The Irish Volunteers’, ‘The Marseilles March’, ‘Ca Ira’, ‘The Grave-Digger’s Address to the Prince of Wales’, ‘Billy’s Undone by the War’, ‘Vive La Liberte’, ‘Hibernia’s Harp Strung by Liberty’, ‘Republican Glee’, ‘The Green Flag’, ‘Jerne United’, ‘Hibernia in Woe’ and ‘War, Cruel War and Starvation’. See *Paddy’s Resource*, 1795 and 1796 volumes.

The United Irish acceptance of French military assistance ‘came at the end of a year in which all the gains of the last two decades had been lost and constitutional channels... closed’.²⁶ It was in response to the Fast Day ordered by the British authorities following the unsuccessful attempts of a French fleet to land on the southern Irish coast, that Rev. James Porter of Greyabbey preached a quite extraordinary sermon. In a tone of the utmost irony and sarcasm, he offered his congregation these thoughts on the British government and the war with France:

We know that government has ordered us to be thankful for the storm which dispersed them; and we are not ignorant that nine tenths of the people of Ireland, neither wished for the commencement nor continuance of the war with France....

Were you to ask me, Why we were involved in the American war, and in the present one, although the people were almost unanimous in their detestation of both? I answer, it was in consequence of our connexion with England – Some people call this connexion, subjection.

Porter went on to denounce how Ireland’s connection with Britain had dragged Ireland into a war which did not involve her, plunging the country into ‘an abyss of ruin’. He added ‘It far transcends my abilities to point out the benefits Ireland gets for all this’.²⁷ Writing to Lord Downshire on the publication of Porter’s sermon, J. Arbuckle, a government supporter, commented that ‘...provided the proof of publication should not fail, I should think he might be handsomely trounced. These fellows [the Presbyterian clergy] should be deprived of their Regium Donum. They all, save two or three, in the whole province are avowed incendiaries’.²⁸

One song entitled the ‘Tenth of August’, stated that:
 ‘Tho’ we praise the proud day which beheld
 mighty *France*
 Burst her Bastiles [sic], and rise from servility’s tomb;
 Behold her with earth-shaking paces advance,
 And pour her strong vengeance on tyranny’s dome.
 Tho’ we praise that great day
 Which o’erturn’d lawless sway,
 Yet a king still remained, FREEDOM’s cause to betray:
 But the day we have chosen saw monarchy fall,
 And man’s dearest blessings extended to all’

²⁶ Elliott, *Partners*, pp.32-3; p.48.

²⁷ Porter, *Wind and Weather* sermon.

²⁸ Quoted in W.D. Bailie, ‘Presbyterian Clergymen and the county Down rebellion of 1798’, in Myrtle Hill, Brian Turner and Kenneth Dawson (eds.), *1798 Rebellion in County Down* (Newtownards, 1998), p.170. His language is identical to the Third Marquis of Londonderry’s description of certain Down Presbyterian ministers in 1850.

Arbuckle's estimate that almost all ministers were United sympathizers or members is clearly an exaggeration, but there were indeed many who had, by 1797, distinguished themselves as subversives in the eyes of government. Certainly, following the publication of the *Wind and Weather* sermon, Porter was under close government surveillance²⁹. We should not underestimate the effect which such sermons by radical Presbyterian ministers could have on a locality. It is reported, for, instance, that a United Irish society was established in Donaghadee in January 1798, following the preaching of the Revs. Porter and Dickson – two prominent radicals – in the town on 'consecutive Sundays in December and again in the New Year'.³⁰ In 1797 Porter also penned three letters addressed to the Marquis of Downshire, which appeared in the *Northern Star*, denouncing war with France and extolling the virtues of reform. Porter speculated,

Suppose a Revolution takes place, in consequence of Reform being refused. We might then have a new mode of government, founded on the representative system....It might even produce a separation from England, and we might not then be governed by the councils of another country. The boundaries of the state might be the boundaries prescribed by nature. The produce of the land might not be drained to support Absentees of a foreign Court, enormous sums might not be taken from the People to carry on wars which they disapprove of; our provincial subjection being removed, the Irish mind might assume a national character! – The will of Ireland might be the law by which Irishmen would be governed! – And, the political maxim of standing and falling with Britain, might no more be uttered, as if intended to exhibit the badge of our degradation and pusillanimity.³¹

The French attempt to land at Bantry Bay was the ultimate trigger for the Irish Viceroy to instigate decisive military action in the north. The 'dragooning of Ulster' which commenced in earnest in 1797 under the command of General Lake, aimed at disarming the rebels and snuffing out any attempted rebellion. Martial law, house burnings, arms seizures and arrests were implemented with vigour.³² The execution of William Orr, a young Presbyterian farmer from Antrim, in October 1797, for administering a United Irish oath, helped further harden the attitude of many Presbyterians against the British authorities. But equally, the brutality frightened away many rank and file Presbyterians from the

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Hill et al., *1798 Rebellion in County Down*, p.87.

³¹ *Northern Star*, 23 December 1796.

³² McBride estimates that between 500 and 600 people were arrested in Ulster between September 1796 and September 1797 for "political" offences.

revolutionary cause,³³ whilst higher up the United Irish command structure, the British authorities' success in arresting and infiltrating the rebels in advance of action, placed the northern leaders in disarray, long before the rebellion broke out in May and June of 1798.³⁴ Writing under the pseudonym of 'Marcus' in the *Press* newspaper in Dublin, the Rev. James Porter lamented in a letter to Lord Grenville how 'you make it treason for Irish independence to oppose English bayonets'.³⁵

Among those Presbyterians who found themselves state prisoners over this period were: the Rev. William Steel Dickson of Portaferry, widely believed to have assumed a military position on the eve of rebellion in Down; William Tennent (his brother John had successfully fled to France in May along with another United Irish Presbyterian minister in Down, Arthur McMahan); Robert Simms, and Samuel Neilson. The British government's 'disarming' of Ulster – and the subsequent 'spectacular failure of nerve'³⁶ on the part of the United Irish military leadership in the north – had certainly helped to contribute to the fiasco that was the rebellion in Ulster in 1798.

If we accept therefore that, in the words of Ian McBride, 'it would be unwise...to conclude that the reform programme of the United Irishmen led inexorably to full-blown separatism', then this certainly helps to explain the relatively passive reaction of most Presbyterians to the passing of the Act of Union in 1800. Defeat at the hands of British military might must have had a salutary effect on those Presbyterians who had been involved with or sympathized with the rebels' cause. In the fallout from 1798, the eagerness of many Presbyterians to 'lay low' is understandable. In the aftermath of rebellion, the British government maintained a vigilant watch over east Ulster.

The radical political reform envisaged by the leading middle-class Presbyterian radicals centre around Belfast³⁷ – wealthy from the burgeoning linen trade, ambitious and well-educated, yet excluded from political power – was of course greatly influenced by the events of the American and French Revolutions. Ultimately, they remained utterly frustrated at their exclusion from Irish political life.³⁸ Their treatment at the hands of the

³³ Finlay Holmes, 'From Rebels to Unionists: The Political Transformation of Ulster's Presbyterians', in Ronnie Hanna (ed.), *The Union: Essays on Ireland and the British Connection* (Newtownards, 2001), p.35.

³⁴ One of the best known and most active of the informers was Nicholas Maginn, a colonel in the United Irish organization in Down. Curtin *United Irishmen*, p.261.

³⁵ Reprinted in [Anon.], *Beauties of the Press* (1800), p. 109; 272.

³⁶ McBride, 'Presbyterians and the...Act of Union', p.77.

³⁷ In 1790 Belfast was a 'pocket borough' controlled by Lord Donegall.

³⁸ See Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast, 1992); David Miller, *Queen's Rebels. Ulster Loyalism in Historical Perspective* (Dublin, 1978), p.54

institutions of the 'Protestant Ascendancy', were enduring reminders of their 'Dissenter' status and their social, economic and political inferiority. The political power of the Irish landed classes saw their family members or nominees elected as M.P.s for the Irish parliament, in a system which saw tenants frequently unable to disobey their social and economic masters at the polls. Moreover, they dominated grand juries, the magistracy, and the posts of sheriffs and county lord lieutenants and, unsurprisingly, were mostly hostile to political reform.³⁹ Their religious affiliation, almost exclusively Anglican, entailed a close relationship between landlordism and the established church. For Presbyterians like William Drennan, even the Irish Whigs were ultimately too dominated by aristocrats to carry through any truly significant plans of reform.

In 1791 the United Irishmen's foremost demand was a redistribution of Ireland's political power, with reform to be achieved by a union of Presbyterian, Protestant and Catholic.⁴⁰ As Nancy Curtin has pointed out, the transfer of political power which they envisaged, certainly had revolutionary implications from the beginning.⁴¹ As the movement developed, and ultimately turned to insurrectionary means, traditional (largely economic) Presbyterian antipathy to Irish landlords and the established church amongst tenants and farmers, was exploited to the full.

Ulster had a tradition of agrarian violence directed against landlords, such as the Hearts of Steel movement in the 1770s, when predominantly Presbyterian tenants on the estate of Lord Donegall took extreme measures in response to large fines being imposed when their leases expired.⁴² This was typical of the type of agrarian violence that could occur when Presbyterians felt their rights to be under threat from landlords, land agents, and even tithe collectors. The sympathy of many Presbyterian clergy with the economic plight of their tenant congregations at this time, if not with the violent methods they employed, foreshadowed their tenant sympathies in 1798 and again in 1852. It is likely that some ministers were also influenced by the waves of emigration to America during the

³⁹ On the political and economic dominance of Irish landlords, see, Brian Walker, 'Landlords and Parliamentary Elections in County Down, 1801-1921', in *Down : History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin, 1997), pp.297-325; S.J. Connolly, 'Ulster Presbyterians, pp.25-40.; W.E. Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants in Ireland, 1848-1904* (Dublin, 1984)

⁴⁰ See Finlay Holmes, 'Ulster Presbyterians and 1798', in James Seery, Finlay Holmes and A.T.Q. Stewart, *Presbyterians, the United Irishmen and 1798* (Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland pamphlet, Belfast, 2000)

⁴¹ Nancy J. Curtin, 'The Transformation of the Society of United Irishmen into a mass-based revolutionary organisation, 1794-6', *Irish Historical Studies*, 24/96 (1985), p.465

⁴² J. S. Reid (and edited by W. Killen), *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, vol. 3 (Belfast, 1867) pp.448-9. Holmes, 'United Irishmen and Ulster Unionists'.

eighteenth century which saw their Presbyterian flocks fleeing high rents and economic uncertainty. Similar patterns of emigration were once again an issue in the aftermath of the Famine and in the years leading up to the tenant right movement. Both McBride and Holmes have emphasized ‘the continuities which undoubtedly existed in Presbyterian areas between the United Irishmen and the earlier Oakboys and Steelboys’,⁴³ with many of these early agrarian rebels ultimately providing the Presbyterian ‘foot-soldiers’ of the rebellion. W.T. Latimer, the nineteenth-century Presbyterian historian, famously claimed that prior to 1798, those Presbyterians who hated the landlord more than the Catholic became United Irishmen, and those who hated the Catholic more than the landlord became Orangemen.⁴⁴

The significant role of the Presbyterian clergy in both the United Irish movement, and the rebellion itself, is of course, well documented. The Rev. James Porter of Greyabbey paid with his life. As a leading United Irish propagandist, Porter was vehement in his attacks on the Protestant establishment and the British government. But his most famous work, the satirical squib, *Billy Bluff and Squire Firebrand*, first published in the *Northern Star* in 1796, ridiculed and attacked the landlord class, their political domination, their wealth and their corruption.⁴⁵ But this was no ordinary denunciation of landlords; Porter’s work was extremely personal, and his portrayal of ‘Lord Mountmumble’ was clearly aimed at his own local landlord, the First Marquis of Londonderry.

Demonstrating a deliberate lack of deference, Porter highlighted the electoral power of the landlord over his tenants for particular attack, and their desire to keep tenants ignorant and repressed: ‘O’ what a happy country we had before men turned their thoughts to thinking.... Presbyterians thought of nothing but wrangling about religion and grumbling about tythes.... in my father’s day there was none of this work: no! no!... He would fancy a tenant’s daughter – nobody said it was wrong... He ...got a Presbyterian assassinated for voting against him at the Vestry...’.⁴⁶ On the subject of electoral registration ‘Billy’ informed the ‘Squire’, ‘I would just mention that I am four times registered already; I voted three different days for your honour’s friend at the last election, and your honour knows that I have never got my lease yet...’.⁴⁷ Porter’s description of Londonderry’s recent

⁴³ McBride, *Scripture Politics*, p.179.

⁴⁴ W.T. Latimer, *A History of the Irish Presbyterians* (Belfast, 1893), p.191.

⁴⁵ James Porter, *Billy Bluff and the Squire; or A Sketch of the Times*, published in *Northern Star*, May-December 1796, and reprinted in Brendan Clifford, *Billy Bluff and the Squire And Other Writings by Rev. James Porter* (Belfast, 1991).

⁴⁶ Porter, *Billy Bluff*, p.19.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

elevation to the peerage used graphic language: ‘you have seen what our new race of Lords and Earls resemble; they have rotten roots, flimsy stems, spungy heads.... Then.... comes the coronet painted on the coach, on the harness, on the dishes and plates, on the piss-pots....’.⁴⁸

Porter’s vivid scrutiny of the relationship prevailing between landlord and tenant and his image of feudal tyranny, were to be recurrent themes fifty and sixty years later, and remained crucial elements in the inherently anti-landlord tendencies of Ulster Presbyterians. *Billy Bluff’s* popularity in the years that followed⁴⁹ suggested that, particularly in Down, few Presbyterians had forgotten the story of how Londonderry had wilfully failed to intervene to prevent Porter’s execution, in an act of revenge for *Billy Bluff*.⁵⁰

Many Presbyterians held similar resentments against that other great pillar of ‘Protestant Ascendancy’ – the ‘landlord’s church’ (the established Church of Ireland). It too inspired the vitriol of the radical propagandists in the 1790s. Anglicanism was much more than simply a rival church, although it did inspire strong Presbyterian revulsion for its hierarchical structure, its wealth, and the pluralism and absenteeism of its clergy. But most significantly, it was closely connected to the state, and enjoyed immense influence in a country in which Anglicans formed only a tiny minority of the population, yet held all the positions of influence, including parliamentary seats and political control. As well as exclusion from public office on religious grounds, Presbyterians and Catholics in Ireland shared a common hatred of the tithe system. Issues such as tithes and the refusal of the established church to recognise the validity of Presbyterian ordination, both significant long before 1798,⁵¹ were to remain issues of discontent in the years after 1800.

Mutual hostilities between the two Protestant churches in Ireland were played out in a series of pamphlet disputes in the 1780s – Presbyterians increasingly frustrated at their

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.27-8

⁴⁹ Both *Billy Bluff*, and the song book, *Paddy’s Resource*, to which Porter was also a key contributor, became ‘local classics’, and *Billy Bluff* ran to fourteen more reprints, as late as 1840 and 1868. See J.R.R Adams, *The Printed Word and the Common Man: Popular Culture in Ulster 1700-1900* (Belfast, 1987), p.86; William McMillan, ‘Presbyterian Ministers and the Ulster Rising’, p.98.

⁵⁰ See, W.T Latimer, *Ulster Biographies relating to the Rebellion of 1798* (Belfast, 1897); O.P. Water, ‘The Reverend James Porter, Dissenting Minister of Greyabbey, 1753-1798’, *Seanchas Ardmhacha*, 19, no.1 (1990), pp.80-101; W.J. Wharton, ‘The Reverend James Porter’, *New Ulster: The Journal of the Ulster Society* (November, 1994), pp.10-12.

⁵¹ In the 1760s and 1770s the collection of excessive tithes was one of the main complaints of the Oakboys and Steelboys, Protestant agrarian groups from Ulster’s rural underclass, who were predominantly Presbyterian. Holmes, *Presbyterian Heritage*, p. 77.

inferior position, and Anglicans paranoid about Presbyterian encroachment. In the anti-tithe agitation of the Presbyterian Oak and Steelboys ‘nervous Anglicans also detected the malign influence of seditious Presbyterian parsons’.⁵² Forming in many ways a distinct society within a society, Presbyterian ministers certainly occupied a central role within Presbyterian communities. The established church was also a target in Porter’s *Billy Bluff*, which denounced the connection between church and state, as personified in the local Anglican minister, John Clelland, a magistrate and an agent to Lord Londonderry. Tithes were denounced with enthusiasm on the pages of *Paddy’s Resource* and United Irish propaganda frequently included a promise to abolish tithes.⁵³

The United Irish ideal of eradicating religious differences in the ‘common name of Irishmen’ was the cornerstone of their vision – initially for achieving parliamentary reform, and ultimately in overthrowing British rule in Ireland.⁵⁴ The two volumes of *Paddy’s Resource* highlighted the United Irish movement’s massive propaganda campaign after 1794 devoted to promoting the notion of unity among Irishmen: ‘Unite and be Free’, ‘Union of Parties’, ‘Brethren Unite’, ‘Irishmen now are United’ and ‘Ierne United’.⁵⁵ Above all such propaganda sought to reinforce the notion that the alliance was a natural one, and that sectarian animosities had been deliberately nurtured by the ruling Anglican elite in an policy of ‘divide and conquer’, an idea perpetuated once again in 1850 by Presbyterian ministers during the tenant right campaign.⁵⁶

However, behind the propaganda and the idealism, Presbyterian attitudes to their Roman Catholic countrymen in the 1780s and 1790s were vexed and divided. By 1798, as Alvin Jackson has commented ‘numerous northern Presbyterians evidently fought under the United Irish banner, while remaining profoundly suspicious of their Catholic co-conspirators’.⁵⁷ According to Elliott, radical Catholic leaders were just as suspicious of the

⁵² McBride, ‘Presbyterians and the Penal Era’, *Bullán: an Irish Studies Review*, 1:2 (1994), pp.73-77.

⁵³ For instance, Copy of A Document Drafted by the Secretary of a Committee of United Irishmen near Ballynahinch, County Down, PRONI, Roden Mss., MIC/147/9, pp.57-60.

⁵⁴ It was an idea mooted long before 1791 by Presbyterian radicals such as Drennan. In 1784 he wrote, ‘I call upon you, Churchmen, Presbyterians, Catholics, to embrace each other...and to unite as a sacred compact in the cause of your sinking country – For you are ALL Irishmen’. William Drennan, *Letters of Orellana, an Irish Helot, to the Seven Northern Counties not Represented in the National Assembly of Delegates, held at Dublin, 1784, for Obtaining a more Equal Representation of the People in the Parliament of Ireland* (Dublin, 1785) p.28.

⁵⁵ *Paddy’s Resource* 1795 and 1796.

⁵⁶ ‘Advice to Paddy’ and his ‘Protestant brothers’ in 1796, lamented that

‘Your foes have long prided,
To see you divided’.

⁵⁷ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998. Politics and War* (1999; Oxford, 2003), p.17.

Presbyterians themselves,⁵⁸ whilst Bartlett acknowledges that in many ways Presbyterian concerns that Catholics were reluctant to commit to radical politics in the hope of government concessions, were not altogether unfounded.⁵⁹ David Miller, Ian McBride, Roy Foster and Marianne Elliott have all emphasized the crucial place of ‘anti-popery’ within the Presbyterian radical tradition.⁶⁰ Indeed, Wolfe Tone’s *Argument* was ‘wittingly or unwittingly, appealing to a strong prophetic strain in Presbyterianism by encouraging the belief that the events in France, the most powerful Catholic country in the world, heralded the downfall of the Pope and Catholicism itself...Therein lay his appeal and his immediate impact.’⁶¹ As noted earlier, those Seceding and Covenanting congregations who did become involved in rebellion, were driven by a prophetic millenarianism which interpreted recent events in France as the first signs that Roman Catholicism was about to fall.⁶² For other Presbyterian reformers, the French Revolution suggested that Catholics had at last abandoned priestly dictation and superstition in the common name of liberty – no Presbyterian of any political hue shared any sympathy with Roman Catholicism *per se*. Moreover, it was increasingly clear after 1783 that truly significant political reform could never succeed in Ireland if it failed to involve the country’s Catholic majority. Of course, the moderate and relatively unthreatening tone of Catholicism within Ireland at this time⁶³ – both the passivity of Catholic politics and the liberal Gallicanism of leading figures in the Irish Catholic Church hierarchy – was also important. This was clearly significant given that the, ‘secular republicanism of the Belfast Presbyterians involved a thoroughgoing hostility towards institutional Catholicism’.⁶⁴

It is rightly argued by historians that Presbyterian support for the United Irish movement flourished in Belfast, and its hinterlands of north Down and Antrim – notably where the Catholic population was extremely small, and where Presbyterians felt secure in

⁵⁸ Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster: A History* (London, 2000), p.229.

⁵⁹ Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation: the Catholic Question, 1690-1830* (Dublin, 1992), p.128.

⁶⁰ See Ian McBride, “‘When Ulster Joined Ireland’: Anti-Popery, Presbyterian Radicalism and Irish Republicanism in the 1790s’, in *Past and Present*, 157, (1997), pp.63-93; Roy Foster, ‘Remembering 1798’, in Ian McBride (ed), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), p.69.

⁶¹ Bartlett, *Fall and Rise of the Catholic Nation*, p.127.

⁶² Elliott, *Tone*, p.117; Ian McBride, ‘“The Common name of Irishmen”: Protestantism and patriotism in eighteenth century Ireland’ in T. Claydon and I. R. McBride (eds.), *Protestantism and national identity: Britain and Ireland, c.1650-c.1850* (Cambridge, 1998), pp.236-64, at pp.258-9.

⁶³ Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, p.213.

⁶⁴ Jackson, *Ireland: 1798-1998*, p.20.

their majority status.⁶⁵ Move beyond these confines, particularly the ‘linen triangle’ in county Armagh, and it is clear that the United Irish movement failed to win much Presbyterian support. Indeed, in these frontier areas where Catholics and Protestants lived in close proximity, sectarianism could, and did, erupt at times of political or economic upheaval. In the 1790s, Presbyterians from such areas more often joined the ranks of Orange loyalists or the Yeomanry rather than the rebels.⁶⁶ In county Armagh, the rapid expansion of the linen industry in the 1770s and 1780s, with its resultant economic and social implications, in an area where Protestant and Catholic lived side-by-side, contributed to sectarian polarization.⁶⁷ The history of the subsequent movements this spawned, both Protestant Peep O’Day Boys and Catholic Defenders, and the events at the Battle of the Diamond, are well documented. Simultaneously with the religious clashes in Armagh, middle-class Presbyterian and Catholic radicals in Belfast and Dublin were establishing ‘United Irish’ societies in 1791. McFarland has noted that throughout the 1790s, the United Irish leaders fatally underestimated the strength of sectarian feeling across areas of the north.⁶⁸

The sectarian developments in the 1780s and 1790s in ‘frontier’ flash-point areas such as county Armagh, presented a microcosm of the sectarian violence which would eventually be replicated in Belfast by the mid-nineteenth century, when the town experienced the impact of economic change and large-scale migration from rural areas.⁶⁹

Certainly, in areas of Antrim and Down where the United Irish movement flourished, Presbyterian society – excluded from power and influence in a region they dominated, and in the absence of a physical presence of Catholics – regarded the Anglican Protestant Ascendancy as their greatest grievance. Roman Catholic chapels were built in

⁶⁵ See A.T.Q Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster 1609-1969* (London, 1977), pp.107-8; Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, p.244, 229, David Miller, ‘Presbyterianism and Modernization’, p.75.

⁶⁶ Allan Blackstock, ‘The Down Yeomanry’ in Hill et al., *1798 Rebellion in County Down*, pp.40-59.

⁶⁷ There is debate among historians on the origins of the Armagh troubles. See David W. Miller, ‘The Armagh Troubles, 1784-95’, in Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly Jnr. (eds.), *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914* (Madison, 1982), pp.155-189; and in particular the debate between Louis Cullen and Miller: see, David W. Miller, ‘Politicisation in Revolutionary Ireland: The Case of the Armagh Troubles’, in *Irish Economic and Social History*, 23 (1996), pp.1-17 and Cullen’s response in the same, pp.18-23.

⁶⁸ Elaine McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the age of revolution: planting the green bough* (Edinburgh, 1994), pp.37-8. Elliott has emphasized that prior to the ‘Armagh troubles’, eighteenth century Ulster was far from being a perpetual hotbed of religious antagonisms, and she is critical of what she describes as the tendency of many historians to read history backwards, from the 1780s and 1790s. There was a relatively settled co-existence of Protestant and Catholic on a day-to-day basis across the north of Ireland (mixed marriages, interdenominational hedge-schools). *Catholics of Ulster*, p.178-81.

the 1780s in 1790s across north Down – Belfast, Saintfield, Dromore, Ballynahinch, Saul, Lisburn, Portaferry and Ballee – ‘all...with substantial Protestant, and particularly Presbyterian assistance’.⁷⁰ In the aftermath of the mass expulsion of Catholics from north Armagh in 1795 after the formation of the Orange Order, many Catholic fugitives were sheltered in Presbyterian homes across Down and Antrim.⁷¹

The integration of the sectarian Catholic Defenders into the United Irish organization after 1795 in the creation of a mass-based revolutionary movement, was fundamentally inconsistent with the non-sectarian avowals of the United Irish movement’s middle class (and largely Presbyterian) leadership. The two movements were uneasy bedfellows and the Catholic Defenders, born out of Armagh’s ‘troubles’, proved impossible to control.⁷² Above all, the Defenders and United Irishmen had very different visions of what they were fighting for. Indeed, Elliott argues that the middle-class United Irish leadership sought French aid more out of an inherent fear of the popular catholic passions they themselves were helping to unleash, rather than for any strategic military necessity.⁷³ Most historians have found it difficult to find much real evidence of a sense of Presbyterian-Catholic unity when the fighting broke out in 1798, and it is frequently noted that Defenders and United Irishmen often fought separately under their own banners. As A.T.Q. Stewart has noted, the rebellion was in many ways ‘the antithesis of everything the United Irishmen had stood for in 1791’.⁷⁴ But the sectarian colour of 1798 should not disguise the fact that many radical Presbyterians such as the Rev. William Steel Dickson, James Hope and Henry Joy McCracken remained committed to the rights of their Catholic countrymen. Complexity, ambiguity and division had ultimately been the over-riding themes of Dissenter attitudes to their Catholic countrymen in the so-called ‘United Irish’

⁶⁹ S.E. Baker, ‘Orange and Green: Belfast 1832-1912’, in H.J. Dyos and M. Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian City: Image and Reality*, 2 vols, (London, 1973), ii, pp.789-814; Sean Connolly, *Religion and Society in nineteenth century Ireland*, (*Studies in Irish Economic and Social History*, vol.3) (Dundalk, 1985), p.22.

⁷⁰ Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, p.238.

⁷¹ J.M. Barkley, ‘The Arian Schism in Ireland, 1830’, in Derek Baker (ed.), *Schism, Heresy and Religious Protest: Papers read at the tenth summer meeting and the eleventh winter meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society (Studies in Church History 9)*(Cambridge, 1972), p.325.

⁷² Marianne Elliott, ‘The Origins and Transformation of Early Irish Republicanism’, *International Review of Social History*, 23, (1977), p.428.

⁷³ Elliott, *Partners*, p.4.

⁷⁴ Stewart, *Narrow Ground*, p.110.

era, even among the most radical strain of thought,⁷⁵ and these continued to be the defining features for much of the first half of the nineteenth century.

The historiography of the 1798 rebellion itself has inevitably focused on the sectarianism which manifested itself most notably in the Catholic massacre of Protestants at Scullabogue and Wexford Bridge.⁷⁶ The revisionist work of the 1990s, in particular that of Louis Cullen and Kevin Whelan, attempted to redress the balance, with Whelan eager to portray the sectarian divisions as artificially generated by loyalists and a Dublin Castle administration, petrified at the prospect of Catholic-Dissenter unity.⁷⁷ Ian McBride however, has sounded a note of caution with this approach, re-emphasising the anti-popery element that remained intrinsic to the northern Presbyterian radical vision.⁷⁸ Equally, whilst the Presbyterian-Catholic alliance was clearly tenuous, Frank Wright has dismissed the notion that Presbyterians stumbled blindly into a rebellion with Irish Catholics ‘only because they did not know what fire they were playing with’, until the massacres of the south ‘opened their eyes’.⁷⁹

The years after the rebellion have frequently been portrayed as a time when the Presbyterians recognized their mistake in 1798, and influenced by evangelical fervour and increasingly aggressive political Catholicism, moved towards the Anglican Church in a ‘Protestant bloc’ for security. For Cooke, anti-Catholicism was certainly the crucial life force in his untiring efforts to fuse together his theological and political conservatism. Whilst he successfully played on the Catholic/repeal insecurities of the rank and file

⁷⁵ See A.T.Q. Stewart, ‘“A Stable Unseen Power”. Dr William Drennan and the origins of the United Irishmen’, in John Bossy and Peter Jupp (eds.), *Essays Presented to Michael Roberts: Sometime Professor of Modern History in the Queen’s University Belfast* (Belfast, 1976), pp.87-92.

When Tone visited Belfast in 1791 he was famously surprised at the depth of division among Presbyterian radicals on the subject of Catholic Emancipation, and on their inclusion in any campaign for parliamentary reform. There was much suspicion, even ignorance, demonstrated. Thus followed Tone’s pamphlet, *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland* to allay Presbyterian fears.

⁷⁶ Marianne Elliott has described the United Irish ideal of creating a ‘common name of Irishman’, as ‘still-born’, see *Catholics of Ulster*, p.213. The British government had certainly taken the potential of such co-operation seriously enough, granting unprecedented concessions to Catholics in 1792 and 1793. See Bartlett, *Fall and Rise of the Catholic Nation*, p.125.

⁷⁷ Referring to Wexford in 1798 for instance, Cullen argues that, ‘it can be said without fear of contradiction that it was establishment Protestants who popularized the fear of massacre’, L.M. Cullen, ‘The 1798 Rebellion in its eighteenth century context’, in P.J. Corish (ed.), *Radicals, Rebels and Establishments: Historical Studies*, 15 (1985), p.110. Whelan (*Tree of Liberty*, p.153) argues that, ‘The post-Union decades saw the dismemberment of the United Irish alliance of Presbyterian and Catholic radicalism. This was hastened by the rancid polemics which peddled sectarian glosses and aimed precisely at opening Presbyterian-Catholic divisions’.

⁷⁸ McBride, ‘When Ulster Joined Ireland’, pp.64-5; Ian McBride, ‘Reclaiming the rebellion: Review article’, pp.398-400.

Presbyterians in Belfast's increasingly sectarian climate in the nineteenth century, many more Presbyterians (especially, as in 1798, in Down) rejected such religious bigotry. Indeed, they rejected Cooke's political and social aspirations for Ulster Presbyterianism.

⁷⁹ Wright, *Two Lands*, pp.42-3, and Elliott agrees with Wright's observation, 'Religious polarization and sectarianism in the Ulster rebellion', in *1798: A Bicentenary*, p.294.

CHAPTER 1
‘AS LONG AS THE PRESBYTERIANS ARE LOYAL’:¹ ULSTER
PRESBYTERIANS AND THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT.

In particular, it was the prominent involvement of a large number of Presbyterian ministers which resonated over Ulster in the aftermath of the rebellion; men who occupied a central and clearly influential position within Presbyterian society. As Peter Brooke noted, although only a minority of ministers were directly and publicly involved in the United Irish movement, ‘when an armed revolt is in careful preparation over a period of five years and the surrounding community does not exert itself to help the government suppress it, we may safely assume that there is widespread, if tacit, support for it’.² When the Synod of Ulster finally met in August 1798, as is well-documented, numbers were unsurprisingly small,³ given recent events. Writing in 1943 Patrick Rogers painted an emotive picture of proceedings, noting the ‘unusual tenseness’ which prevailed: the rebellion quashed, the subsequent retribution across the north, the empty seats of certain colleagues. One, James Porter, hanged outside his own meeting house whilst ‘His associates whose presence they missed, lay under the severe displeasure of the government’. Indeed, ‘others lived in constant dread of arrest’.

And the layfolk whom the Synod ruled... What minister...could say with confidence that his congregation had no member fighting in the rebel ranks?

The Synod was gravely perturbed. The stigma of disloyalty – or was it the halo of patriotism? – had come upon them.⁴

In this sense, the loyal address to government of August ’98 clearly hid as much as it revealed – an assembly of men fearful of government retribution, in which the loyalists among them had been able to seize the initiative. The acceptance of the new terms of the *regium donum* increase in 1803, after much bitterness and opposition, must also be seen in this context.

It is unnecessary here to detail the way in which the British government under the advice of a baptized Presbyterian of County Down – Lord Castlereagh – implemented a strategy to eradicate radicalism in the leading Presbyterian body. The flow of correspondence between the loyalist minister, Rev. Robert Black, and

¹ Quote of James McClelland on the loyalty of Presbyterians in County Antrim in August 1803, as quoted in, Ian McBride, ‘Ulster Presbyterians and the Passing of the Act of Union’, in Michael Brown, Patrick M. Geoghegan and James Kelly (eds.), *The Irish Act of Union, 1800. Bicentennial Essays* (Dublin, 2003), pp.79-80.

² Peter Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism: The Historical Perspective 1610-1970* (Dublin, 1987), p.129.

³ McBride, ‘Ulster Presbyterians and the Passing of the Act of Union’, p.73.

⁴ Patrick Rogers, ‘Ulster Presbyterianism and Irish Politics, 1798-1829’, in *The Capuchin Annual*, (Dublin, May 1943).

Castlereagh, confirm that the public assertions of loyalty and passivity in the immediate aftermath of the rebellion, belied a much more turbulent and divided Synod. Moreover, Castlereagh's own comments to Black emphasized that government itself was far from convinced by such professions. The increased grant offered to ministers was intended, and indeed regarded by many contemporary ministers, as quite simply a 'political bribe'⁵ to secure their loyalty and the survival of the Act of Union. As Alexander Knox⁶ rightly conveyed to Castlereagh, the chastened and stunned ministers of post-'98 were perhaps in the mood themselves for a degree of reconciliation:

...this is perhaps a more favourable moment for forming a salutary connexion between Government and the Presbyterian body of Ulster than may again arrive. The Republicanism of that part of Ireland is checked and repressed by the cruelties of Roman Catholics in the late Rebellion, and by the despotism of Bonaparte. They are, therefore, in a humour for acquiescing in the views of Government beyond what they ever were, or (should the opportunity be missed) may be hereafter.⁷

But the Synod did not roll over so easily and from the announcement of the new plans in 1799, many in the Synod did attempt to oppose the new terms on which the greatly increased grant would be given. The most significant of these was the classification of the bounty into three groups, which contravened the polity of the Synod, and also the new oath of loyalty to government now required in order to receive the money. More fundamentally, as well as dividing ministers, the classification scheme was intended, as Peter Brooke has noted, 'to undermine the "democratic" nature of Ulster Presbyterianism'.⁸ Moreover, the insistence by government that the Synod's *regium donum* agent be no longer appointed by the Presbyterian body, but instead by government, was also part of the effort to tie the largest Presbyterian synod in the north more tightly to government's strings. Black's admission to Castlereagh that it was the ministers 'whose politicks for years back had been adverse to government plus other loyal men' who were leading the opposition to the new plans, underlines the continued existence of many United Irish sympathisers within the ranks of the Synod after 1798, and emphasizes the efforts mounted to maintain the grant on the original terms. Indeed, one of those who played a leading part in opposing the scheme was Rev. Henry Henry

⁵ Latimer, *History*, p.184.

⁶ Castlereagh's secretary who also conducted negotiations with the Synod of Ulster on the *regium donum*.

⁷ Alexander Knox to Castlereagh, Dublin, July 15 1803, in *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Second Marquis of Londonderry*, edited by his brother, Charles Vane, Marquis of Londonderry, vol.4 (London, 1848), p.288.

⁸ Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, p.134.

of Connor, a suspected rebel, who argued that ‘the magistracy of the country, who as such are not church governors.... therefore have no right to classify this Synod’⁹. William Drennan commented with disdain to his sister, on the ‘new alliance of Church and State’ personified in the relationship of Castlereagh and Black, but the loyalist minister was certainly not representative of his colleagues, and, by his own admission, was regarded by them with increasing hostility and suspicion. Writing to Drennan on the debates in the Synod in August 1800, Moses Dawson informed him that many of the ministers ‘are much disgusted with the conduct of Mr. Black’.¹⁰

Government’s utmost concern in subordinating the north of Ireland was ‘to encourage a more respectable, more conservative and more loyal Dissenting leadership’,¹¹ or in the words of Knox ‘a subordinate ecclesiastical authority, whose feelings must be those of zealous loyalty and whose influence upon their people will be as surely sedative when it should be so, and exciting when it should be so, as it was the direct reverse before’. The reference to the need for them to become an ‘ecclesiastical authority’ was clearly an allusion to their hitherto active involvement in political concerns. Sean Connolly has called it ‘a conscious attempt to increase the state’s control over what was seen as a potentially subversive group’.¹² Writing to the lord lieutenant in August 1799, the Duke of Portland commented on the principal aim of the remodelled allowance as being ‘to make them more dependent, and render them more amenable to government’. It is the aim of this chapter to evaluate how far the government succeeded in creating this loyal, subordinate, dependent, ‘ecclesiastical’ group of ministers throughout the period, to examine how the *regium donum* was regarded by Presbyterians and outsiders, and above all to analyse whether acceptance of the British connection rendered them politically muted and subservient.

Lord Castlereagh himself acknowledged that the acrimony within the Synod over the bounty’s new terms had already militated against much of the ‘good feeling’ intended to be generated between government and the ministers. But he clearly felt relief at the Synod’s eventual acceptance of the terms, commenting in a letter to Lord Wickham that ‘I am satisfied that the democratic party has made its effort, and has been defeated’.¹³ But as both A.T.Q. Stewart and Ian McBride have noted, the Synod’s

⁹ Records of the General Synod of Ulster, vol. III, p.272 (1803).

¹⁰ Moses Dawson to William Drennan, August 31 1800, PRONI, D/456/14.

¹¹ David Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland from the Glorious Revolution to the Decline of Empire* (Cambridge, 1996), p.97.

¹² Sean Connolly, *Religion and Society in nineteenth century Ireland* (Studies in Irish Economic and Social History 3) (Dundalk, 1985), p.33.

¹³ Castlereagh to Wickham, August 6 1802, PRONI, T/2627/5/G/15.

eventual acceptance of the new scheme in 1803 was one born out of lack of choice rather than desire or approval. Stewart has commented that ‘the voice of criticism was not silenced... and the motives of government remained suspect’.¹⁴ The *Belfast Monthly Magazine* was far from impressed and its editorial described the government’s overtures to the Synod of Ulster as ‘a courtship whose aim is to make Presbyterianism a concubine of the Castle’. It predicted that the church would become ‘substantially, though not formally, a secondary and supplemental *state religion*.’¹⁵ In addition, it denounced the influence of Castlereagh whom it predicted would become ‘the official *overseer* and permanent moderator’. By contrast, Rev. Alexander Montgomery spoke for the loyalists in the Synod when he implored his fellow brethren to support the government’s new grant, since ‘all circumstances being duely considered, [it] is a most extraordinary and unparalleled instance of clemency and generosity on the part of Government – an instance which calls loudly for gratitude on our part’.¹⁶ In many ways, Montgomery’s comments were true.

In a series of three letters, ‘Presbyter’ attacked the government’s scheme of classification and their right of appointing the Synod’s *regium donum* agent, noting that ‘Other politic-ecclesiastic systems in general’, have the right of ‘distribution of the church’s emoluments’, which right ‘in this system, is artfully denied to us’.¹⁷ He highlighted the very particular and lengthy efforts which the British government had gone to, in order to secure Presbyterian allegiance: ‘Government we are told must have sufficient security for the loyalty of those who may claim its proposed bounty. Such security is not required of any other church in the British empire’. Of course, few others had been so strongly implicated in armed rebellion against the British government. ‘Presbyter’s’ complaint serves as a strong reminder of just how important government felt it was necessary to curb the independence of the Presbyterian ministry. Representing the voice of government, Castlereagh wrote optimistically to Wickham requesting the advance of the necessary funds from London to oversee the scheme. ‘I consider’, he said, ‘the gaining [of] this Powerful Body in the North as a measure of the very first consequence to the Interests of Government and the peace of the Country’.¹⁸ Perhaps more tellingly, Castlereagh advised Wickham and the government that ‘an annual vote of Parliament, however troublesome, would be for some time to come the

¹⁴ Stewart, *Narrow Ground*, p.94.

¹⁵ from the Drennan cuttings, PRONI, D/965/2-5.

¹⁶ Address ‘To the Inhabitants of Ulster’, in *Belfast Newsletter*, July 26 1803.

¹⁷ *An Illustration of the Present Critical State of the Synod of Ulster, in Three Letters. By a Presbyter.*

¹⁸ Castlereagh to Wickham, September 29 1803, PRONI, T/2627/5/G/53.

safest and most prudent'¹⁹ way of proceeding. Significantly, the *regium donum* was still subject to annual vote by 1853, despite frequently voiced Presbyterian resentment at the government's refusal to make it permanent. This would suggest that during those fifty years, the Presbyterian clergy were a sufficiently active and disruptive influence to persuade government of the utility of keeping the Presbyterian ministers in check by a grant whose continuation was, in theory at least, not confirmed.

The significance of the hostility from both within and outside the Synod towards the *regium donum* was demonstrated at the 1805 general election in County Down when Castlereagh failed to gain re-election. A famous election squib from that year revealed the cumulative Presbyterian hostility (lay and clerical) in the county towards Castlereagh as chief architect and implementer of the Act of Union and of the revised *regium donum*. Supporting the Downshire candidate, one propaganda squib asked 'Who opposed the Union? Who to the last, resisted British influence, and sacrificed self-interest to the good of his country?' Clearly, it had not been Castlereagh. The pamphlet's preliminary observations noted that 'The Presbyterian Interest, he considered all his own; (the Ministers having already been bribed out of the national purse, by an additional *Regium Donum*)'. A spoof conversation between two Down farmers on their way to the election, recorded one of them as saying 'as he had to destroy a Parliament before he could reform it, so with the Presbyterians, he must degrade before he can give, and destroy their GLORIOUS EQUALITY, in order to establish one class, Bishops; a second, Rectors; a third curates, and a fourth, nothing at all'.²⁰

Drennan's *Belfast Monthly Magazine* continued to denounce the grant for many years, referring in 1808 with condescension to the Synod's latest 'display of loyalty, (from whatever *cause* it may proceed)'.²¹ This was followed up by a hasty defence of the grant's terms from a conservative minister writing in the *Newsletter* who argued that government's requirement of an oath of loyalty from each minister in receipt of *regium donum* did not restrict a congregation's free choice since 'G_____t will not grant the bounty to a noted disloyal man, or to one who refuses to take the oath of allegiance; but still the people may choose, and continue even the most disloyal man as their clergyman'.²² The most immediate winners of the new bounty arrangements to the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Meade, John, Hon. *The County of Down Election*. (London, 1805).pp.22, 6, 36.

²¹ *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, December 1808, p.395. The display of loyalty referred to was the Synod's address to the King.

²² *Belfast Newsletter*, January 31 1809.

Synod of Ulster (including the Presbytery of Antrim) were the small Seceding and Covenanter Presbyterians, gaining many lay members from the Synod of Ulster, individuals who rejected their ministers' receipt of the grant. However, both Burgher and Anti-Burgher Seceders did submit to the new scheme in 1809, leaving only the Covenanters outside the *regium donum* sphere.²³

Opposition to the *regium donum* was expressed in *The Tale of the Butterhorn*, published in 1812, which likened the royal grant to a sort of hush money, describing how 'it was an ancient practice among bands of robbers to prepare a Butter-horn to throw to the watch dogs, by which they might be enticed; partly by the taste, partly by the smell; such dogs kept silent while they carried of their Master's goods'.²⁴ And referring to the Anti-Burghers recent acceptance of the government grant, it added that 'the Butter-horn under the specious name of Regium Donum, has of late, silenced three Presbyterian Synods in Ireland'. The *Belfast Monthly Magazine* described it as 'an insidious plan to stifle patriotism, and to reduce [Presbyterians] to the tameness of submission',²⁵ and reiterated its opposition in January 1811: '...however some of them may attempt to justify the measure as a matter of necessity, owing to the inadequate stipend paid by many congregations, no one can seriously contend that it is agreeable to presbyterian principles'.²⁶ Moreover, 'To the lovers of freedom the measure is highly objectionable, as increasing the over-grown influence and patronage of the crown, and teaching an important group in society, to look more to the governors than to the people for support. Let the comparative degrees of patriotism existing among the dissenting priesthood in 1782, and in the period since the augmentation, answer the question as to the favourable or unfavourable influence on general liberty of this measure, introduced by the wily politician, into the dissenting church, as a golden badge of subjection'.²⁷

But not all Presbyterians agreed, and one writer responding to the *Magazine's* political retrospect defended the Presbyterian's entitlement to government money given,

²³ One exception to this was the Rev. James Bryce (an anti-Burgher Seceding minister of Killaig) who maintained a lifetime's stand against the grant, and forming his own voluntary Associate Presbytery. In 1864 the *London Patriot* (a voluntary journal fiercely opposed to state endowments for religion), recalled these years, emphasising that, 'To many of the clergy, and to nearly all the pious and intelligent laity in the Church of the Synod of Ulster itself, these conditions were exceedingly unpalatable; and they were not accepted without much discussion and some opposition'. See *Faith versus Regium Donum: Notices of the late Rev. James Bryce of Killaig, and of the Grounds of his Opposition to the Royal Bounty in the Associate Synods of Ireland and Scotland, 1808 to 1811* [Reprinted from the *London Patriot*] (Edinburgh, 1864), p.7.

²⁴ *The Tale of the Butter-Horn, to which is added a Congratulatory Address to the Reverend Gentlemen of the Associate Synod of I****D, on their late reception of the Royal Gift* (1813), p.iii.

²⁵ *BMM*, November 1810, p.388.

²⁶ *BMM*, January 1811, pp.28-9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

'how richly the established church of this country is endowed, at the expense of all denominations'.²⁸ Moreover, the correspondent denied that any change had been affected in the Synod's patriotism or political principles since 1803. This was echoed by a similar letter to the *Magazine* in defence of the Presbyterian clergy, which argued that, in terms of the original principles of 1782, there had been no change in position:

The old whig principles, not the *overthrowing* principles of after times, animated their bosoms in 1782, and still continue to animate them. And if they have not been as forward in avowing these principles of late years, their silence has been owing to their abhorrence of those revolutionizing principles that have since been grafted on the tree of rational liberty.....But be it understood, that they are the same friends to constitutional reform that they were in 1782.²⁹

The opposing positions between Presbyterians on the subject of how far the new *regium donum* arrangements had altered the clergy's relationship with government were epitomized in an ongoing and bitter dispute between two writers in the *Monthly Magazine* between 1812 and 1814. 'H.' argued that the Church's ministers 'are under no other ties to support the existing government, than is common to all other subjects', and he rejected 'X.'s' allegation that they had sold their independence for gold, and allowed the 'civil magistrate' to have influence over the Synod of Ulster.³⁰ In response, 'X.' denounced 'H.' as someone 'who has placed his foot on the first step of the leaning ladder of Presbyterian promotion....the first flight in that back stair-case, lately constructed, which leads circuitously to the cabinet of state'. More particularly, he lamented the 'VETO' established 'by the regulation that every ordained minister must be reported to the castle, and therefore be subjected to the licence of government'.

Drennan's *Magazine* was undeterred, and later in the year it attacked the Synod of Ulster's latest loyal address to the Prince Regent and the Lord Lieutenant, commenting 'To eyes not dazzled by gifts, there appears little to praise in the Irish administration. Religious bodies are ill-employed, bowing at courts'.³¹ But the dispute in the Synod of Ulster between William Steel Dickson and Robert Black in the years 1812-13, and in particular, the support generated for Dickson against Black, demonstrated that once again, the body's loyal addresses disguised a much more complex situation within the Synod; many ministers far from 'dazzled' by government's 'gifts'. The release of the United Irish state prisoners from Fort George in 1802 had

²⁸ *BMM*, March 1811, p.176-181.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.188.

³⁰ *BMM*, September 1812, pp.194-5.

³¹ *BMM*, July 1811, p.71.

presented a difficult proposition for the Synod of Ulster, with the release of suspected rebels including their own Rev. Dickson, formerly of Portaferry. Ian McBride has referred to the ‘profound embarrassment’ felt by Rev. Black and his associates upon the release of a minister whom it was widely accepted had been Adjutant-general of the rebel army in Down on the eve of rebellion. Although accepted to a new congregation – Second Keady in County Armagh – ‘this small, newly established congregation was later refused a share of the regium donum’ on a technicality. Significantly, when Dickson attempted to challenge this for the second time in 1812, some radical ministers and elders in the Synod supported him in direct contradiction of Black – indeed McBride has noted that seven of the twenty-two ministers who supported Dickson had been implicated in the rebellion.³²

In May 1812 Dickson published his *Narrative*, which in the words of W.D. Bailie ‘raised a major storm at the meeting of the Synod in June’, due to Dickson’s attack on Rev. Black and his associates, prompting a war of words³³ between the two ministers. Indeed, the treatment of Dickson by some of his Synod brethren in 1812 was noted with horror by the (Catholic) committee involved in the publication of Dickson’s *Narrative*. Unsurprisingly, they too highlighted the malign influence of the so-called ‘Presbyterian Primate’, Black and the augmented *regium donum* for the Synod’s unsympathetic treatment of the Presbyterian stalwart, Dickson: ‘But twenty years back, and his honest, patriotic acts would probably have been greeted with their applause and sanction!’ Warning the Catholic clergy and laity against similar government plans for the Roman Catholic priesthood, it noted ‘observe the talismanic influence that a Royal Veto, and a Royal Pension, will exert’.³⁴ Speaking in the House of Commons in May 1813 on the subject of a similar endowment of the Catholic clergy, Castlereagh referred to the position of the Presbyterians as proof of why Catholics should not fear such an arrangement with the state, for ‘though nine years had elapsed since the measure’, in the Presbyterian Church, the government had not once exercised its power of veto in the election of a minister, by withholding the endowment.³⁵ It is interesting to conjecture what impact may have been made on certain members of the Synod on hearing Lord Castlereagh declare to Parliament that ‘the crown had the power of refusing every

³² McBride, ‘Ulster Presbyterians and the Passing of the Act of Union’, p.75.

³³ See, *Substance of Two Speeches, Delivered in the General Synod at its annual meeting in 1812: By the Rev. Robert Black, D.D., Senior Presbyterian Minister of Londonderry: With an Abstract of the Proceedings of the Synod Relative to the Rev. Doctor Dickson* (Dublin, 1812).

³⁴ ‘Copy of a Circular Letter, written by the Committee for promoting the SECOND EDITION of “Dr. Dickson’s Narrative”, to the persons who had the management of the sale’, in *BMM*, December 1812, pp.482-3.

Presbyterian minister, on grounds of disloyalty, even after the recommendation of the synod, with respect to his receiving the endowment'.³⁶

Indeed, by the 1813 meeting of Synod, a number of ministers, including Henry Montgomery and William Porter, had come out in support of Dickson in opposition to Black, and also that of the plight of the widow of the Rev. James Porter, who had been refused a share of the Widow's Fund. Above all, this challenge to Black's authority in 1813 was another reminder that far from all ministers in the Synod were content to toe the government line. One correspondent in the *Magazine* rejoiced at the impact of the Dickson/Black dispute on the Synod, arguing that 'The independence of the Synod has, (I believe for the *first* time these fifteen years), been rescued from the gripe [sic] of the FEW, whose political sentiments in 1798-9, awed the timid and agitated MANY, with the aid of hints, and shrugs, and mysterious declarations, into an acquiescence in measures which their *hearts abhorred!*'.³⁷ Such sentiments were echoed by the magazine's own editorial, attacking Black and his desire to lay the Synod, 'prostrate at the feet' of government.³⁸

The debacle also inflamed the war of words within the pages of the *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, between the two conflicting Presbyterian correspondents 'X,' and 'H.' on the merits or otherwise of government interference in the Synod's affairs. In a retort to 'H's letter, 'X' stated his belief that the Presbyterian church 'consists *only*, and ought to consist *only* of Pastors and People', and 'deprecating, as he ever will do, the monstrous anomaly in....the Synod of that Church, of a "government agent", or a "money agent" (as H does not scruple to call him), an ambitious sort of being, that can live in the opposite elements of the Castle and the Country'.³⁹ 'X' proceeded to deplore the 'secret history' of the *regium donum* negotiations of 1799-1803, and in a bitter swipe at Black's role in proceedings, he mocked the claim that 'as to say that this agent has had for some years past no influence, but merely what he possessed as an individual minister of plausible abilities, betrays a surprising want of memory in the late history of the Synod. It is tantamount to saying, that Lord Castlereagh, the agent on the part of government, had no influence in thus attempting to negotiate away the independence of the Church, after annihilating the independence of the County'. 'Indeed', he continued, '*both* of these transactions are so implicated with each other....that the alliance of our

³⁵ *Hansard*, 1st series, 26, 155-6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *BMM*, July 1813, p.56.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.78.

³⁹ *BMM*, September 1813, pp.196-201.

church to the state may be deemed a mere supplement to the union, a rider upon the act that annihilated Ireland'. 'X' continued to denounce the Act of Union itself, and he described the *regium donum* of 1803 as having 'poured poison into the Presbyterian church by...weakening the ties between pastors and people'.⁴⁰

The refusal of the Synod of Ulster to bow to Black's 'faction' in 1813 over the debates on William Steel Dickson were met with delight by other Presbyterian writers, particularly those who regarded the immediate post-1798 years as a time of regrettable submission to Robert Black and the 'loyalists'. One such piece set out to show the 'absurdity' of the claim that the Synod had shown independence during those earlier years:

....In the year 1782, the Spirit of Freedom walked abroad....and unshackled over our green plains. She raised her glorious standard in Ulster.....As was to be expected, the Presbyterian Ministers were amongst the first and the most zealous who *volunteered* in support of her rights.....Her cause gradually acquired strength from 1793 till 1797, and numbers of Presbyterian ministers again surrounded her standard. Still she had inveterate enemies.....[and] how well those enemies succeeded, the melancholy events of 1798, and the *disjunctive Union* declare.

It was those events which first led the Presbyterian clergy to exhibit the *independence* of the last fifteen years. Some of them suffered death, some banishment, and some imprisonment... But...they proved their independence, by submitting to an inquisitorial examination of their political conduct, by their untainted brethren. Happily, however, the inquisition were unable to find any evidence, except that of each individual respecting his own conduct; which allowed the gentlemen of another opportunity of showing their independence... for every man declared himself innocent and loyal! What a contemptible farce.

They farther proved their independence, by *humanely* suspending the Bounty, a principal means of their support, from two imprisoned brethren, "persuaded by the eloquence" (or something else), of Dr. Black!

To show the spirit of those times. I will bring to "Observer's" recollection the observation of a gentleman at our last meeting, equally distinguished by his talents, his learning, and his candor [*sic*]. Speaking of the word *implicated* in the Minute of 1799, he said, "I, and I am certain a great many others, thought at the time, that it was too strong, and that it was *intended* to express *guilt*; but everyone knows, that those days were no days for *speaking out*!"⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.200.

⁴¹ 'Strictures on "Observer's" Remarks on Synodical Proceedings, *BMM*, October 1813, pp.288-296.

The writer proceeded to praise the Synod's stand of 1813, noting that 'at their last meeting, they gave pleasing symptoms of returning life, energy and virtue', comparing it to the liberation of a 'slave' (*i.e.* the Synod) from its 'master' (*i.e.* Black/the government).⁴² Indeed, an identical viewpoint was expressed in a letter signed 'Verus', published in March 1814. 'Verus' launched a bitter attack on Robert Black's conduct, censuring him for 'turning the times to his own advantage' during the *regium donum* debates and endeavouring 'to pass himself on Government as possessing the confidence of the Synod'. Crucially, he noted that 'the political fermentation which raised Dr. Black to the very surface of the Synod, had now, 'gradually abated', deploring the power which his role as agent for the bounty had given him over his brethren.⁴³

The apparent passivity of north-east Ulster on the passing of the Act of Union, like the Synod's loyal address of 1799, should not be regarded as proof that Presbyterian radicalism had simply withered away. Although the only radical to make a public protest was Drennan, it must be remembered that many of the '98 leaders had been arrested or suffered government (or sought voluntary) exile out of Ireland. Those remaining in the country must have been only too well aware that government maintained a close watch on Belfast and the Counties of Down and Antrim, with the aid of spy networks, up until 1805.⁴⁴ Edward Cooke reported to Lord Castlereagh in January 1801 that 'Dr. Drennan is still busy', and adding that 'I understand the Rebel Party have Dinners with each other: but there is no appearance in the country of fresh or active organisation'.⁴⁵ Little wonder, many feared being seen to put a foot out of line. Although he had experienced something of a near brush with the authorities back in 1794, Drennan's conspicuous non-involvement in the plans and implementation of the late rebellion itself rendered him in a slightly safer position to declare publicly on the Union. With such levels of fear and demoralisation, it is not surprising that the radical Presbyterians who had been willing to lead a rebellion against British rule should now behave somewhat cautiously – in public at least. For those imprisoned, the bitter recriminations which split the men in Fort George as recorded by, amongst others, Archibald Hamilton Rowan, lowered morale further, with many men prepared to make confessions or declarations under pressure from families, to secure their individual release.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.296.

⁴³ 'Remarks on Synodical Transactions', *BMM*, March 1814, pp.174-183.

⁴⁴ Stewart, 'Transformation', p.66.

⁴⁵ Edward Cooke to Castlereagh, Dublin Castle, January 27 1801, PRONI, D/3030/1581.

The immediate years after the rebellion were nevertheless a time of ‘turbulence’ and potential disaffection among the Presbyterian areas of Ulster which had attempted to rise in the summer of ’98. And as Elliott has emphasized, the British government remained preoccupied with, and extremely fearful of, the activities of the likes of William Tennent and the Simms brothers in the vicinity of Belfast.⁴⁶ James Patterson has emphasized the continuing disloyalty of some lower class Presbyterians in Antrim and Down in the years immediately following the rebellion, arguing that many ‘shared the disillusionment of their Catholic neighbours [*sic*] with the United Irish’s middle-class leadership’.⁴⁷ He has highlighted a high level of Presbyterian disaffection which was recognized by Dublin Castle as ‘symptoms of returning turbulence’, particularly in north-east Down. Indeed, he demonstrates that some may have been submerged into Defender units, a position that certainly challenges the traditional ‘sectarian’ view of events at this time. Crucially, Patterson makes the most obvious point that even when Dublin Castle regarded the situation as slightly more settled, after 1803, ‘this inactivity does not necessarily signify that the majority of the Presbyterians of Antrim and Down, at least those of the lower orders, returned to loyalty. Instead, a rational decision was made not to risk destruction in the face of the preponderant military strength of the state’.⁴⁸

It was this rationality which dictated Presbyterian activity during these years, both within the Synod of Ulster and beyond. For indeed, Robert Emmet’s attempted rebellion in Dublin in 1803 could not muster the necessary support for action in the north of the country. An informer’s note to Dublin Castle from May 1803 referred to his having met ‘William Tennent and Francis McCracken of Belfast’ in the capital, noting that ‘Their being in town at this juncture is somewhat extraordinary, as they bore very conspicuous characters in fermenting the late Rebellion’.⁴⁹ Mary McCracken’s biographer has suggested that far from being in Dublin to ferment rebellion, the two old Presbyterian United Irish stalwarts had travelled south ‘to do what they could to prevent a rising’.⁵⁰ An examination of these two Presbyterian families after 1800 suggests that both maintained strong links with their exiled family members and other United Irish

⁴⁶ Elliott, *Partners*, p.361.

⁴⁷ James Patterson, ‘Continued Presbyterian Resistance in the Aftermath of the Rebellion of 1798 in Antrim and Down’, *Eighteenth Century Life* 22/3 (1998), p.46.

⁴⁸ Especially in the absence of French assistance, as Patterson emphasizes. *Ibid.*, p.57.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Mary McNeill, *The Life and Times of Mary Ann McCracken, 1770-1866: A Belfast Panorama* (1960; Belfast, 1998), p.208.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

comrades, but it was clearly necessary to keep a low profile in the face of close government scrutiny.

Mary McCracken, whose brother Henry had been executed in '98 for his involvement in the rebellion, arranged accommodation for Thomas Russell on his return to the north on the eve of Emmet's rebellion in 1803. She and her sister both helped to arrange and finance his attempted withdrawal from the north upon failing to rally Down to the cause.⁵¹ But as John Gray has emphasized, Mary Anne, despite her love for Russell, dared not even attend his trial and subsequent execution in Downpatrick, County Down. Crucially, this would have been an all too public act of radical sentiment, which could not be risked; 'Her family's fears of government retribution, and her own fears in this regard, prevented her from doing so'.⁵² In other words, private or at least clandestine support for the radical cause was permissible, but publicly, such 'disloyalty' had to be avoided at all costs. Doubtless Russell's bloody fate for his attempt to raise Down to rebellion in 1803 was another stern warning to Presbyterian radicals that government's response to disloyalty had not mellowed in the intervening four years. Once again, rationality and fear, more than any new-found love for the establishment and the British government, kept turbulence and disloyalty in check. Referring to the 'lack of will both among surviving leaders and the people to rise again' in 1803, Gray rightly notes that such apathy belies the 'deep discontent' that remained. It was 'the crushing of the United Irishmen and the post rebellion repression which had destroyed any immediate opportunity for another rising', rather than any u-turn in political sentiments.⁵³ Even after 1803, reports of secret organisations among former United Irishmen continued to filter through to government,⁵⁴ and Connolly also notes the rumours of Presbyterian activity 'under the label of Defenders', and even their co-operation with the exclusively Catholic Ribbonmen.⁵⁵ Moreover, as Ian McBride has noted, masonic lodges also continued to act 'as a conduit for continuing radical sentiment',⁵⁶ whilst in 1806 rumours abound of secret meetings in Belfast where United Irish toasts were being drunk.⁵⁷

⁵¹ John Gray, 'Mary Anne McCracken: Belfast revolutionary and pioneer of feminism', in Daire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong (eds.), *The Women of 1798* (Dublin, 1998), p.60.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.59-60.

⁵⁴ S.J. Connolly, 'Aftermath and Adjustment', in W. E. Vaughan, *A New History of Ireland V, Ireland Under the Union*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1989) p.21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ McBride, *Scripture Politics*, p.210.

⁵⁷ Stewart, 'Transformation', p.69.

The Tennent family is also an interesting case in point, as their radical credentials marked the family out for government attention in the years following 1798. William Tennent, a successful Belfast merchant and eldest son of the Seceding minister, the Rev. John Tennent of Roseyards, County Antrim, had been one of the leaders of the rebellion in the north, a co-owner of the *Northern Star* and a member of the United Irish northern executive. His house in Belfast's Waring Street provided the setting for many of the northern executive's meetings, at which elections were conducted to decide on military positions and chains of command in the rebel army.⁵⁸ Aged just 23, his younger brother John, had fled the north to avoid arrest by the authorities in 1797, first to England and then on to France.⁵⁹ Elliott has highlighted John Tennent as one of the most active of the Irish radicals, building up contacts in mainland Britain, and on the continent, in France and Hamburg. It was John too who visited Wolfe Tone aboard the *Vrijheid* with news of the British government's 'dragooning' of Ulster. Another of the Tennent brothers, Robert, a ship's surgeon in the 1790s, was no less radical in his sentiments, having been involved in the Table Bay Mutiny. Indeed it was not until after 1800 that Robert made a name for himself in radical circles in the north of Ireland, alongside his family's old friend, William Drennan. In the early 1800s John wrote from France to Robert in Belfast under a pseudonym to protect his brother.⁶⁰

Throughout 1800 and 1801 Robert endeavoured to secure William's release from Fort George. Annotating his father's papers many years later, Robert's son, Robert James Tennent (later Liberal M.P for Belfast, 1847-52), offered his own thoughts on the British government's treatment of his uncle; a letter from Dublin dated March 1801 made clear that 'the circumstances which have appeared to Government respecting Mr. Tennent's conduct preclude His Excellency [*i.e.* the Lord Lieutenant] from any mitigation of his sentence'.⁶¹ In response William's nephew later annotated the letter with, 'Lying Scoundrels!' above the word Government, and then underlined 'his sentence', noting 'He never was sentenced, – never tried⁶² – never accused,⁶³ yet was imprisoned for years!!!'⁶⁴ John Tennent married a French woman, and had one daughter, Frances, who was placed under the guardianship of Richard McCormick, a member of the United Irish Leinster executive, after John's death in 1813. Both Robert

⁵⁸ Stewart, *The Summer Soldiers: The 1798 Rebellion in Antrim and Down* (Belfast, 1995), pp.60-61.

⁵⁹ Marianne Elliott, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence* (New Haven, 1989), pp.348-351.

⁶⁰ Papers of Dr. Robert Tennent, PRONI, D/1748/C/1/210/8.

⁶¹ Letter from Mrs. Staples, Dublin to Dr. Robert Tennent, March 4 1801, PRONI, D/1748/C/1/195/1.

⁶² underlined twice.

⁶³ underlined three times.

⁶⁴ Like the Rev. William Steel Dickson, William Tennent was never tried.

and William (after his release in 1802) communicated with McCormick, on the subject of John's will⁶⁵ and on the care of their niece.⁶⁶ Clearly the Tennents in Belfast maintained contacts with exiled United Irishmen in France after 1800, no doubt a source of concern to the authorities in Dublin Castle. Writing to an Irish acquaintance in America in 1799, Robert Tennent referred to Ireland as '...my native land, disconsolate and in chains, weeping at the feet of her barbarian oppressor!'⁶⁷

Having penned his *Protest from One of the People of Ireland against an Union with Great Britain* in 1800, Drennan used the pages of the new political journal he shared with Robert Tennent to express dissatisfaction with the Union's character; not so much an actual *union*, but a 'dangerous delusion' without a 'perfect identity of rights, equality under the law and reciprocal utility' between Britain and Ireland.⁶⁸ One letter to the *Magazine* referred to the 'national prejudices'⁶⁹ between Britain and Ireland, and England's continuing view of Ireland as the 'potatoe [*sic*] population'.⁷⁰ In addition, the radical Presbyterian journal protested that Britain had failed to honour its promise of Catholic Emancipation.⁷¹ By 1809 the *Magazine* had begun to criticise the ongoing war with France, denouncing Ireland's involvement in a 'destructive war' not of her choosing, moreover, a war, 'without motive'.⁷² In a cautious editorial on the recent repeal demands from Dublin, the *Magazine*, whilst deploring the means used to secure the Union, took solace that the measure, 'considered abstractedly, had a tendency to allay party feuds'.⁷³ But the ultimate reasoning was quite simply, 'in what respect have we to regret the dissolution of the Irish parliament? After they recovered from the fit of patriotism, into which, partly from fear, and partly from fashion they were led in 1782, what was their subsequent conduct?' The *Magazine* encapsulated the feelings of many Presbyterian radicals who had come to accept the Union, warts and all, for despite patriotic feelings, the Act had brought some measured success in the field of parliamentary reform: 'National vanity may magnify the importance of a resident parliament, but do facts, those irresistible arguments, justify the assertion?'⁷⁴

If further proof be needed of the apparent utility of the legislative union with Britain, it was necessary to look no further than Belfast itself, and the economic impact

⁶⁵ Richard McCormick to William Tennent, 13 April-15 May 1821, PRONI, D/1748/B/1/198/1-3.

⁶⁶ McCormick to Robert Tennent, 10 June 1815, D/1748/C/1/124/1

⁶⁷ Robert Tennent, Belfast to Isabella Shaw, America, December 20 1799, D/1748/C/1/183/1

⁶⁸ *BMM*, December 1808, p.385.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, March 1809, p.161.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, December 1808, p.385.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp.385-6.

⁷² *Ibid.*, September 1809, p.223

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.224.

on trade and the immense growth of the town as a port. Indeed, it was precisely the Presbyterian middle-class backbone of the city, families like the Tennents (William was a sugar merchant), who were beneficiaries of this increased prosperity. As Stewart noted, Belfast's economy 'became more and more linked with that of Great Britain', and in particular, it was the names of 'prominent Belfast radicals' which dominated the 'new commercial projects and associations after 1800'.⁷⁵ William Tennent, for instance, was a founding partner in the new Commercial Bank, established in 1809, whilst the old United Irish stalwarts of Haslett, Getty, McIlveen and Tennent were members of the town's new Chamber of Commerce.⁷⁶ So, irrespective of feelings towards Britain, the economic benefits which Union had brought through trade, consolidated with the recognition that British military might had, and would again, crush an Irish rebellion, fostered a more accepting attitude to the British connection. In October 1811 the *Magazine* bitterly lamented the apparent lack of patriotic spirit in Belfast: 'Men may cover their tergiversation...they may boast of themselves being bettered by the iron-hand of power, and they may say, Fort George was a useful school'.⁷⁷ But Drennan's use of the word 'patriotism' no longer translated to Irish independence, but Irish exertion for political reform and equality of rights. For these reasons, Presbyterian radicals were content to sit tight under British rule. Yet, as subsequent events will demonstrate, their radicalism, and above all, their willingness to defy the British government, remained undeterred.

The fact that in early 1813, allegations were being made that some Presbyterians in Ulster still composed 'a very strong Republican party' were significant. At the same time, the fact that the *Magazine* felt it necessary to offer a fervent denial of that charge, was demonstrative of the changed circumstances in Ulster in the years after the rebellion's suppression. Publicly at least, it was necessary to employ caution. The government's attention was clearly directed to the activities of a Town meeting in Belfast in August 1813, at which Robert Tennent was arrested on an assault charge after an apparently innocuous incident between himself and the town's (conservative) former sovereign, the Rev. Edward May. Disorder broke out at the meeting over the current sovereign's refusal to allow debate on the matter of a recent Orange riot. As Stewart has commented, Tennent 'stood up, and on the part of exasperated radicals', denounced the decision not to deal with the subject. Tennent's subsequent charge and

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Stewart, 'Transformation', p.111.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.118.

⁷⁷ *BMM.*, October 1811, p.316.

imprisonment for three months in Carrickfergus jail⁷⁸ created a furore in the town, and beyond. Significantly, Peel commented in a letter to Lord Liverpool that ‘some of the old leaven of ’98’ were busy once more in Belfast.⁷⁹ Unsurprisingly, the *Magazine* spoke out robustly in Dr. Tennent’s defence.⁸⁰

In 1811, the *BMM* also offered its support for Peter Finnerty, who had been tried and imprisoned on a charge of libel against Lord Castlereagh, specifically relating to allegations made by Finnerty in respect of Castlereagh’s conduct in Ireland between 1797 and 1799. It is indicative of the feelings maintained for the former Presbyterian nobleman among many northern Presbyterians, that the *Magazine* organized subscriptions to a fund to pay for some of Finnerty’s legal costs against Castlereagh.⁸¹ In 1817, Robert Tennent wrote to Finnerty providing him with information he had requested in a letter to William Tennent, on the composition of a late meeting to Lord Castlereagh given in Belfast, in the hope of discrediting the latter.⁸² Tennent assured Finnerty that ‘...it originated with persons holding places under Government, and was promoted and attended by all of that description’. Tennent went on to denounce Castlereagh’s efforts to muzzle the press in Ireland and in England, adding ‘I trust however that all his machiavellism will be insufficient to create such an alarm as to divert the people from their purpose of obtaining that Radical Reform of Parliament without which the Country can hardly be saved’.⁸³ The correspondence suggests that the radical Presbyterian brothers were still at the forefront of opposition to Castlereagh and the government interest.

The activities of the *Belfast Monthly Magazine* and Belfast’s town meetings were not the only signs that Presbyterians had far from submitted to the will of the British government, despite their acceptance of the Act of Union. In the years between 1814 and 1817 both Presbyterian laity and clergy became involved in an unprecedented conflict with the authorities surrounding the new Presbyterian enterprise, Belfast Academical Institute, a school with collegiate potential to educate not only Belfast’s middle-class youth, but also it was hoped, future Presbyterian ministers. It revealed that Castlereagh’s hopes of a subdued laity and an ecclesiastical body integrated into the establishment, rather than naturally hostile towards it, had certainly not been achieved.

⁷⁸ In October 1813.

⁷⁹ Quoted in R.B. McDowell, *Public Opinion and Government Policy in Ireland, 1801-1846* (London, 1952) p.54.

⁸⁰ *BMM*, August 1813, pp.161-2

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, February 1811, pp.148 and 171 ; March 1811, pp.245-6.

⁸² Peter Finnerty to William Tennent, November 28 1816, PRONI, D/1848/B/1/108/1.

⁸³ Dr. Robert Tennent to Peter Finnerty, February 26 1817, D/1748/C/1/74/1.

The involvement of many United Irish radicals on the lists of subscribers, proprietors and managers, cast a dark shadow of suspicion over the new establishment, among conservatives such as the Rev. Black, and the authorities themselves. William Tennent, Robert Tennent, Robert Calwell, Robert and William Simms, William Drennan, John Barnett, Robert Grimshaw, Rev. Henry Henry (a United Irish sympathiser who had been one of the most vociferous opponents to the government's classification scheme), all active radicals in the 1790s, and also W.B. Neilson (son of the United Irishman and *Northern Star* editor, Samuel Neilson). These men were foremost in the Institution's founding, and it was Dr. Drennan himself who gave the speech at the opening ceremony.⁸⁴ With Belfast's radical Presbyterian network now directly involved in the education of Belfast's youth, it was feared that, 'the republican spirit of the Presbyterians will pervade the system of education'.⁸⁵ If those involved in the new enterprise gave government cause for concern, then so too did the Institution's internal structure.⁸⁶

Nor can the government have felt easy at the emphasis on patriotic spirit and love of country within the BAI ethos, particularly, on the founders' desire to rehabilitate the teaching of the Irish language by including it in the curriculum. This complemented the activities of the 'Harp Society', established in Belfast in 1809,⁸⁷ again with radical Presbyterian involvement – Robert Tennent, Francis McCracken and Drennan himself. On the need for such a society, Drennan wrote in typical style:

The Harp, our glory once, but now our shame,
Followed the country's fate, and slept without a name.⁸⁸

Although as A.T.Q Stewart has commented, Drennan was careful not to involve his own private political sentiments during his opening address at BAI in 1814,⁸⁹ he finished with a prayer that the pupils of 'Inst' might learn to love their country. Given the emphasis on cultural nationalism in the United Irish propaganda of the 1790s, it was

⁸⁴ Writing to Drennan, the veteran catholic radical, William Todd Jones, referred to a comment he had heard lately, of the involvement of 'persons of doubtful loyalty' at BAI, see Jones to Drennan, March 21 [1816], PRONI, D/456/37.

⁸⁵ Quoted in A.T.Q. Stewart, 'Transformation', p.148, Sir Arthur Wellesley to Lord Hawkesbury, March 1808.

⁸⁶ As McBride has noted, 'Intriguingly, much government criticism was directed at the 'democratic' constitution of the college'. Government, wrote Drennan, 'deprecates anything democratic in the officers or boards and thinks that every thing of political bearing or which may have such tendency, is to be extirpated from the establishment' (PRONI D/531/1).

⁸⁷ Report of meeting of the Irish Harp Society, *BNL*, March 21 1809.

⁸⁸ Note of William Drennan on a document entitled 'Revival of the Irish Harp', n.d., PRONI, D/1748/G/810/1.

⁸⁹ Stewart, 'Transformation', p.150.

certainly a significant comment.⁹⁰ In 1818 Joseph Stevenson, the Institution's Presbyterian secretary, wrote that 'we hope soon to see a class opened for teaching the Irish language....[it] should not be suffered to fall into oblivion and [we] regret that our national harp has been so long unstrung and our national language so much neglected'.⁹¹ Furthermore, the avowedly non-sectarian principles of the Institution were another sign to government of continuity with the ideals of 1791. Writing to the Earl of Moira in India to request financial assistance to the Institute, Drennan reaffirmed that 'The actuating Principle that pervades this establishment is the desire to nationalize instruction; by including all religious persuasions (whether as Professors or Pupils) on the common concern of a good education – to open the Gates...to the free and unquestioned admission of Catholics as well as Protestants'.⁹²

Writing as early as 1808 when the scheme was first mooted, Sir Arthur Wellesley, chief secretary to the Lord Lieutenant, had warned the Prime Minister that 'the object of the institution is evidently to make Belfast the seat of the education of the Presbyterians of the north of Ireland to the exclusion of the Scotch and universities and the college of Dublin. The success of this plan, in this view of it alone, would be inconvenient and dangerous, as it would separate to a greater degree this numerous sect from the inhabitants of Great Britain and from their own countrymen'.⁹³ He concluded to government that 'I strongly recommend you to neither encourage this institution by a charter, nor to give ground for a belief that you have set your face against it; as in this last case, it would flourish in a greater degree than it would by any discouragement you could give it'.⁹⁴

As Stewart noted, government recognized that 'the synod and the Belfast radicals were the two most turbulent influences in the north of Ireland'.⁹⁵ Therefore, the grant to BAI must be considered in the same way as the massively increased *regium donum*. That is, government's belief that financial contributions from the state purse would provide it with at least some influence over the activities of the Presbyterians involved. Given the absolute necessity of government's financial aid, circumspect public comments, and the gesture of making the Archbishop of Armagh an honorary member were clearly calculated attempts to pre-empt government distrust sufficiently to

⁹⁰ Drennan's speech amongst his papers relating to BAI, D/531/1.

⁹¹ Letter from Joseph Stevenson to A.J McClean, 1818, PRONI, SCH/524/7B/12/66.

⁹² William Drennan, 'To His Excellency the Earl of Moira, Governor General of the British Empire in India', January 1814, PRONI, D/531/1

⁹³ Wellesley must surely be referring to Anglicans in his comment on 'their fellow countrymen'.

⁹⁴ Letter from Sir Arthur Wellesley to Lord Liverpool (the Prime Minister), n.d., quoted in Stewart, 'Transformation', p.149.

obtain a government grant.⁹⁶ This was widely recognized to be the case, encapsulating the radical's approach towards government since the crushing of the rebellion; as Edward Wakefield had commented in 1812 on the northern Presbyterians, he regarded them largely as still 'republicans in principle, in their hearts decided enemies to the established government', their apparently acquiescent mood simply, 'the quietness of expedience alone'.⁹⁷

It is not possible here to document in detail what transpired between BAI and the government. Suffice to say that the parliamentary grant was to be short-lived, as in 1816 some of BAI's managers and teachers attended a dinner on the eve of St. Patrick's Day in Belfast, at which radical toasts were made.⁹⁸ According to the *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, which wasted no time in printing the details, these included 'Erin Go Bragh – may her sons never forget that their union constitutes her strength'; 'A radical reform in the Representation of the people in Parliament'; 'The true "Legitimacy" – that which is derived from the people'; 'Unqualified Emancipation to all who suffer political disabilities on account of religion'; 'The memorable 14th July 1789'; 'The glorious and immortal memory of George Washington, and may the liberty and independence of his country be as lasting as his renown'; 'The memory of the Dungannon Convention – may it ever be cherished by Irishmen'; 'The South American Revolutionists, and may they succeed in their struggle for independence', and 'The Exiles of Erin – may they find that protection under the wing of the republican eagle, which was denied them by the monarchical lion'.⁹⁹ Not only did the toasts celebrate the American and French Revolutions, and call for a radical reform of parliament, but the chairman, Dr. Robert Tennent referred to 'passing the principles of 1782 and 1792 to a new generation'.¹⁰⁰ Given the attendance of men from the new Academical Institute, this was especially significant.

National education was regarded by many middle-class Presbyterians as a means of realizing their goals of liberty and reform, and offered a new alternative to the political means which had so spectacularly been crushed in 1798. Moreover, national education could be carried through constitutional channels, even with the financial

⁹⁵ Stewart, 'Transformation', p.175.

⁹⁶ J. R. Fisher and J.H. Robb, *Royal Belfast Academical Institution: Centenary Volume 1810-1910* (Belfast, 1913), p.63.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Connolly, 'Ulster Presbyterians: Religion, Culture and Politics', p.37.

⁹⁸ The individuals from BAI's Joint Boards and professors who attended the St. Patrick's dinner included five directors, Robert Tennent (chairman), William Magee, Robert Grimshaw, William B. Neilson, and John Barnett, and also James Knowles, head of the English department.

⁹⁹ *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, March 20 1816.

¹⁰⁰ McBride, *Scripture Politics*, p.212 (my underlining).

assistance of government. It seemed clear that the radicals were well aware that a new, longer-term vision was required: 'Education in the great scale', wrote Drennan to Robert Tennent, 'is a reform, circuitous, but certain – an Ulster university.... would do more to change mens' minds and manners, than can be well conceived'.¹⁰¹ In many ways, then, the founding of the Belfast Academical Institute should be regarded not as an abandonment of radical political action, but rather as a dramatic change of approach. Drennan alluded to a similar point in a letter to a friend in Dublin which made its way into the local press, referring to the wider significance of a place of education which could find a cure for 'our hitherto ill-fated island', 'where the ordinary and extraordinary physicians have only by bleeding and blustering and so on, brought their patient to the brink of the grave'.¹⁰²

The publication of the events in the local press caused uproar, particularly within conservative and government circles, providing Castlereagh with the perfect pretext to clamp down on the pretensions of the northern Presbyterians in the field of education. The character of the toasts offered ammunition to those opposed to the Institute on political grounds, and Sir George Hill, M.P led a stinging attack on BAI, denouncing in his speech to parliament

the description of men who had worked themselves into the management of the Belfast Academy – men, some of whom had figured in the horrible transactions of 1798; but who having failed in that more prompt experiment to upset the constitution by rebellion, were now attempting the slower, but surer, means of revolution, by inculcating and infusing into early youth the religious and political precepts of Paine and Priestly.¹⁰³

In a letter to the editor of the *Belfast Newsletter*, 'A Friend to Belfast' (pseudonym of the arch-conservative Anglican minister of Newtownards, Rev. Mark Cassidy, but clearly no friend to BAI) deplored the St. Patrick's proceedings for bringing 'such foul disgrace on the loyal and respectable inhabitants' of the town, with its 'treasonable toasts'. The author continued to associate the men involved with the events of '98, describing them as those 'who were disappointed in their dearest hopes, whose idol Bonaparte....meanly surrendered himself to his generous enemy, and, for a time at least, put an end to their fondly cherished hopes of exciting sedition and

¹⁰¹ William Drennan to Dr. Robert Tennent, c.1817, PRONI, D/1747/C/1/60/7.

¹⁰² PRONI, T/965/1.

¹⁰³ *Hansard*, 1st series vol 34, 427-9, May 10 1816. Also extracts of quoted in the reply of Joseph Stevenson to Sir George Hill's speech, May 30 1816, PRONI, SCH/524/7B/10/21. Writing subsequently to Joseph Stevenson in November 1816, Hill claimed that the 'principles' of the governing body of BAI, 'are devised, detailed and dictated by men of no slight revolutionary character'.

rebellion, leaving them no other mode of shewing their disaffection but by publishing their sentiments, under the pretence of toasts given at a festive entertainment'. The author lamented that, 'it must make the impression on the minds of all strangers, that the majority of the respectable inhabitants of Belfast are disaffected – averse to the connection with England – friends of Bonaparte, or of any other turbulent tyrant through whose means they might hope to excite rebellion – opposition to England, and finally a separation, which these gentlemen do not hesitate to avow as their grand object'.¹⁰⁴

Moreover, Cassidy alleged that at a recent meeting of government ministers, the proposal for a grant to the Academical Institute of Belfast was objected to by some, 'on the grounds that the people of Belfast were disaffected to the government, that they were the friends of Bonaparte and of sedition', and not least because, 'some of the very managers of this institution were not only present, but were among those who gave the most exceptionable of the toasts'.¹⁰⁵ Addressing himself this time, 'To the Proprietors of the Belfast Academical Institution', Cassidy warned that, 'through the mad and intemperate zeal of those men for the propagation of their revolutionary principles, the establishment is in danger of falling into disrepute, if not of being overturned'. He advised them to, 'guard against committing the management of it to men of revolutionary principles, of seditious practices, who will bring your establishment to the ground, poison the mind and pervert the principles of your children'.¹⁰⁶

The managers and teachers present at the dinner, including Robert Tennent, had no choice but to resign, as it was immediately intimated that the government grant had been jeopardized by recent events. As John Jamieson emphasized, 'Inst could not hope to run a college department without the financial backing and the prestige that government support would give'.¹⁰⁷ But Tennent made his feelings clear in a letter to the Institute's Joint Boards: 'I disclaim in the most explicit and public manner, all right in the Boards to follow the officers of the Institution into private life, to sit in judgement of their sentiments and opinions'.¹⁰⁸ Drennan appreciated this more than anyone, and he wrote to Robert on May 12th 1816, 'I have just heard that it is your intention to proffer your resignation to the Boards and I cannot refrain from applauding your

¹⁰⁴ *BNL*, April 19 1816. The author is the conservative Anglican, Rev. Mark Cassidy, as the draft for this letter can be found among his papers in PRONI, D/1088/15.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *BNL*, May 7 1816.

¹⁰⁷ John Jamieson, *The History of the Royal Belfast Academical Institution 1810-1960* (Belfast, 1959), p.23.

magnamity in sacrificing all personal feelings for what (whatever may be your own opinion) others may consider the public advantage'.¹⁰⁹ Annotating his father's letters many years later, Robert James Tennent condemned, 'the paltry government of the day' withdrawing its financial support, 'from that valuable establishment'.¹¹⁰ At the May 1816 meeting of Boards and Proprietors, William Neilson, a Visitor at BAI and also in attendance at the fateful dinner, iterated his belief that, 'in accepting...an office in that Institution, he by no means considered that he had surrendered those rights of a free citizen of a free State'. On the subject of the resignations which had been given, Drennan told Tennent, '...if these do not satisfy the Government, and induce a reconsideration of the matter, all that can be said is, that the withdrawing of the grant was pre-determined upon the first plausible pretext...'.¹¹¹

Despite the immediate disavowal of the proceedings by the Joint Boards,¹¹² the recently won parliamentary grant was hastily withdrawn,¹¹³ and it was made clear that it would only be restored on government's terms, and following some significant changes to the body's republican-style constitution. Government now demanded, wrote an outraged Drennan, that the Institute, 'must be put on a new footing', and explained how, '...Government.... must have a negative or veto on the appointment of every Professor, Master, or Member of the Boards so appointed or chosen – thus completely to guard against the entrance of any disloyal or unreligious principles into the Institution'.¹¹⁴ In a lengthy response addressed to the Proprietors of BAI, Drennan called on them not to submit to government demands: 'The Academical Institution is about to be bought and sold', he warned. Drennan feared that the Institution would be, 'transformed to the Administration of the day, for the annual bounty of £1,500 to that ministry which spreads its monstrous palm over every liberal Institution, moulds them to its own purposes of influence....and fettering the Institution'. Drennan deplored the fact that the grant, which had initially been given without terms was now subject to a series of conditions, 'held out with most courteous dictation'.¹¹⁵ He recognized that, for

¹⁰⁸ Robert Tennent to the Joint Boards of the Belfast Academical Institute, via Joseph Stevenson, May 6 1816, SCH/524/7B/10/14.

¹⁰⁹ Drennan to Tennent, May 12 1816, PRONI, D/1748/C/1/60/5.

¹¹⁰ Annotation by Robert James Tennent on a copy of his father's resignation letter following the St. Patrick's dinner, D/1748/C/1/196/1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² '...they disavow totally a participation in any sentiment expressed on that occasion inimical to Government and to the principles of the British Constitution', Joseph Stevenson, c.1816, D/531/1 (25/42).

¹¹³ William Vesey Fitzgerald, Irish Executive Office, to Joseph Stevenson, April 22 1816, PRONI, D/531/1 (28/42).

¹¹⁴ William Drennan 'To the Proprietors of the Belfast Academical Institute', 1816, PRONI, D/531/1 (9/42).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

government, ‘the meeting of the St. Patrick’s Day supplyd [sic] the wished for pretext of exercising power in return for money’.¹¹⁶ Government’s hope in demanding these new conditions, Drennan realized, was, ‘chiefly, to fill up gradually all the departments of the Institution with those, and those only, who are friendly to all the measures of Government’:

all candidates for chairs, masterships or offices would electioneer in Dublin, with connexions at the Castle, or with those here, who may have such connexions; and on the other hand, everyone, however in other respects well qualified for the office, if he had said anything inimical to administration, or acted in any way even by advocating that terrible thing they call REFORM would be discouraged.¹¹⁷

The prospect of a grammar school under such influences may not have been ideal to the government when the school opened its doors in February 1814, but it was the implications of its collegiate department which concerned Castlereagh the most. In particular, the prospect of Presbyterian ministers – whom government recognized as a potential source of resistance – receiving their MA degrees from BAI was horrifying. Hence Castlereagh’s concern that both the Synod of Ulster and the Seceders appeared poised to make terms with BAI for the appointment of their own divinity professors to train their future ministers there.¹¹⁸

Castlereagh, who regarded the college, in his own words, as ‘a bastard institution’, ostensibly for academical purposes but, ‘in reality part of a deep laid scheme to bring the Presbyterian synod within the ranks of democracy’, emphasized the ‘incalculable importance of not suffering Dr. Drennan and his associates to have the power of granting certificates of qualification for the ministry of that church’.¹¹⁹ He demanded that if the Institution’s parliamentary grant was to be restored, the proposed connection with the Synod of Ulster must end. Once again, George Hill made his feelings clear, arguing, in a letter to the secretary of BAI, that masters would be able to abuse their positions to ‘teach politics’ to their students.¹²⁰ Castlereagh and the government had envisaged that the greatly increased *regium donum* would exercise a restraining influence on the radical tendencies of many ministers, rendering them an

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ T/965/1

¹¹⁸ In 1814 the Synod of Ulster had agreed, ‘that the same respect be paid by the Synod of Ulster to the certificates of the Belfast Academical Institution...as to the certificates from foreign universities’, and set in motion plans to endow a chair of Divinity within the Institution. The Seceders had also taken the same decision in favour of training their future ministers at BAI.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Holmes, ‘From Rebels to Unionists’, pp.37-8.

¹²⁰ Sir George Hill to Joseph Stevenson, June 15 1816, SCH/524/7B/10/24.

intrinsic part of the established state and binding their loyalty to the British government. It is highly significant that even in the aftermath of the St. Patrick's Day toasts debacle, the majority of the Synod of Ulster still concurred in pressing forward with the formal connection with BAI, despite pressure from Robert Black at the subsequent meeting of Synod in 1816 to abandon the plans.¹²¹ In a protracted and bitter pamphlet war between Drennan and 'Presbyter', the former admitted, 'that Government, however to be opposed in most of its measures, is justly entitled to the...thanks of every description of party', for granting funds to the north's educational venture.¹²²

Above all, it was Castlereagh who conveyed the government's anger at the proposals, when a deputation from the Synod met with him in 1816, where he referred to the Synod failing to act with, 'becoming respect to his Majesty's government'. More importantly, he warned that the connection between BAI and the Synod would be, 'deemed an act of hostility' by the government; clear hints were also made regarding the future of the regium donum in such circumstances.¹²³ These events were reported to the Synod at its annual meeting in 1817 and the ministers' defiance of the government's threats matched that of Inst's Joint Boards. Indeed, in an incident which has become one of the most celebrated moments of Presbyterian radicalism aimed against the state and the established order, the Rev. James Carlile, declared, 'Who or what is this Lord Castlereagh, that he should send such a message to the Synod of Ulster? Is he a minister of the body? Is he an elder? What right has he to obtrude himself on our deliberations?'. He condemned the presumption of any 'civil magistrate to dictate to them where their students should be educated'.¹²⁴ As David Stewart noted, 'The impression in the Synod was that the independence of the Church was at stake'.¹²⁵

Drennan rejoiced that 'the General Synod of Ulster has made a noble stand against the attempts not only to encroach on the right of private judgement, but upon the free government of the Presbyterian Church'.¹²⁶ Of course, the matter was not simply one of where Presbyterian ministers should receive their religious training. As Drennan was well aware, the events had deep political significance and, with clear allusions to his own personal position within BAI, and of those forced to resign, he launched a bitter attack on the government's attitude. He deplored,

¹²¹ *Records of the General Synod of Ulster*, vol.3, 1778-1820 (Belfast, 1898), 439.

¹²² William Drennan, "*Pande-Manum*" for "*Presbyter*", of 9th August, 1816 (Belfast, 1816), pp.13-14.

¹²³ Drennan reporting to the proprietors of BAI, on Lord Castlereagh's comments at his recent meeting with a deputation from the Institution, 1816, D/531/1.

¹²⁴ Speech of the Rev. James Carlile in the Synod of Ulster, Belfast, 1817, (reprinted in Reid and Killen's *History*, pp.539-41

¹²⁵ David Stewart, *History and Principles of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, p.143.

...their inquisitionary persecution of every individual, who may have differ from them in political views, and to endeavour, by every means, to get persons so differing from them in regard to Catholic Emancipation and a reform of Parliament marked as of a revolutionary character and altogether unfit for the management of any part of a literary Institution, unless he corresponds exactly to their...measure of loyalty...to reject them from all seats of learning,...to spread through society a fear of even conversing, much less writing, on any political subject.¹²⁷

A newspaper article lamented that if only BAI had been able to continue, 'independent of government, had the experiment, in the old Presbyterian spirit, been suffered to complete a few years revolutions, through a Republican orbit, Belfast might be what...it will never be under the Patronage of Government, a Little ATHENS'.¹²⁸ Touching on the subject of BAI's non-sectarian policy (Inst was unusual in not requiring any religious tests), Drennan wondered whether, 'government desire[s] to keep all religious persuasions as far as possible asunder, that it may...distract attention from civil and political affairs, by encouraging sectarian disputes...Can this be the reason for putting the extinguisher over the Belfast Academical Institute?'¹²⁹ Indeed, the alleged 'divide and rule' policy of the British government had been a refrain throughout the United Irish propaganda of the 1790s,¹³⁰ and as this chapter will demonstrate, was echoed by Presbyterians involved in the tenant right campaign in the 1850s. Writing in 1821, Archibald Hamilton Rowan, the Presbyterian radical and United Irishman, made a similar attack on, 'those whose principle it is to divide and govern' in Ireland.¹³¹ In his hand written notes on BAI, Drennan also claimed that government's nervous reaction to formal co-operation between the Synod and the Academical Institution stemmed from a more general insecurity about the future of the established church,¹³² and undoubtedly, a fear of future Presbyterian strength in the north of the country.

The position of the Synod and BAI caught the imagination of the public press, and numerous letters emphasized the need for standing firm against intimated government threats. 'The Querist' deplored such 'state interference' in the discipline of the Presbyterian Church,¹³³ whilst 'An Elder of Ballywalter' expressed similar

¹²⁶ Drennan papers on BAI, D/531/1, (17/42).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, (17/42)

¹²⁸ Anonymous newspaper article, c.1816, amongst Drennan's papers, T/965/1.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, (11/42)

¹³⁰ For instance, *Paddy's Resource* (1795), p.7.

¹³¹ Archibald Hamilton Rowan to John Carr, October 22 1821, PRONI, D/2930/8/16.

¹³² D/531/1.

¹³³ From an anonymous newspaper extract amongst Drennan's papers, T/965/2-5.

sentiments in a letter addressed to the members of the Synod. 'The broad fact is', he noted, 'that the Royal Bounty to the one body, and the Annual Grant to the other, are the two great instruments which are made to operate....for the purpose of rendering them equally subservient to Administration; but a regard to religious liberty in the one case, and to civil liberty in the other, will rescue both bodies from the ignominious thralldom'.¹³⁴ In July 1817 another newspaper correspondent signing himself as 'Elder' denounced both the 'Civil Slavery' being exercised over the Presbyterian Church by the government and 'the exercise of this negative on the Royal Bounty'. He envisaged that the Synod of Ulster's freedom to act, 'will be annihilated as completely as GRATTAN'S Declaration of Rights has been swallowed up by the posterior Act of Union. The independence of *this* Church is, in fact and effect, as little regarded as the independence of the Country'.¹³⁵ In equally emphatic tones, yet another correspondent on the subject declared that it was a simple choice for the Synod of, 'Whether the Presbyterian Clergy are to continue a Church of Christ's; or to become henceforward, the Church of the King and his Ministers'.¹³⁶ Castlereagh was accused of setting, 'his heel on the democratic anthill of the Belfast Academical Institution'.¹³⁷

Referring to Rev. Robert Black, the nineteenth-century Presbyterian historian, W.T Latimer, noted that this was one of the occasions when, 'the spirit of Presbyterian independence burst the shackles with which the Government agent sought to bind it'.¹³⁸ Undoubtedly, the establishment of BAI and the defiant stance of its managers and of the Synod of Ulster in these years, reflects what A.T.Q Stewart has defined as, 'the essential independence of the Presbyterian attitude to civil government'.¹³⁹

As Chapters Four and Five will demonstrate, Presbyterian radicals in Belfast assumed the lead in town meetings, petitioning for radical reform of parliament and Catholic Emancipation, in opposition to both the successive Tory governments in Britain, and to the Tory-dominated Irish executive at Dublin Castle, which dominated for thirty years after the Act of Union. It is not surprising then, that the north of Ireland, and Belfast in particular, remained a source of unease for the English government in these years. Praising Drennan's latest speech at a reform meeting in 1817, William Todd Jones, the veteran reformer, wrote to him of his delight, 'at this semblance of Belfast as she was', despite Britain's motto towards Ireland of, 'eat your pudding, slave,

¹³⁴ From an anonymous newspaper extract of c.June/July 1817, T/965/2.

¹³⁵ From an unknown newspaper extract dated July 9 1817, T/965/2.

¹³⁶ Letter from 'An Elder' dated July 5 1817, as above.

¹³⁷ *Ulster Register*, August 29 1817.

¹³⁸ Classon Porter, *Irish Presbyterian Biographical Sketches*, p.7.

¹³⁹ Stewart, *Narrow Ground*, p.96.

and hold your tongue'.¹⁴⁰ His reference to the regular stir caused on the occasion of the arrival into London of newspapers from 'rebel Belfast', suggests the suspicion which prevailed in government circles and beyond, of the Presbyterian town.¹⁴¹ Jones wrote to Drennan of England's detestation of Ireland, 'more especially after wise Ireland having shewn her teeth in 1798 and 1803, when she could not bite', and of Castlereagh's and Dublin Castle's 'Resolve to govern Ireland by the rights of conquest'.¹⁴²

Keen to repudiate this label of disloyalty on Belfast, the Rev. Mark Cassidy attempted to demonstrate that the radical meetings and petitions emanating from the town were representative of only a small minority of the population. In a letter to a newspaper in 1821, Cassidy argued that, 'of the respectable and thinking inhabitants of Belfast, 99 out of 100 are well affected to the present Government',¹⁴³ and he continued to attack the respectability of one such recent reform meeting in Belfast. It was this 'Turbulent and Seditious' minority whom the Anglican minister held responsible for the prevailing belief, outside of Ireland, that, Belfast remained marked out by 'disaffection' and 'radicalism'. Cassidy denounced Dr. Robert Tennent, John Barnett and James Munfod as, 'the miserable rump of the miserable faction of 1798', whose continuing activities, 'succeed in causing an impression through the Empire that Belfast is a hot bed of sedition', and 'disloyal' to 'his Majesty's dominion'. The meeting in question, Cassidy noted, had been held in the town's Covenanting Meeting House, where Barnett had made a strong speech, 'in compliment to his services to the cause in 1796-1797 and 1798 and ever since when an opportunity of powering forth a torrent of vulgar abuse upon every Established Institution'. Moreover, Cassidy denounced the leading role played by the Catholic radical newspaper owner, Jack Lawless, at the meeting.

But in leading the campaigns for parliamentary reform and Catholic Emancipation, the Presbyterian radicals based in Ireland's 'Athens of the North' were by the very nature of the Act of Union, being drawn into the wider British political structure, albeit in an opposition role, for such demands could now only be directed at the Parliament at Westminster, not Dublin. As Holmes has emphasized, they remained 'far from satisfied with the pace and extent of reform'.¹⁴⁴ The activities and political jottings of Robert James Tennent during his days at BAI and beyond, suggest that he

¹⁴⁰ William Todd Jones (a small landowner from County Down, a Volunteer and a prominent radical) to William Drennan, February 18 [1817], PRONI, D/456/40.

¹⁴¹ W. T. Jones to Drennan, c.1817, D/456/45.

¹⁴² W. T. Jones to Drennan, c.1816, D/456/36.

¹⁴³ Draft copy of his letter among the Cassidy papers, D/1088/38B

¹⁴⁴ Holmes, 'From Rebels to Unionists', p.42.

had inherited many of his father's and uncles' radical convictions.¹⁴⁵ Whilst a pupil at 'Inst', Tennent's 'List of books read' in 1819, included, Paine's *Rights of Man, Part I*, and his *Age of Reason, Part II, The Society of United Irishmen of Dublin, 1794* (their blueprint of radical reform demands), Mary Wollstonecraft on the French Revolution, and Walker's *Irish Bards*.¹⁴⁶ Perhaps the government's fears of BAI were not ill founded, for whilst there, Tennent established a political society, 'The Society of the Crescent' for 'the friends to the sovereignty of the people, and consequently to equal rights for every individual...in accordance with the maxim that knowledge is power'.¹⁴⁷ The young Tennent also emphasized the society's patriotic credentials, for, 'our views', he wrote in the prospectus, 'are principally directed to the prosperity of our native land'.

Tennent's correspondence with another young Presbyterian, John Hutton, suggests that pragmatic acceptance of British rule did not equate to love of British rule nor of the British government. Writing to Tennent informing him of his plans to leave Ireland, Hutton was gloomy about the future prospects of Ireland and her, 'present degraded....state', 'cramped as we are in the N___h [sic] by the vile minions of...government'.¹⁴⁸ In his reply, Tennent concurred with Hutton's appraisal of 'poor Erin', referring to his familiarity with, 'the black consequences of slavery by the wretched example of my native country. 'Forbid it', he added, 'every drop of Irish blood in our veins that does not proclaim its owners bastard!'.¹⁴⁹ Such expressions echoed those of Drennan's in a speech in 1815 in which he referred to the 'withered' shamrock.¹⁵⁰

Writing from Dublin in 1821, to his father, Dr. Tennent, young Tennent commented on the failure of the rebellion of 1798, noting that, 'Had the superabundant energies which were at that time ranged on the side of the rights of man been guided as they ought to have been, Ireland would not at this day be a conquered province – trampled upon, insulted and enslaved!'.¹⁵¹ Writing again to his father at the height of the Catholic Emancipation campaign in 1828, Tennent expressed his hope that, 'the English people will yet make up for the evils inflicted upon us for many centuries by the English government'.¹⁵² Interestingly, similar sentiments were expressed by the young

¹⁴⁵ PRONI, D/1748/G.

¹⁴⁶ D/1748/G/749/27.

¹⁴⁷ D/1748/G/754/5.

¹⁴⁸ John Hutton to Robert James Tennent, December 6 1820, D/1748/G/286/1.

¹⁴⁹ Tennent to Hutton, December 8 1820, D/1748/G/286/2. This letter has been endorsed by Tennent, 'never sent – due to neglect'.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Drennan's speech on parliamentary reform among his political papers and cuttings, T/965/2.

¹⁵¹ Robert James Tennent to Dr. Robert Tennent, March 13 1821, D/1748/C/1/215/16.

¹⁵² RJ Tennent to Dr. Tennent, May 12 1828, D/1748/C/1/215/52.

Presbyterian James McKnight, who wrote in November 1828 to Miss Barber (daughter of the famous radical and Volunteer, Rev. Samuel Barber of Rathfriland), lamenting that, 'in Ireland we have for years had nothing that has deserved the name of Government'.¹⁵³ Similarly, in 1823, Archibald Hamilton Rowan deplored the 'absence of a local Parliament in that laws are proposed, passed an [*sic*] enforced without the least notice given to the people they are to bind'.¹⁵⁴ By 1831 he continued to voice criticism of British rule in Ireland, commenting in a private letter that 'We have never had any other government than that of force'.¹⁵⁵

Yet despite the rhetoric of enslavement, the reality of the situation in Ireland was quite different, with the economic gains experienced under the Union, and the gathering mobilisation of the Catholic majority in the political arena. Even a radical of Mary Ann McCracken's standing was forced eventually to admit that, 'it would be necessary to lay aside natural feelings of National pride and love of independence, which is not easily done, in order to consider whether the people of this country might not have their liberty and happiness better exercised in being an integral part of a great and powerful nation provided that ample justice towards Ireland was strictly observed'.¹⁵⁶ But as Holmes emphasizes, Mary Ann McCracken never repudiated the United Irish vision.¹⁵⁷ Acceptance of the reality of the Act of Union by the 1820s clearly did not equate to a Presbyterian north uncritical of, or subservient to, the British government.

Within the Synod of Ulster, Black's defeat over their association with BAI assisted in pushing this increasingly unpopular government supporter to commit suicide and in the following year, the liberal Rev. Henry Montgomery was elected Moderator of the Synod of Ulster. But in the bitter doctrinal schism which engulfed the Synod from the early 1820s over subscription, spearheaded by Montgomery's conservative rival Henry Cooke, Cooke's orthodox religious credentials pushed this politically ultra-conservative into a position of prominence for a time in the Synod's history. Hutton wrote to Tennent in 1820 lamenting that, 'The seen [*sic*] of Presbyterian Independency [*sic*] is heavily set, never to rise, with the same splendour, that marked its cause in past times over the meridian of Ireland. The synod of Ulster, once the Palladium of all that

¹⁵³ James McKnight to Miss Barber, November 1 1828, in *Extracts from Original Letters of James McKnight, LL.D., Litterateur and Land Reformer, Editor of "Belfast Newsletter" and "Londonderry Standard"*, *Ninth Annual Report of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, 1915-16* (Belfast), pp.5-6.

¹⁵⁴ Hamilton to Carr, March 25 1823, D/2930/8/25.

¹⁵⁵ Hamilton to Carr, November 4 1831, D/2930/8/40.

¹⁵⁶ Mary Ann McCracken to R. R. Madden, October 15 1844, quoted in McBride, *Scripture Politics*, p.215.

¹⁵⁷ Holmes, 'From Rebels to Unionists', p.41

is dear to Irishmen is now the first to strike the fatal blow against their rights... being hired by a foreign couch. A Regium Donum is the bone it picks with Thankfulness; and what could we expect from it but servility to the hand that pays it'.¹⁵⁸ Cooke, as many modern commentators have noted, was in many ways the successor to Black, equally concerned with establishing the 'loyalty and respectability'¹⁵⁹ of the Synod, and equally deploring of the northern Presbyterian's United Irish heritage. Did Cooke induce the Synod to demonstrate 'servility' to the British government?

There can be no doubting the political dimension to Cooke's campaign to oust the theological 'New Lights' from the Synod of Ulster in the 1820s,¹⁶⁰ for whilst the connection was by no means clear cut or exclusive, it was typically 'New Lights' who had some of the strongest and most prominent links with the radicalism of the 1790s and beyond. As McBride has crucially noted, Montgomery was politically weakened against Cooke not by his liberalism (for this remained the dominant strand within the Synod as a whole), but by his theological position (his Arianism). Cooke's presence at a time when many ministers were soul-searching their religious purpose, and during years when Roman Catholics were making increasingly self-assertive and strident moves in the political arena, was clearly significant, helping to heighten his influence above – at least for a time – what it might otherwise have been.

Holmes has detailed the first overtures made to Sir Robert Peel by Cooke as early as 1825, chiefly on the subject of BAI, warning the British home secretary, 'Experience has established the Institution as an adequate literary seminary but has raised many suspicions and much decided opposition upon grounds partly political but chiefly religious'.¹⁶¹ Moreover, Cooke promised that, 'any influence I have would be managed according to your wishes'.¹⁶² Holmes notes that, 'had this letter been made public it is likely that his influence in the synod would have been destroyed'. Combined with Cooke's earlier controversial evidence to the government's Education Enquiry,¹⁶³ he offered himself 'as the agent and ally of the tory political interest in the Synod'.¹⁶⁴ Peel offered cautious and tentative encouragement to Cooke, and it is

¹⁵⁸ Hutton to R.J. Tennent, December 6 1820, D/1748/G/286/1. Presumably he meant 'scene'.

¹⁵⁹ Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, p.146.

¹⁶⁰ See in particular, 'J.M. Barkley, 'The Arian Schism' and Holmes' biography of Cooke.

¹⁶¹ Quoted in Holmes, *Cooke*, p.39.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p.40.

¹⁶³ Cooke told this government Inquiry of his fears of the 'political ramifications' of 'teaching our ministers to talk politics instead of to preach Christ', PRONI, T/3447/1. Cooke's suspicions of the political allegiance of some of the leading proprietors of Inst were, as this chapter has demonstrated, clearly not ill founded. In 1826 and 1827 Dr. Robert Tennent subscribed to the pro-nationalist Dublin publication, *The Moon Review*. See Tennent Papers, D/1748/C/1/13/1-2.

¹⁶⁴ Holmes, *Cooke*, p.40.

reasonable to suspect that the Tory government, after nearly thirty years of trying, was optimistic that they had at last secured the crucial foothold of influence in the Synod of Ulster that they craved. Had the aims of the *regium donum* finally come to fruition?

There is no doubt that whilst even the *Belfast Newsletter* criticized Cooke's aspersions on the Academical Institution, there was a body of opinion in the Synod by the mid-1820s concerned at the lack of influence they possessed at the educational establishment. This of course boiled down to an ambiguity in Inst's role – how could it possibly be a Presbyterian seminary and offer a non-sectarian general education? The acrimony which attended the meeting of Synod representatives and BAI proprietors in September 1825 was the first symptom of discord in a relationship between the two which culminated ultimately in the Synod's decision in 1840 to terminate the connection and seek funding for their own self-controlled seminary. But it must be remembered that the split was not induced by the Synod's antagonisms over the political hue of BAI (despite Cooke's best efforts), but rather the simple fact that after the imposition of religious orthodoxy in the Synod, it became untenable to allow an institution where Arians were granted equal favour, to train orthodox ministers. Robert and William Tennent both spoke out for BAI's independence, with another proprietor asking, 'why we should grant to the Synod what we had refused to government'? Henry Montgomery, as Head of the English Department (although also a minister of the Synod of Ulster), reminded the meeting that, 'the Institution had lost the offered patronage of government by its fidelity to the Synod....and is this a fit reward for such honourable conduct?'.¹⁶⁵

As for government's position, Robert Peel made it clear in a private memorandum to the Archbishop of Armagh in 1829 that a renewal of the parliamentary grant to BAI could only happen according to new conditions. Unsurprisingly, the established church felt that the measures did not go far enough in taming this, 'nursery of dissent'.¹⁶⁶ The Archbishop informed Dublin Castle that the best 'means of securing to the Crown that influence over the Presbyterian Church which it may reasonably demand, (and which it actually enjoys in Scotland)', would be strict theological tests of belief in the Holy Trinity for all teachers at Inst, to secure, 'the soundness of the theological and political tenets to be inculcated'.¹⁶⁷ His comments emphasize the success of Cooke's strategy throughout the 1820s of associating Arian theology with radical politics and orthodox theology with more conservative principles. The

¹⁶⁵ *BNL*, September 30; October 4 1825.

¹⁶⁶ Archbishop of Armagh to William Lamb, Dublin Castle, c. January 1 1828, PRONI, T/172/4.

Archbishop's reference to 'the persons who professed the greatest influence in the Synods' who were, 'anxious that the Institution should be rescued from the hands into which it had fallen and placed like many of the Scotch colleges, under the patronage and control of government, of whose interference the more respectable of the Presbyterian ministers entertained no jealousy', underlines the significance of Cooke and his conservative colleagues in wooing Government.

The *Northern Whig*, staunchly liberal and sympathetic to the Arians, deplored Cooke's manoeuvres, declaring that the influence of the *regium donum* had finally come of age; 'Lord Castlereagh', it argued, 'knew a trick worth a 1000 horse power of mere force...he bribed them...', and that henceforth Presbyterians had been silent.¹⁶⁸ Such expressions were not confined to radical Presbyterians, as demonstrated by the evidence of Denis Browne, M.P., to the Commons Inquiry into the State of Ireland in 1825. Referring to the significance of the *regium donum* he noted that in the 1790s, 'the Presbyterians of the north of Ireland...were marching side by side with the patriots against his Majesty's troops', but after 1803, 'there never was dissatisfaction among the Presbyterians, and the clergy, that were the greatest preachers of mischief, left off all that'.¹⁶⁹ Under Cooke's influence and in the light of the Synod's purging of its own theologically latitudinarian party, it certainly *appeared* that a more conservative force – and one highly amenable to government – was now at work in the Synod of Ulster.

But far from all Presbyterian opinion was as pro-establishment as Henry Cooke, and leading the demands for parliamentary reform, Henry Montgomery and the *Northern Whig* continued to attack government on the issues of the day; in 1830 the paper denounced 'our sapient Chancellor of the Exchequer'¹⁷⁰ on the matter of a proposed increase in stamp duty. At a meeting to oppose the plans, William Tennent, Robert Grimshaw and John Barnett were among those who spoke out,¹⁷¹ whilst at a reform meeting in Belfast, Montgomery contrasted the paltriness of the government's grant to BAI with the salaries of the 'pampered aristocratic attendants and menials of George III'.¹⁷² In September 1830, 'An Independent Elector of Down' demanded parliamentary reform, and warned that, 'not all the power of the Noble Lord, backed by the British Minister can, or dare, resist the voice of an united people'.¹⁷³ Criticism of

¹⁶⁷ Archbishop of Armagh to Dublin Castle, October 16 1828, D/172/18.

¹⁶⁸ *NW*, July 26 1827.

¹⁶⁹ *BNL*, April 15 1825.

¹⁷⁰ *NW*, May 10 1830.

¹⁷¹ *NW*, April 29 1830.

¹⁷² *NW*, December 6 1830.

¹⁷³ *NW*, September 23 1830.

the *regium donum*, or the ‘filthy lucre’¹⁷⁴ was also commonplace on the paper’s pages.¹⁷⁵

Holmes has noted that, encouraged by Cooke’s influence, by 1831 the Tory party were ‘openly courting’ the synod of Ulster,¹⁷⁶ and nowhere is this revealed more clearly than in Sir Robert Bateson’s motion in the House of Commons for an increase to the *regium donum* in August 1831. A correspondence to the *Newsletter* on the subject, signed ‘Presbuteros’, rejoiced that at last someone in influence had addressed Presbyterian interests, given that, ‘there has for a length of time been manifested by government a singular indifference to the wants and wishes of the Presbyterians of Ireland’.¹⁷⁷ In sentiments that were echoed again in the 1840s and 1850s, he wrote,

..... The time has arrived when people must *speak out* in order to be heard, and if the Presbyterians of Ireland would hope to have their interests attended to, they must come forward and tell the Government – we are a million of people, comprising much of the loyalty and respectability of the nation –....and should a powerful party continue their efforts to effect a separation of this country from England, it is to us, under God, that you must principally look for assistance in preserving the Union.¹⁷⁸

Moreover his comment that given all those factors, it was only fair to grant Presbyterian ministers, ‘a sum equal to that bestowed upon a single sinecurist, or enjoyed by a single Bishop of the Church of Ireland’, also prefigures the self-assertive nature of Presbyterianism against the established church as well as the British government, which dominated from the 1840s. Although Roman Catholic aggression and the issue of repeal of the Union was a source of fear to northern Presbyterians, it can be argued that this simultaneously empowered the Presbyterians in their relationship with the government, by allowing them to play upon the government’s need for their loyalty.

The *Northern Whig* attacked the letter of ‘Presbuteros’, denouncing the *regium donum* as ‘one of the most detestable remnants of Castlereagh policy, designed, not for the good of the Presbyterians of Ireland, but to bind them more slavishly to the wheels of the State chariot’. Referring to some of the Presbyterian laity’s complaints against the grant, the *Whig* commented, ‘No wonder. Their Minister is not their servant, but the

¹⁷⁴ *NW*, September 27 1827.

¹⁷⁵ *Bible Christian*, March 1837, pp.51-4. Montgomery’s Remonstrant Synod defended its acceptance of the government’s grant purely on the grounds of financial necessity, arguing that, whilst it approved of the Voluntary system for Church funding, ‘we continue to receive the royal bounty.... because circumstances...have made that aid absolutely necessary to our subsistence’.

¹⁷⁶ Holmes, *Cooke*, p.96.

¹⁷⁷ *BNL*, August 16 1831.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

paid servant of Government'.¹⁷⁹ In 1831, education was at the top of the agenda once again in Presbyterian/British government relations, with the Whig government's proposed National System of Education for Ireland. As chapter Four has detailed, Presbyterian opinion both within and outside the Synod was sorely divided on the issue, with Cooke and conservative opinion leading the opposition to a system allegedly designed to 'encourage Popery' in schools.

Ironically, it was those conservative ministers normally most keen to maintain a good relationship between government and the largest of the Presbyterian synods, who denounced the Whig administration's scheme most forcefully. This fact was used by many liberals in the Synod to claim that Rev.'s Cooke and Stewart opposed the plans precisely because it was the work of a Whig government, although one of those leading the Synod's opposition to the scheme was the Rev. John Brown of Aghadowey, a well-known political liberal. Rev. Robert Stewart, a staunch conservative ally of Cooke fervently denied this accusation,¹⁸⁰ emphasizing that the General Synod, 'would have manifested just as strong an opposition to it under a Tory as it is now reluctantly compelled to do under a Whig government'.¹⁸¹ The fact that this charge came from fellow Presbyterians, including Synod of Ulster, Seceder and Remonstrant emphasizes the level of division among their ranks on the Government's proposals. Cooke commented on the failure of a recent deputation to London on the matter, noting government's refusal to concede to the Synod's amendments.¹⁸²

In early 1832 the *Whig* reported with disgust on government's announcement of plans to increase the *regium donum*.¹⁸³ The paper regarded the move as one of simple political expediency, designed to allay the opposition of many of the influential voices in the Synod of Ulster against national education (and also in the hope of dampening Presbyterian desire for the abolition of tithe payments – see Chapter Two). The title of its article – 'More Regium Donum! alias, More Royal Bribery', encapsulated the position of some liberal Presbyterians on the subject.¹⁸⁴ Significantly, the paper noted that the government's plan had failed, given that those influential ministers were as, 'loud and vituperative as ever in denouncing the government measures'.¹⁸⁵ There was not only concern at government influence under the *regium donum*. One Dublin

¹⁷⁹ *NW*, August 25 1831.

¹⁸⁰ [Rev. Robert Stewart], *National Education. Address to the Religious Public* (Belfast, 1832), p.2.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

¹⁸² Letter of Henry Cooke whilst in London, to an unidentified recipient, dated May 21st 1833, PRONI, T/3307/37.

¹⁸³ *NW*, April 9 1832.

¹⁸⁴ *NW*, April 26 1832.

Presbyterian minister denounced another effect of the bounty as, ‘the interest of every minister to be subservient to the dominant party in the ecclesiastical body to which he belongs’.¹⁸⁶ The *Bible Christian* (periodical of the Remonstrant Synod) made a similar observation aimed at Henry Cooke, attacking the, ‘tyranny of a junto within the Synod’.¹⁸⁷ Rev. Carlile of the Synod of Ulster, who, by supporting the new system and accepting a position on its Board of Education, became embroiled in the most bitter of disputes with Cooke, advised the Synod in 1833 to, ‘let not half a dozen men govern you at their will’. Above all, that it was, ‘high time to assert freedom for the ecclesiastical serfs of the Synod’.¹⁸⁸ Carlile commented that Rev.’s Stewart, Cooke and associates were, ‘determinedly opposed to the present Ministry’, seeing their present, ‘hostility to Government’, and thus to the education scheme as purely political.¹⁸⁹ In a bitter reply to his Synod of Ulster colleague, Carlile, the Rev. Stewart accused the former of hypocrisy, reminding him of his own infamous defiance against government interference in 1817 in the sphere of education.¹⁹⁰

In 1832, ‘A Presbyterian’ writing to the *Whig*, denounced Cooke as the ‘Polignac’ of the Synod of Ulster and called on all liberal members to defy his self-imposed authority. The writer alleged that Cooke had opposed National Education as an act of revenge against the Whig government that had proposed it, because of the latter’s conciliation of the Remonstrant Synod.¹⁹¹ John Coulter of the Secession Synod (whose Belfast Presbytery declared its preliminary support for the new education scheme) made a similar attack on Cooke’s domination.¹⁹² Speaking in the House of Commons the radical M.P for Downpatrick, Edward Ruthven, denounced the opposition as, ‘purely of a political character’.¹⁹³ The attempts of successive deputations from the Synod of Ulster to government to request a modification of the education scheme to allow the Synod of Ulster to offer its formal sanction, are described in detail by the Rev. William Johnston, of Townsend Presbyterian Church in Belfast in his triumphant

¹⁸⁵ *NW*, April 9 1832.

¹⁸⁶ Comments of the Rev. James Martineau of the Eustace Street congregation in Dublin. See *NW*, December 19 1831.

¹⁸⁷ *Bible Christian*, vol.1 no.9, October 1830.

¹⁸⁸ Quoted by Henry Cooke in his reply to Carlile’s attack on him in, *Authentic Report of the Speech Delivered at the Meeting of the General Synod of Ulster, at Cookstown, July 1833, in answer to the charges of the Rev. James Carlile, Against the Synod’s Deputations to Dublin and London by Henry Cooke, D.D.* (Belfast, 1833), p.22.

¹⁸⁹ [Rev. James Carlile], *To the Ministers and Elders of the Rev. The Synod of Ulster* (Belfast, 1832), pp.3-4.

¹⁹⁰ [Rev. Robert Stewart], *National Education: in Three Letters to the Rev. James Carlile* (1832), pp.5-6.

¹⁹¹ *NW*, June 4 1832.

¹⁹² *BNL*, June 8 1832.

¹⁹³ *Hansard*, 3rd series vol 10, 1203.

pamphlet of 1848, outlining the path which had led to the government's conceding to Presbyterian demands in 1840.¹⁹⁴ In response, the Presbyterian William Witherow maintained that the government, however, had granted nothing special to Presbyterians, and that ultimately, 'the paramount object of the Government, in establishing the system, was...to conciliate and strengthen Popery'.¹⁹⁵ Cooke, however, insisted that no compromise of principle had been made by the Synod in its 1840 resolution with government,¹⁹⁶ and referring to the matter in the Commons, one M.P. commented on the, 'measures [that] had been taken to conciliate the Synod of Ulster'.¹⁹⁷ Modern commentators have also generally concurred that it was government and the Board of Education who 'capitulated to Presbyterian objections'.¹⁹⁸

As early as 1832 in the dispute with government over national education, the Synod of Ulster's publication, the *Orthodox Presbyterian* had advised government that, 'the Presbyterians of Ulster are the inseparable link that binds Ireland to England'.¹⁹⁹ The following year it warned the government once again that, 'we form the real bond of British connexion, and our devoted loyalty is NOW the best pledge for the integrity of the Empire'.²⁰⁰ Again, it is evident that the Presbyterians were in a sense able to capitalize on the repeal agitation: the fact that by 1840 the British government's compact with O'Connell had collapsed and given way to a concerted campaign for repeal is surely a significant context in which to regard the government's capitulation to the Synod of Ulster's education demands.

Another sign of the Synod of Ulster's increasing confidence – and their awareness of their potential value to any British administration – was shown in their successful pursuit for an end to the classification system of the royal bounty in the 1830s. Commenting on the system in his evidence to the Government Commissioners in 1825, Rev. Henry Cooke acknowledged the opposition of ministers to the mode of distributing the bounty on the grounds that it destroyed 'our presbyterian parity', and referred to their repeated applications to the Lord Lieutenant to have the system

¹⁹⁴ [Rev. William Johnston], *Education, Religion and Liberty: or, The Right Use of the Scriptures Secured, By the Presbyterian Church, in her National Schools, with Remarks on the Church Education Society and other similar institutions* (Belfast, 1848), p.12.

¹⁹⁵ [William Witherow], *A Reply to the Rev. William Johnston's Sermon on Education, Religion and Liberty; or the Position of the Presbyterian Church, with reference to the National Board, Stated, and the Principles of the System examined* (Londonderry, 1849), pp.5-7.

¹⁹⁶ [Rev. Henry Cooke], 'To the Pastors, Ruling Presbyters, and Churches of the General Synod of Ulster', printed in *The Orthodox Presbyterian*, April 1840, pp.109-117.

¹⁹⁷ Quote of Sergeant Jackson, MP, *Hansard*, 3rd series vol 54, 1160-1.

¹⁹⁸ Holmes, *A Popular History*, p.104.

¹⁹⁹ *Orthodox Presbyterian*, March 1832, p.188.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.* January 1833, p.163.

equalized as previous to the 1803 settlement.²⁰¹ Referring to the hostility of the Seceders to the classification system – among both laity and ministers – one Presbyterian encapsulated their opposition to it on the grounds that it corrupted Presbyterianism, ‘with the ranks and orders of episcopacy’, and destroyed the Presbyterian principle of equality among ministers by creating, ‘one class BISHOPS; a second DEANS; a third RECTORS’.²⁰²

The Rev. William Kennedy McKay penned a controversial pamphlet defending the Presbyterian right to receive *regium donum*, but he attacked the principle of classification as being, ‘opposed to parity of right’.²⁰³ Moreover, McKay advised of the utility to government of expending the extra sum upon the ministers, in ‘the preservation of Ireland to the Crown’.²⁰⁴ One correspondent to the *Whig*, signed, ‘A Dissenter, But no Advocate for Regium Donum’, attacked McKay for the irony of his, ‘compliment paid to Government’, at a time when so many in the Synod were opposing the administration over national education, and, in particular, for Government’s recent ‘intervention’, ‘in lately elevating the Rev. James Carlile to an alleged prelatical pre-eminence over his brethren in the Synod’.²⁰⁵ In 1835 the Government had refused to accede to the requests for an equalization of the bounty, but in 1838, they conceded.²⁰⁶

However, some Synod of Ulster ministers still maintained hostility to the *regium donum per se*, denouncing it as, ‘a paltry boon, dealt out for silence sake’,²⁰⁷ whilst the Covenanters who had always refused to accept a state bounty, remained resolutely opposed to the grant. Their Eastern Presbytery condemned it in 1835 as ‘a filthy lucre’ which created invidious distinctions among Presbyterians, arguing that it degraded ‘ministers of the Gospel into engines of state policy’.²⁰⁸ Typical of the Covenanters’ traditional hatred of state servility, and of ‘an unscriptural connection between church

²⁰¹ See Cooke’s evidence, PRONI, T/3447/1.

²⁰² *An Essay on Equalization of Bounty; being a free and candid Enquiry into the causes of the present dissatisfactions among Seceders, concerning the Royal Bounty; with conjectures toward the most probable measures to restore Equality among the Ministers, Harmony among the people, prosperity to religion and Justice in the distribution of the Royal Grant.* By “Aretin” (Belfast, 1811), pp.i-ii; p.51.

²⁰³ William Kennedy McKay, Presbyterian Minister of Portglenone, and Member of the General Synod of Ulster, *Elements of Zion’s Polity* (Belfast, 1832), p.85.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.86.

²⁰⁵ *NW*, September 20 1832.

²⁰⁶ See account of one of the deputation, Rev. Richard Dill, in [Rev. Richard Dill], *The Presbyterian and Protestant Dissenter in the Army and Navy* (London, 1858), pp.9-10

²⁰⁷ *Letters to the Presbyterians of Ulster, on Tithes, Regium Donum and the Abuses of the Church Establishment,* By a Member of the Synod of Ulster (Belfast, 1835), p.8.

²⁰⁸ *The Signs of the Times; in which the Evils and Dangers of the Present System of Tithes and Regium Donum are Exposed, and some late improvements in Church and State pointed out, by the Eastern Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland,* 2nd edition (Belfast, 1835), p.11; 14.

and state', the Eastern Presbytery launched a blistering attack on the effect of the royal bounty:

Royal Bounty is given to Presbyterian ministers for political purposes. That it was designed to produce loyalty, no man can doubt... Hence an oath of allegiance is required as an indispensable condition of receiving it....

Presbyterian ministers! ministers of Jesus Christ! Will you suffer yourselves to be exhibited before the British Parliament as a piece of State machinery!.... To exercise a virtual veto over the appointment of Presbyterian ministers, by refusing them a Regium Donum, if they do not swear an oath of allegiance, is a gross insult, offered to the Presbyterian ministry...²⁰⁹

The *regium donum* was not the only source of division in the ongoing debate on the relationship between the Presbyterian Church and state during the 1830s and 1840s. The successful efforts of Henry Cooke and his so-called 'junto' to pass unqualified subscription to the Westminster Confession Faith in 1835 (and ratified in the Synod of Ulster in 1836), took place against fierce division and debate on the role of the civil magistrate in the Presbyterian Church. Indeed, the opposition mounted from various sides demonstrated an increasing resentment and frustration at Cooke's allegedly 'dictatorial' style in the Synod, and the early signs of a backlash against his crusade to improve the respectability of Ulster Presbyterianism in the eyes of state. What the acceptance of unqualified subscription did facilitate was a union between the Synod of Ulster and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland in 1836.²¹⁰ Ironically, as this chapter will demonstrate, it was precisely this new connection which soon embroiled Ulster Presbyterianism in a bitter battle with the British government over patronage. These events seriously undermined Cooke's previous efforts to place Ulster Presbyterianism on a solid footing within the establishment, by forging strong connections with both the established church and successive, especially Tory, British administrations.

In a pamphlet in 1835 the Presbyterian journalist James McKnight attacked the sanctioning of, 'the magistrate's coercive authority in matters of religion', denouncing Revs. Cooke and Robert Stewart of having, 'laboured so zealously in order to force....[such] ...tenets down the throats of their brethren, in the shape of an unlimited signature to the Confession of Faith'.²¹¹ 'The spirit of our forefathers', noted

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.15-18.

²¹⁰ One Presbyterian writer stated that it was the prospect of a union with the Scottish Church that primarily motivated the ambitious Rev. Dr. Cooke in his pursuit of unqualified subscription.

²¹¹ [James McKnight], 'A Member of the Synod of Ulster', *Persecution Sanctioned by the Westminster Confession: A Letter addressed to the Clergy, Eldership and Laity of the Synod of Ulster; showing from the History and Proceedings of the Westminster Divines, and the Public Records of the Church of*

McKnight, 'would have spurned alike the dictatorship of Dr. Cooke, and the degrading ascendancy of his "tail" '.²¹² In another anti-Cooke tirade, the Rev. D.G. Brown of Newtownlimavady, writing as 'John Knox Jnr.', denounced the 'disgraceful Erastianism that has crept into the Presbyterian Church', defined by Brown himself as, 'the system of those who resolved all the powers of church government into the will of the state'.²¹³ Moreover, Brown sounded one of the first notes of the call for proper Presbyterian representation, indicating the growing desire for reasserted Presbyterian independence and self-confidence: 'The government should understand and feel that we are worthy of their attention, and that in every ministerial or public scheme for the amelioration of the state of Ireland, it would be both wise and equitable to consult the Presbyterian Church, and to respect its conscientious and dear-bought privileges'.²¹⁴

Reviewing McKnight's pamphlet in their periodical, Henry Montgomery's Remonstrant Synod unsurprisingly rejoiced in the attacks on Cooke from thoroughly orthodox Presbyterian sources, noting that it showed, 'that *all* the members of the Synod of Ulster have not... kissed the toe of their new Pope'.²¹⁵ The *Bible Christian* condemned the manoeuvrings within the Synod of Ulster to secure unqualified subscription as the result of, 'the self-interested ambition of a few', whose principal object was, 'to open the door for themselves into the Scotch Church', led by Cooke, their 'politico-religious dictator'. In 1835 the *Bible Christian* condemned the enforced acceptance of the power of the civil magistrate in religious matters as contrary to Presbyterianism itself: 'while the king (or queen as the case may be) is *bona fide* the head of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and nothing can be ordained or ratified without his sanction, – so also in the General Synod of Ulster a temporal masterdom has been set up, and overtures established, which shut the gates of the church against all who will not bow down to the idol embodied in them'.²¹⁶ Once again in July 1837, referring to the controversial chapter 23, section 3 of the Confession, detailing the civil magistrate's power in church matters, it asked, 'And do the Synod of Ulster believe that a civil magistrate has such power? Certainly not. A few of them may do so, but the majority, while they tacitly admit it, do really reject it. They tacitly admit it, because they desire to be united with the Church of Scotland; and, unless they swallow the

Scotland, the Doctrines of Intolerance, to which the late vote of unqualified subscription has committed the General Synod of Ulster (Belfast, 1835), p.6.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p.18.

²¹³ 'John Knox Jnr.', *The First and Second Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Union of Presbytery and Prelacy* (Belfast, 1835), p.5.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.21.

²¹⁵ *Bible Christian*, New Series, vol.1, no.11 (December 1836), pp.381-4.

whole confession without exception or explanation, such a union could not be ratified'.²¹⁷

In 1837, the Rev. John Dill of Carrmoney (a member of the Synod of Ulster) similarly attacked unqualified subscription, registering his protest in print, 'against the intolerant and Anti-Presbyterian dogmas therein....announced on the subject of the magistrate's power'. Dill emphasized that, 'it is a law which has been carried in opposition to the views of some of the wisest and best men in the Synod'.²¹⁸ His pamphlet received the approbation of the *Northern Whig* in an editorial of June 1837.²¹⁹ In particular, there was anger at the insistence that current church elders must also sign up, or be expelled from their position. The Rev. Richard Dill of Dublin, who had opposed Cooke during the unqualified subscription debates in the Synod back in 1836²²⁰ accepted, as he claimed did most of his brethren, the Westminster Confession as 'a compend of Christian doctrine'. However, he did not agree with every clause, particularly those relating to the civil magistrate's role in religion. At the same time Dill claimed that many church Elders had informed him that they no longer often attended Synods because they had lost their voice, and that, 'everything was managed by a few clerical leaders, who took upon them to do all and speak all for the entire Synod, and would, not tolerate the slightest interference'²²¹ – yet another clear attack on Henry Cooke and his allies.

It was not only the Synod of Ulster that was divided on the matter of the power of the civil magistrate. The matter created a rupture among the Covenanting Presbyterians during the 1830s, when the Rev. John Paul and his Eastern Presbytery seceded from the Reformed Synod in 1840 after a bitter and protracted dispute between he and the Rev. Thomas Houston. In their official Declination, Paul's Presbytery listed their reasons for the separation, which included that, 'Mr. Houston maintains the propriety of propagating the true religion by the sword of the civil magistrate..'; 'Mr. Houston's civil magistrate would appoint church officers, depose church officers, and regulate the public worship of God', and finally, that, 'Mr.Houston's sentiments are

²¹⁶ *Bible Christian*, vol. 6, no.2 (March 1835), p.83.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, New Series, vol. 2, no.6 (July 1837), pp.182-3.

²¹⁸ Rev. John Dill, *The Power of the Civil Magistrate in the Church, as Declared in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and now Acknowledged by the General Synod of Ulster; A Familiar Letter, Addressed to the Rev. J. Carmichael, A.M, Drumkeerin, in Reply to his Defence of Certain Statements in the XX and XXIII Chapters of the Confession.* (Belfast, 1837), p.iii.

²¹⁹ *NW*, June 17 1837

²²⁰ *Times*, August 19 1836

²²¹ *BNL*, March 7 1840 (Dill's letter 'To the Ruling Elders of the Synod of Ulster'.)

grossly Erastian'.²²² In the bitter debate in the Remonstrant Synod in 1838 prior to the split, John Paul responded to Houston's metaphor on the role of the magistrate in society being like that of a father within his family, thus: 'If the Magistrate should do in the State as the parent may do in his family, he would be the greatest despot the world ever saw; his government would be the most cruel and bloody ever instituted'.²²³ Paul, like the orthodox minister Rev. James Carlile, and similarly James McKnight, regarded Presbyterian acceptance of such a role for the civil magistrate in religion as tantamount to a persecuting spirit which was contrary to all that Presbyterianism represented.²²⁴

In July 1842, William Hopkins, a member of the Presbyterian Church in Ballymoney, and an avowed political Whig, attempted to present a memorial to the General Assembly attacking the Erastianism of the 23rd chapter of the Confession. He argued that it represented, 'an invasion of the Church's independence....[and], that were it yielded to by the Church, she would become the mere echo of State policy, an engine of arbitrary power'.²²⁵ Clearly, McBride is right to regard the Synod of Ulster's acceptance of unqualified subscription to the Confession of Faith as finishing the work begun in the 1820s which had purged the Synod of Arianism, and thus, in the words of Hill and Hempton, completing its doctrinal 'purification'²²⁶ by 1835. For this religious strengthening, most orthodox Presbyterians accepted the 'debt of gratitude' (Goudy's words in 1852) owed to Cooke. Moreover, most did desire closer communion with their Scottish brethren. But there was clearly dissatisfaction among many ministers at the clauses relating to the power of the state in their church affairs, however theoretical. Indeed, in a short period of time, this point had become very much more than a theoretical one.

In 1834 the Presbyterian Church of Scotland (the country's established church), passed a Veto Act against the system of patronage in operation which allowed ministers nominated by aristocratic or government patrons to be forced upon the Church, even if contrary to the will of its congregations. As Holmes has described, there followed throughout the 1830s, a series of disputes between the Scottish presbyteries and nominees of patrons, culminating in a decision in the House of Lords that the Assembly had acted unlawfully in 1834 in its effort to oppose patronage. What followed were

²²² *NW*, July 25 1840.

²²³ *Report of the Discussions on the Magistrate's Power Circa Sacra; Persecution; Writings of the "Covenanter"; Extirpation of Heretics and Idolaters &c., In the Reformed Presbyterian Synod, at its Meeting in Ballymena, July 1838* (Belfast, 1838), pp.23-4.

²²⁴ Paul called it a 'surrender' of the fundamental principle of 'the right of private judgement and free inquiry', *Ibid*, p.35.

²²⁵ *Banner of Ulster*, July 15 1842.

several years of bitterness between a majority of the Church and the Government, in which the Presbyterians of Ulster came out forcefully in support of their Scots brethren's efforts to resist government interference. In particular, the refusal of Sir Robert Peel and his Tory administration to offer any concession to the Scots Presbyterians created immense anger in Ulster, and led to defiant criticism of the British government by many ministers of the General Assembly. When the Scots ministers finally broke away from the established Presbyterian church in 1843, it was with the support of the majority of the General Assembly, discrediting the staunch Tory Henry Cooke's position.²²⁷

As early as 1835, the Seceders had commented on the growing disquiet on the issue of patronage in the established church in Scotland, 'What right has an earthly Government to interfere with a church of Christ, in the appointment of her pastors?'.²²⁸ Indeed in 1836, just prior to the 'Renewal of Ministerial Communion' between the Synod of Ulster and the Scots church, one correspondent writing as 'Presbyter' questioned the wisdom of such a move, given that, 'the [Scottish] Church is in such vassalage to the State', and her, 'right of presentation to all her parishes, with scarcely an exception, is vested either in the hands of the King's Government, or in that of private patrons'.²²⁹ It is not surprising therefore, that the Synod of Ulster offered its support when the Scots Church attempted to defy government on the subject of patronage. A petition to Parliament from the Presbytery of Monaghan in February 1840 demanded the complete abolition of such patronage, and deplored the fact those who had conscientiously resisted, 'the intrusion of unacceptable Ministers' in vacant congregations, had been punished before the Civil Courts. Even the conservative *Belfast Newsletter* denounced the 'unpresbyterian yoke of secular patronage' exerted over the Church of Scotland, rendering her a mere 'creature' of State.²³⁰ Such sentiments were echoed across Ulster, in the form of meetings and petitions to Parliament supporting the Scottish Presbyterians in their dispute with the authorities.

For Cooke, the Scottish Church dispute proved immensely difficult. As an avowed Tory and supporter of Sir Robert Peel, he found his loyalties torn and the criticism of his pro-Tory and pro-Government stance amplified. His strategy had

²²⁶ Hempton and Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism*, p.74.

²²⁷ For more on the Scottish Church disruption see, James Lachlan MacLeod, *The Second Disruption: The Free Church in Victorian Scotland and the Origins of the Free Presbyterian Church* (East Lothian, 2000), pp.1-3; Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Scottish Church, 1688-1843* (Edinburgh, 1973)

²²⁸ *Christian Freeman*, vol.3, no.36 (October, 1835), p.429.

²²⁹ *BNL*, June 24 1836.

always been to steer mainstream Ulster Presbyterianism into the establishment fold through closer relations with British conservative governments, the Anglican church and aristocracy. The Tory government's failure to accede to Scottish Church demands placed him in a vulnerable situation, attempting to curb the mounting defiance and criticism of government from within his own ranks. Holmes has described the increasingly desperate letters penned to Peel during this period, imploring the Tory Prime Minister to offer at least some concession to the Scots, warning of the potential alienation of Ulster Presbyterians, which Cooke warned he would be powerless to stem.²³¹

The increasingly defiant tone of Presbyterian opinion in Ulster was demonstrated by the comments of the minister of Crumlin, Alexander Canning, who dismissed potential claims that by supporting the Scots, they were demonstrating, 'a want of proper subordination to the powers that be'.²³² Another minister addressing the ministers and people of the Presbyterian Church in Ulster commented, 'There is much reason to fear that the High Tory Party are about to renew their attempt....to legalize the naked Erastian supremacy of the Civil Court'.²³³ At a Non-Intrusion meeting in Belfast in March 1841 there was unanimous condemnation of Lord Aberdeen's late bill, and pride expressed that Ulster Presbyterians enjoyed state endowment, through the *regium donum*, but endured no state interference for the privilege.²³⁴

The *Northern Whig* delighted in both Cooke's personal discomfiture and at the barrage of Presbyterian criticism against the Tory government. Meanwhile, the controversy was emboldening those Presbyterians desirous of proper Presbyterian parliamentary representation – again, a stance vehemently opposed by Cooke. The Rev. John Brown, an orthodox Whig minister, implored Presbyterians to vote at the next election only for candidates pledged to support the Scottish Church, and other Presbyterian interests.²³⁵ In an attempt to resist the growing clamour (from the likes of Brown) to convene a special meeting of the General Assembly to discuss the Church of Scotland crisis – Cooke was well aware it would reveal the full extent of Presbyterian criticism of the Government – Cooke made a fatal error, publishing a declaration of confidence in Peel in November 1841.²³⁶

²³⁰ *BNL*, February 21 1840.

²³¹ *Ibid*, pp.150-3.

²³² *BNL*, October 12 1840.

²³³ *BNL*, February 19 1841.

²³⁴ *BNL*, March 12 1841.

²³⁵ See Brown's letter, 'To the Presbyterian Electors of Ireland', in *BNL*, June 25 1841. See Chapter Five.

²³⁶ *NW*, November 30 1841.

Such misplaced confidence was revealed the following February at the opening of Parliament when no mention of the Scottish Church was made in the Queen's Speech. As one Scots newspaper noted, 'The Conservative Government have now put themselves in a position of unequivocal hostility to the Church of Scotland'.²³⁷ At a subsequent meeting of the Presbytery of Coleraine, Rev. Dr. Brown commented that, 'There have been deeds...of Government, that give evidence and earnest of coming mischief'. Moreover, he read extracts from a letter from Rev. Dr. Candlish, one of the Scottish ministers leading the non-intrusionist party, expressing his hope that 'Dr. Cooke's eyes' might now be opened to Government's real position.²³⁸

In similar terms, the *Northern Whig* declared that the cause of the non-intrusionists was clearly, 'not likely to be treated with much favour by the Tory Government'.²³⁹ Writing to Rev. Dr Chalmers in January 1843, the Rev. Dr. Hanna of the General Assembly commented on Cooke's exertions to the Prime Minister, particularly, 'a very strong letter to Sir Robert Peel pointing out to him the evils that must arise if the Government continue to pursue their present course – urging him to do something for your church – and declaring that if nothing is done he will not only leave but oppose the conservative party with whom he has hitherto acted'.²⁴⁰ In his biography of Cooke, however, in the absence of any proof this letter's existence, Holmes has questioned the likelihood of any such threat on Cooke's part.

The *Whig* denounced with evident satisfaction the Tory administration as, 'sticklers for a species of domineering ascendancy...peculiarly wedded to the supremacy of an established party, or an established system. They look down, with scorn, upon the struggles of Presbyterians for popular freedom, in ecclesiastical concerns'.²⁴¹ 'The conduct of the Government', the *Whig* editorial commented, '...has naturally produced a strong feeling of dissatisfaction among the Irish Presbyterians'.²⁴² In June 1842 the momentum of a spirited Presbyterian independence, in opposition to Cooke's pro-establishment policy was sealed with the establishment of a new Presbyterian newspaper, the *Banner of Ulster*. Its early editions were filled with comment and reports on the Scotch Church crisis, and were strongly critical of Government. The *Banner* concurred with the report of an evangelical paper, the *London Record*, in comments that must have made painful reading for Cooke:

²³⁷ Quote from the *Scottish Guardian*, reprinted in *BNL*, February 1 1842.

²³⁸ *NW*, February 1 1842.

²³⁹ *NW*, February 10 1842.

²⁴⁰ Rev. Dr. S Hanna, Belfast to Rev. Dr. T. Chalmers, January 12 1843, PRONI, T/3307/66.

²⁴¹ *NW*, March 19 1842.

²⁴² *NW*, March 29 1842.

The late Whig Government, indeed, did, and we believe could do, nothing by legislative enactment, but they were friendly to the Church, and exercised the patronage of the Crown in unison with her regulations. The present Government on the other hand... appears disposed arbitrarily to exercise the Crown patronage in a manner most offensive to the Church.²⁴³

Both the *Banner* and the *Whig* used the term 'war' or 'warfare' to describe the current situation with Government.²⁴⁴

At the special meeting of the General Assembly, which eventually met on March 10th 1842, Rev. Dr. Brown led attacks on both Tory policy and the Home Secretary, Sir James Graham, attacking the 'manner in which Englishmen treated the Scottish Church question'. More significantly, he argued that, 'If the Presbyterian people...were properly represented, there would be not such a state of things'.²⁴⁵ In a letter to the *Newsletter*, the Rev. James Morgan warned government against pursuing a course that would alienate Presbyterians in Scotland and Ulster, noting that, 'the support of Presbyterian Ulster will be given to none who oppress the Church'.²⁴⁶ More defiant language was directed towards the administration at the first meeting of the newly-formed Presbyterian Defence Association in Coleraine, in November 1842, when Rev. Brown warned that, 'The Church of Scotland was not framed by statesmen, and the people of Scotland are not so fallen as to allow statesmen to make it their tool'.²⁴⁷ Such a response from Presbyterian Ulster provided the Dublin repeal newspaper, the *Nation*, with the hope, somewhat optimistically, that the crisis might prove to Ulster Presbyterians the evils of English government.²⁴⁸

The expected split in the established church in Scotland came in May 1843 when the non-intrusionists abandoned the Scottish General Assembly to form the Free Assembly. A large deputation from the Ulster Assembly attended,²⁴⁹ including a reluctant Cooke, but as Peter Brooke has noted, Cooke's real support for the Free Church was 'somewhat half-hearted'.²⁵⁰ It did not sit easy with his Tory politics and certainly not with his efforts to forge a strong connection between mainstream Ulster Presbyterianism and the establishment. At the Free Church of Scotland's Assembly in October, Rev. A.P. Goudy of Strabane – by now emerging as one of the chief ministers

²⁴³ *BU*, June 21 1842.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, and *NW*, June 14 1842.

²⁴⁵ *NW*, March 12 1842.

²⁴⁶ *BNL*, March 18 1842.

²⁴⁷ *BU*, November 11 1842.

²⁴⁸ *Nation*, November 26 1842.

²⁴⁹ *NW*, May 23 1843.

²⁵⁰ Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, p.180.

opposed to Cooke's policies – led the speeches of the Irish deputation in denouncing the established church of Scotland as, 'an utterly enslaved Erastianised institute', and making the now familiar criticisms of Peel and Graham.²⁵¹ Little wonder that the *Times* commented that, 'the leaven of the democratic is still at work even in the expurgated establishment of Presbyterian Scotland'.²⁵²

The Scotch Church disruption was not the only issue gripping Presbyterian Ulster at this time – a more immediate and serious matter arose in the form of a dispute over Irish Presbyterian mixed marriage rights. The subject brought the orthodox Presbyterians into a bitter battle with the Church of Ireland – it was an ecclesiastical court in Armagh in 1840 which had first ruled against them – and as Chapter Two emphasizes, brought a dramatic end to Cooke's dreams of 'Protestant Peace'. But it was the refusal of Peel's Tory government to redress the controversy which brought an unprecedented and defiant response from the General Assembly. In early 1842 the Presbyterian press and numerous ministers led calls for government to clarify and confirm the right of a Presbyterian minister to conduct the marriage of a Presbyterian and a member of the established church. Recent court judgements in bigamy cases placed a question mark over the legitimacy of such marriages, and questioned a right enjoyed by the Presbyterian Ministry for almost two hundred years. Rumours that government intended only to pass a retrospective law on the matter was greeted with horror, as 'this alone would be tantamount to a prohibition, against Dissenting ministers, of the celebration of mixed marriages'.²⁵³

At a Presbyterian meeting in Armagh in January, the anger and outrage of the community was clearly demonstrated, and Rev. P.S. Henry led calls for a complete measure. Writing in the *Whig*, Samuel M. Greer, a Presbyterian barrister noted that, 'if this be not now continued, the conclusion is inevitable, that the Legislature is determined to brand our Church with this notable mark of inferiority'.²⁵⁴ Warnings began to be issued at protest meetings held across the north advising Government, 'to pause, before they alienated the feelings of Presbyterians',²⁵⁵ and ministers such as Brown used the government's stand on both the marriages and Scottish church issues to attack Cooke's misplaced confidence in the Peel ministry, and to urge Presbyterians to return only their own members to northern constituencies.

²⁵¹ *BNL*, October 27 1843 (supplement)

²⁵² *Times*, December 28 1843.

²⁵³ *NW*, January 22 1842.

²⁵⁴ *NW*, January 27 1842.

²⁵⁵ *NW*, February 8 1842.

Presbyterian fears were confirmed in February when Lord Eliot introduced a purely retrospective measure in the House of Commons.²⁵⁶ Their lack of proper representation was painfully demonstrated by the fact that it was O'Connell, and not their own northern M.P.s, who conveyed to Parliament Presbyterian anger at such a meagre bill.²⁵⁷ At a special meeting of the General Assembly the Rev. Brown was typically caustic in his appraisal of the bill, again warning that it was, 'nothing short of an insult to Presbyterians. The Government owed much to the Presbyterians of Ulster'.²⁵⁸ But the Government was undeterred, and Eliot's bill became law in August 1842. The *Whig* denounced the fact that, 'the Bill introduced is an "enacting Bill", and not a "declaratory one". This is an insidious Tory trick, declaring that the marriages in question *were* illegal, although now making them legal'.²⁵⁹ Thus commenced a determined campaign, led by members of the General Assembly, to remonstrate, hold meetings, and petition Parliament in order to pressurize Government into introducing the desired legislation. 'I am confident of success, during the next Session of Parliament', wrote the Rev. P.S. Henry of Armagh, noting that the government were, 'well aware of our political, social, and religious importance'.²⁶⁰

In a letter to Presbyterian Electors, Rev. Brown of Aghadowey made a bitter attack on Peel and his Ministers, denouncing their, 'cold-blooded cruelty' towards the Church of Scotland, and now, their insult to Ulster's Presbyterian Church. 'I think it full time', he declared, 'that Presbyterians should look at their position, and prepare to protect themselves by all legitimate means'.²⁶¹ In an editorial in the *Banner*, the government were accused of working to favour the established church, 'to please "some of the bishops" ', irrespective of it 'insulting' Presbyterians.²⁶² The Rev. Clarke Houston spoke in similar terms at the first meeting of the Presbyterian Church Defence Association: 'In speaking of the late Marriage Act, he could scarcely trust his feelings, when he contemplated the perpetration, by the British Government, of one of those crimes which showed the character of the men who were opposed to Presbyterian interests'.²⁶³ At the meeting of the General Assembly in July 1843, Mr. Molyneux stated that, 'Government could not afford to alienate Presbyterians from them. He believed, that no matter what would occur, the Crown would not forfeit the loyalty of

²⁵⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.60, 1006, February 24 1842.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1181.

²⁵⁸ *BNL*, March 15 1842.

²⁵⁹ *NW*, March 1 1842.

²⁶⁰ *NW*, October 1 1842.

²⁶¹ *BU*, October 7 1842.

²⁶² *BU*, August 12 1842.

Presbyterians; but it might be shaken in such a manner as no Government would endeavour to court'. Brown expressed the humiliating aspect of the bill, asking, 'Could he himself or Dr. Cooke, not perform a marriage as well as the blacksmith at Gretna-Green'.²⁶⁴

The hostility shown towards the Established Church and the Government at this meeting led to the acceptance of Brown's resolution regarding Presbyterian representation, and Cooke's decision to stop attending the Assembly until it was overturned (which did not happen until 1847). At a meeting in the First Presbyterian Meeting house in Rathfriland, Lord Eliot's bill was denounced in stark terms: 'Is there a Presbyterian within these walls whose blood does not boil at such an insult? What! Are not marriages by Presbyterians legal?... Depend nothing on Parliament. Did you see the list of the committee on the Marriage Bill? No doubt it had at its head that ornament of the Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury'.²⁶⁵ In a letter from 'A Presbyterian Repealer' which appeared in the *Nation* under the title of 'The English Government and the Irish Presbyterians', the author attacked the justice meted out on the marriages issue:

...if it indeed be so, as some of the speakers in the General Assembly sitting in Belfast have plainly declared, that it is not merely neglect we have to complain of – if there be a settled purpose, on the part of the government and high church party, to crush Dissent and Presbyterianism altogether – then I would fair know on what support that government relies when Sir James Graham stands up in the House of Commons and announces their "determination" to maintain the Legislative Union and the Irish church establishment. How long would they be able to maintain either one or the other if the Irish Presbyterians declared war against them? Let the Presbyterian body throw their weight into the scale against those inviolable palladia of Sir James Graham's...²⁶⁶

Of course, most orthodox Presbyterians had no intention of expressing their discontent by joining the Repeal movement, but they felt confident enough to at least threaten the possibility to government. This certainly marked a new stage in post-'98 Presbyterianism and such ebullient self-confidence was a far cry from the tentative earlier years, when Presbyterians had felt under pressure to demonstrate their loyalty and curry government favour. Speaking at a special meeting of the General Assembly in March 1844 the Rev. Richard Dill warned, 'that, were the Presbyterians of the North to combine with the Catholics of the South, the Government of the country could not

²⁶³ *BU*, November 11 1842.

²⁶⁴ *NW*, July 11 1843.

²⁶⁵ *BU*, August 8 1843.

long resist a demand that had been lately made upon it, by which was sought to separate the two countries. He brought this forward merely as an instance why the Legislature should not look lightly on so important a body as the Presbyterians'.²⁶⁷ Such defiant words must have given apoplexy to Henry Cooke, in his self-imposed exile from the Assembly. Dill echoed his comments in a pamphlet on the subject, and alluding to the Catholic repeal movement, he noted, 'To Presbyterians...government owe not only the prosperity and peace of a province, but the possession of a kingdom. How ungrateful, then – how unjust – how unwise and impolitic, to insult, injure, and alienate a people to whom so much is owed'.²⁶⁸

The *Times* deplored the tone of the orthodox Presbyterian organ, the *Banner*, and the numerous Presbyterian monster meetings taking place. Referring to Dill's comments at the recent Assembly meeting, it noted that the proceedings, 'are as full of indignant invective as any ever uttered within the walls of the Conciliation-hall, while a half-threat is held over the heads of Ministers...in the event of a full measure of justice being withheld'.²⁶⁹ Similarly, the conservative established church organ, the *Derry Sentinel*, warned Presbyterians that, 'The constitutional mode of seeking a redress of grievances is to petition Parliament, not to follow the example of O'Connell and the Repealers, by hurling defiance at Government, and setting the country in a flame'.²⁷⁰ By contrast, the *Nation* delighted that relations between the largest Irish Presbyterian Synod and the British government had plummeted so low, and especially in the Presbyterians' new, more aggressive approach. 'They resolved to agitate, and they have begun the agitation in good earnest'.²⁷¹

In a pamphlet by the Rev. Clarke Houston of Coleraine, the Presbyterian minister referred in anger to the late Marriage Bill, and warned, 'Let there be a watchful eye kept on the movements of our civil rulers and legislators'.²⁷² Referring to the speech of Rev. A. P. Goudy at a special meeting of Presbyterians in Strabane, the *Times* was horrified by the minister's call to action: 'Now, then, is the time to stand forth and tell Sir Robert Peel and Sir James Graham and the rest of them in a voice of thunder, that we will not submit to the attempts that are made to put us down...we will resist

²⁶⁶ *Nation*, July 22 1843.

²⁶⁷ *NW*, March 7 1844.

²⁶⁸ *Mixed Marriages; The Substance of A Speech, by the Rev. Richard Dill, A.M., Dublin, Delivered at a Public Meeting in Glasgow held on Tuesday, 11th June on the Mixed Marriage Question.* (Glasgow, 1844), p.19.

²⁶⁹ *Times*, March 11 1844.

²⁷⁰ Quoted in *Times*, March 27 1844.

²⁷¹ *Nation*, March 23 1844.

these aggressions'.²⁷³ Goudy's tone was certainly defiant, and he warned Peel's government that, 'The Irish Presbyterians are a body whom no government can afford to despise', since they, 'form the ligament by which Ireland is bound to the British Empire'.²⁷⁴ The notion of government owing the Presbyterians' gratitude was again expressed at a Marriages meeting in Gilnahirk chaired by the Rev. Dr. Coulter, where one speaker commented that Government, 'cannot fail to feel the necessity of acting with due regard to their great numbers', and 'ought to feel...grateful to the Presbyterians of Ulster, for their conduct during late years'²⁷⁵ (*i.e.* in opposing Repeal of the Union). By contrast, non-subscribing Presbyterian opinion had pulled back from the Marriages controversy, with their organ, the *Northern Whig* denouncing the 'absurd strain of violence indulged in' by the orthodox ministers. But as this chapter will demonstrate, the division between the General Assembly and the Remonstrant Synod on the marriages issue belied a deeper acrimony taking root between the two on the question of Presbyterian congregation land rights. In this struggle, the Remonstrants found themselves rewarded by Peel's government, at the expense of the General Assembly.

By June 1844, however, it appeared that Presbyterian protest had paid off, though the *Banner* sounded a note of caution, since, 'we have experienced a sufficient number of disappointments to prevent us from cherishing high expectations of "speedy justice" from the Legislature'.²⁷⁶ Referring to the long delay in settling the question of mixed marriage rights, Colonel Rawdon M.P., told the House of Commons that whilst the Presbyterians approved of the bill, 'no gratitude was due to the Government for the manner of its introduction'.²⁷⁷

The emerging conflict between the Assembly and the Remonstrants centred on a rumbling issue concerning the ownership rights of Unitarian property which had originally been in Trinitarian possession prior to the Arian split in 1829. In its increasingly militant mood, the Assembly laid claim to all property it believed had originally belonged to it prior to the secession of the Arians.²⁷⁸ There can be no doubting the ferocity and bitterness between the two sides, as epitomized in the pages of the *Northern Whig* and *Banner of Ulster* respectively. Montgomery, who led the

²⁷² Rev. Clarke Huston, *Letters on the Present Position, Enemies, Prospects and Duties of Presbyterians* (Londonderry, 1843), pp.54-5.

²⁷³ *Times*, March 30 1844.

²⁷⁴ *BNL*, April 2 1844.

²⁷⁵ *NW*, April 13 1844.

²⁷⁶ *BU*, June 28 1844.

²⁷⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.76, 1653-4, August 1 1844.

Remonstrants' case portrayed the Assembly's actions as the over-zealous crusade of a bigoted minority – of which Cooke featured at the forefront. But as Finlay Holmes has noted, the stance of the *Banner* suggests that it extended well beyond the sentiments of a mere clique. Indeed, it was the political liberal Rev. Goudy – an avowed opponent of Cooke on many matters – who was one of the most enthusiastic advocates for reclaiming Trinitarian property.²⁷⁹ However, there was certainly an element of truth in the *Whig's* claim that many of the laity of the General Assembly were uncomfortable with their ministers' stance, for indeed some petitions in favour of the government's bill to protect current Unitarian property rights emanated from Trinitarian congregations.

Both sides bombarded Peel's government and parliament with their arguments, and clearly it was Montgomery's far less dogmatic and less hostile stance towards the government's handling of both the Scottish Church disruption and the Marriages Bill, which proved critical. His cautious position was clearly part of a broader charm offensive to bring Government down more favourably on the side of the Remonstrants in the Presbyterian property dispute.²⁸⁰ The *Banner* attacked his willingness to support Eliot's original bill on the basis that 'half a loaf' was preferable to 'no bread' at all.²⁸¹ It was in fact, argued 'An Observer' writing to the editor of the orthodox Presbyterian organ, a strategic manoeuvre, demonstrating, 'his readiness to barter Presbyterian rights to promote Unitarian interests'.²⁸²

In February the General Assembly was convened to express its horror and 'astonishment' at the government's intention to introduce a Dissenters' Chapels Bill to secure Unitarian rights.²⁸³ The *Whig's* editorial denounced the, 'Moderator of the General Assembly raising a cry, and endeavouring to excite the whole Assembly into a state of indignation at the Government.'²⁸⁴ In a speech to the Commons in June, Sir Robert Peel spoke out in defence of the bill, and in support of the Unitarians – an absolute defeat for Cooke and the General Assembly.²⁸⁵ Speaking on behalf of the government, Lord Eliot described the Dissenters' Chapels Bill as simply, 'an act of justice'.²⁸⁶ The *Whig* celebrated triumphantly, upon the Bill's passing into law,

²⁷⁸ Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, p.157.

²⁷⁹ *NW*, April 20 1844.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ Rev. Henry Montgomery to Rev. John Scott Porter, *NW*, November 8 1842.

²⁸² *BU*, December 5 1843,

²⁸³ *NW*, February 24 1844.

²⁸⁴ *NW*, April 9 1844.

²⁸⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd series vol 75, 383-9.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 76, 108-110

lavishing praise on Peel and the British government.²⁸⁷ At a celebratory dinner given in honour of Montgomery's efforts, 'lasting gratitude' was expressed towards Peel, Lord Lyndhurst as Lord Chancellor, and Lord Eliot of the cabinet.²⁸⁸ Montgomery emphasized that throughout the negotiations with government, his side had always openly admitted their hostility to the political principles of Peel's ministry, noting that government had been swung by their, 'straightforward and uncompromising honesty'.²⁸⁹

The contrast with the tone of both the General Assembly and the *Banner* could not have been more striking. At an Assembly meeting in September, the Unitarians were accused of acting, 'to poison the mind of the Government, and others, against them'.²⁹⁰ For the *Banner*, the government's response had been a clear act of revenge: 'We believe that if the Presbyterians of Ireland had not given their support to the Free Church of Scotland, they would not have been visited with this most infamous enactment....Sir Robert Peel would not dare to tamper in this way with the rights and privileges of the Church of England....But orthodox Presbyterians must be singled out as the objects of his oppression'.²⁹¹ This was reiterated at the General Assembly's annual meeting in July, where it was claimed that government's attitude had changed, 'after the Assembly had expressed their approbation of the stand which the Free Church had taken'.²⁹²

The relationship between the British Government and the General Assembly was soured further with the former's decision to increase the endowment paid to the Catholic seminary at Maynooth in 1845. As chapter Four emphasizes, Presbyterian opinion on the bill was typically divided, but it was Montgomery's Unitarians who led the way in offering their support for Peel's latest measure in favour of their Catholic countrymen. The irony of the situation was not lost on the *Banner* which commented acridly, 'Who could have supposed, a few years ago, that Sir Robert Peel would be the darling of the Unitarians?'.²⁹³ For the majority of the General Assembly who largely opposed such an endowment of Popery, salt was to be rubbed into their wounds, for the Maynooth grant was eventually placed on the Consolidated Fund list and therefore,

²⁸⁷ *NW*, June 11 1844.

²⁸⁸ *NW*, October 12 1844.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*; *Hansard*, series 3 vol 75, pp.386-7. (from Peel's speech).

²⁹⁰ *NW*, September 19 1844.

²⁹¹ *BU*, June 14 1844.

²⁹² *BU*, July 12 1844.

²⁹³ *BU*, April 25 1845.

unlike their own state grant, no longer subject to annual parliamentary renewal.²⁹⁴ For orthodox Presbyterians, the British government seemed intent on dealing them hard blows. At the same time, many evangelicals across Ireland and England accused the Assembly of failing to adequately express sufficient opposition to the Maynooth bill, blaming this on their own receipt of the *regium donum*.

Assailed from all sides, the *Banner*'s reaction was one of fury, and it was fervent in its denials that Presbyterians' receipt of state money had not rendered them silent on the government's Maynooth bill. Responding to Catholic claims that the Presbyterians' 'golden link with the crown' had made them, 'mere pensioners...to do every dirty work at her bidding', the *Banner* emphasized that, 'The Irish Presbyterian Church has no political connexion with the State'. The newspaper added that the royal grant had not, 'rendered Presbyterians here or elsewhere tools of the State'. Indeed, 'Recent events placed us in opposition to the State'.²⁹⁵ The priests' comments that Presbyterianism was not what it was forty years ago, and that the *regium donum* was to blame, were echoed by Sharman Crawford in the Commons, during the Maynooth debates. Although a staunch supporter of Irish Presbyterian interests, Crawford was resolutely opposed to the state endowment of any religious body, 'as inimical to the progress of civil and religious liberty'. 'That was proved', he argued, 'in the case of the Presbyterian clergy of Ulster, who, though they had been among the foremost in the rebellion of 1798, no sooner had an increase of their grant, which was given to them by Lord Castlereagh, than they became the friends of every Government'.²⁹⁶ Nor was it to be the last time that Presbyterians and 1798 were referred to during the Maynooth debates, with Mr. Ward also reminding the House, in the Catholics' defence, that the rebellion, 'was the work of the Presbyterians, not of the Catholics'.²⁹⁷

The *Banner* assumed an increasingly defiant tone, attacking Peel's apparent assumption that the 'paltry endowment' of *regium donum*, 'would bribe them to silence or acquiescence'. 'He will be warned in time that the Irish Presbyterians are not for sale; that no endowments in hand...can buy them; and that to his measures they will continue to present, by every means within their power, an uncompromising opposition'.²⁹⁸ Again, responding this time to claims in the London *Patriot* of a failure to confront government over its Maynooth bill, the *Banner* defended the Irish

²⁹⁴ In the early 1850s this apparent injustice continued to preoccupy Presbyterians, *BU*, July 30 1850.

²⁹⁵ *BU*, November 26 1844.

²⁹⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 79, pp.939-41.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.1141-2.

²⁹⁸ *BU*, May 9 1845.

Presbyterian position, emphasising that of late, it had thrice opposed government: the Scottish Church question, Marriages, and most recently with the Dissenters' Chapels Bill.²⁹⁹ The *Banner* expressed its outrage at an address from the Associate Presbytery of Antrim (or 'Primitive Seceders') advising the Assembly's ministers to renounce their *regium donum*, on the grounds that, 'whoever is paymaster will be master'.³⁰⁰

The most interesting editorial on the *regium donum* and relations with the state came in July 1845 under the shadow of the emerging tenant right and Presbyterian colleges questions, both of which were to again bring Presbyterian opinion into conflict with the British government. The *Banner* referred to a scheme for creating a sustentation fund with the aim of, 'superseding the present endowment to the ministers of the General Assembly'. For the first time the paper admitted that such a proposal may have to be contemplated in the near future, for whilst, 'the Regium Donum has not stifled the Presbyterian General Assembly so far', 'the principles of the existing Government, as exhibited in the Church of Scotland controversy, would naturally lead the Ministry, on the first favourable opportunity, to bring us under their control'.³⁰¹

At the General Assembly's annual meeting in July 1845 there was division on the subject of *regium donum*, and harsh criticism of the government. The elder James Gibson argued that, 'The events of the last few years too plainly showed that the Irish Presbyterian Church could not hope to be the favoured child of the State, or long to enjoy any of its bounty. The disruption of the Church of Scotland – the refusal of Government to give the Presbyterians of Ireland a college for the training of their students for the ministry, although it was at the same time endowing Maynooth with a most munificent liberality – the passing of the Dissenters' Chapels Bill,...all these indicate a disposition most unfriendly to the claims of evangelical truth'.³⁰² Gibson's comments emphasize the orthodox Presbyterian outrage that Peel's government appeared to be favouring, not only non-subscribers, but now also Irish Catholics, over themselves. Gibson questioned whether the Assembly could continue in receipt of the state bounty, but his stance was opposed by the Moderator, the Rev. James Carlile, who argued that, as yet, they had not been obliged to compromise any principle in order to enjoy state endowment. Similarly, the Rev. James Denham of Derry rejected the notion that they must abandon *regium donum*, adding that, 'Should the day, however, come,

²⁹⁹ *BU*, May 6 1845.

³⁰⁰ *BU*, April 18 1845.

³⁰¹ *BU*, June 24 1845.

³⁰² *Report of a Discussion in the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, on Monday July 7 1845, On the Presentation of Two Memorials from Belfast and Derry (respectively)* (Belfast), pp.9-10.

that their principles or privileges should be interfered with by the Government, or any attempt made to infringe on them, he was persuaded that, at whatever risk, or sacrifice, or self-denial, the ministers would be found prepared to fling their endowments to the winds'.³⁰³

The Rev. Molyneux reiterated the Assembly's past defiance of government, '...Had not the ministers of that body bearded the Government of the day on the National Education question, until they obtained what they had contended for? Had they not acted in a similar manner in respect to the Dissenters' Chapels Bill...?'³⁰⁴ Rev. John Brown also defended the *regium donum*, but added that he was well aware, 'that members of their body viewed with distrust the movements of Government, in whom they had no confidence'.³⁰⁵ James Gibson referred to the great deal which had been said by the various speakers on, 'the boldness with which this Assembly in late years, and the Synod of Ulster formerly, had resisted Government measures, in spite of any apprehensions as to their endowments', but he himself remained convinced of the negative impact of the *regium donum*.³⁰⁶

As mentioned, Cooke's successful efforts to impose religious conformity upon the members of the Synod of Ulster in 1829 and his implacable opposition to the Belfast Academical Institute throughout the succeeding years, culminated in an inevitable separation between the General Assembly and the institution's Boards by 1840. As Brooke notes, 'the latitudinarianism of the Belfast Academical Institution was becoming increasing galling'. In the 1830s Cooke led opposition to the appointments of various professors whose religious orthodoxy he questioned, and the ultimate moment came in 1838 when Henry Montgomery (of the Remonstrant Synod) and John Scott Porter (of the Presbytery of Antrim) were appointed as theology professors. The increasing bitterness and hostility between the two Presbyterian sects sealed the Assembly's decision to terminate its connection with a seminary where Arians sat as professors. The Assembly's decision to strive for a self-controlled Presbyterian college was also a natural development of the growing body of opposition, within the Assembly and beyond, to Cooke's efforts to steer Presbyterianism in a pro-establishment direction. A more fiercely independent and at times radical tone was emerging, which found a new avenue in the subsequent 'college question'. This brought perhaps the bitterest dispute so far in the Church's relationship with the British government.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp.13-14.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.17.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.19.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.22.

In 1844 at a special meeting of the General Assembly in Cookstown, a resolution was passed demanding that they should endeavour to obtain a complete college under their control, 'embracing both an undergraduate and a theological department'.³⁰⁷ A College Committee was established to oversee the plan and a deputation despatched to London to test the possibility of Government endowment of such a scheme. But the announcement in 1845 of Peel's plan of collegiate education, establishing three non-sectarian colleges across Ireland, with one in the north, clearly threatened to interfere with the Assembly's hopes. Upon the deputation's return, one of its members, the Rev. Brown, launched a bitter tirade against Rev. Drs. Edgar and Cooke, also members of the deputation, denouncing what he described as the 'dextrous manoeuvring' of the two Belfast doctors.³⁰⁸ Brown described Cooke's behind-the-scenes negotiations with the government in advance, and his awareness that a purely theological college in the vicinity of the proposed Queen's College, was the best to be expected. Brown argued fervently for the Assembly's 1844 resolution, and attacked the submissive and accepting manner of Cooke and Edgar in their negotiations with government:

... to me there was nothing proposed that seemed different from the constitution of the Belfast Institution, except that Government proposed to take to themselves all the patronage, and to remove that popular constitution that gave it all its efficiency, and that afforded us some chance of exercising therein a reasonable influence.³⁰⁹

Brown denounced Cooke and Edgar for submitting to 'Erastian principles' for Presbyterian education.³¹⁰ The General Assembly thus found itself bitterly divided on the question of accepting the government's offer, and agreeing to permit their ministers to receive an undergraduate education at the government's Queen's College, or holding their resolve to fight for their own self-controlled college. On the one side, the 'clique' of Belfast ministers, led by Cooke, advocated co-operation in the government enterprise, whilst Brown and his allies, notably Rev. Richard Dill and the Presbyterian elder, James Gibson, accused them of being blinded by the lure of positions and salaries within the new institution.³¹¹ The *Banner of Ulster* denounced the initial Queen's College plans as 'a deliberate insult to the Presbyterians of Ireland', adding, 'It is quite

³⁰⁷ Latimer, *History*, p.213.

³⁰⁸ Rev. John Brown, D.D., *Narrative of Proceedings and Negotiations for Establishing a Presbyterian College in Ireland; with Remarks on the Management of the "Banner of Ulster"; together With a Petition for Manses and Schools, Submitted to Government in 1844*. (Belfast, 1846), p.4.

³⁰⁹ Brown, *Narrative*, p.7.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.7.

evident that our present rulers have but little regard for the feelings of the Presbyterians of Ireland'.³¹²

In a letter *To the members of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in connexion with the General Assembly*, James Gibson reminded the Rev. James Carlile (then Moderator of the Assembly) of his defiance of government back in 1817 when Lord Castlereagh had threatened them over their connection with BAI.³¹³ Gibson argued that Sir Robert Peel's scheme was even 'more dangerous than the threat of his predecessor' and he asked, 'what claim can the State, which has shewn such unequivocal disregard to Presbyterian rights, and to evangelical principles, put forward to the confidence of our body?...what reason is there to induce Irish Presbyterians to place themselves under a yoke which...may become most painfully oppressive?' 'The whole machinery of the intended colleges', argued Gibson, 'is to be in the hands, and all of its movements are to be regulated by the will of, the Crown'. As for the Presbyterian Church, he concluded that, 'With the exception of the threat of the late Lord Castlereagh, in 1817, there has not occurred, since the grant of the Regium Donum in 1803, any occasion on which there was laid upon it a duty equally imperative, to record its adherence to principle, in opposition to the measures of Government'.³¹⁴

Such sentiments were echoed by Rev. Richard Dill of Dublin who argued for nothing less than full adherence to the 1844 Cookstown resolution and he bitterly attacked the behaviour of the College Committee's visit to London (including Cooke, Morgan, Stewart and Edgar). Dill lamented that, 'The stately ship dwindled to a mere punt, dregged after the stern of the Government galleon, and the burden of the negotiation consisted in procuring a little higher wages for one or two of the crew'. Far from encouraging Cooke's campaign for harmony with the establishment, notably the British government itself, Dill emphasized, 'What do any party in the State care for Presbyterianism or Orthodoxy?...Has the lesson, taught by the disruption of the Scottish Church, been so soon forgotten?' The Dublin minister emphasized his anger that Government seemed under the impression that, 'they have only to gratify Presbyterians, by one or two appointments as to place and persons, in order to secure their support of the proposed academy'.³¹⁵

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.17.

³¹² *BU*, May 13 1845.

³¹³ *BU*, October 10 1845.

³¹⁴ *BU*, October 17 1845.

³¹⁵ *BU*, November 18 1845.

The Rev. John Rogers of Comber, soon to rise to fame for his prominent role in the Tenant Right agitation, supported the arguments of Brown and Dill against their involvement with the Queen's College. Referring to the government's appointments to conciliate Presbyterian opinion, particularly the selection of Rev. P.S. Henry as its first President, Rogers noted, 'I count little on the Presidents, for they will stand by their employers rather than by their respective Churches'. Rogers concluded with an attack on the Tory ministry who had initiated the scheme, noting that, 'Nothing has been wanting on the part of Government. Sir Robert Peel has prepared and polished his hook, and to court the coy fish, he has baited it with bursaries'.³¹⁶ The *Banner* declared in January 1846, 'We dislike the investiture of more Patronage in the Executive. The dependence of Professors on the Government seems to us a very objectionable mode of management'.³¹⁷

The antagonism of the 'fierce dispute'³¹⁸ was carried into the annual meeting of the General Assembly in July 1846, with Brown, Rogers and Gibson reiterating their hostility to the scheme. The latter noted that, 'he had no confidence in any Government' to secure Presbyterian rights. But other speakers in the Assembly expressed concern at the, 'evils of having...a Presbyterian Maynooth...where the candidates for the ministry would receive their education separately from all those with whom they were to be associated, as soon as they entered upon their work'.³¹⁹ Similar sentiments had been expressed in a letter from a Presbyterian student to the *Whig*.³²⁰ The *Whig* newspaper, representing largely non-subscribing and urban middle class Presbyterian opinion, admired the Queen's Colleges scheme for its non-sectarian principle.³²¹ Writing to Emerson Tennent, Henry Montgomery expressed his hope that the northern college would be established, 'free of sectarianism (except in the theological classes)', rather than, 'crushed down into a Presbyterian Maynooth'.³²² But the largest Presbyterian synod – the General Assembly – remained bitterly divided at the prospect of increased government influence in the education of its future ministers.

Events in the college debate took an even more destructive turn in 1846 when Rev. Richard Dill of Dublin announced that a member of his congregation, Mrs. Martha Magee, the widow of a Presbyterian minister, had bequeathed £20,000 to the General

³¹⁶ *BU*, January 26 1846.

³¹⁷ *BU*, January 2 1846.

³¹⁸ *NW*, September 1 1846.

³¹⁹ *BU*, July 10; 14 1846.

³²⁰ *NW*, December 2 1845.

³²¹ *NW*, August 27 1846.

Assembly to establish a complete Presbyterian college. Significantly, the trustees of the bequest included Dill himself, Rev. Brown and Gibson. Holmes notes that it was news of this bequest – and the fact that the Assembly now had the money to make their college schemes a reality – that prompted Lord John Russell’s new Whig government to offer to endow the Presbyterians with additional chairs in a Presbyterian theological faculty.³²³ Mrs. Magee’s bequest on the condition of a complete Presbyterian college suggests that among the laity, there was considerable momentum for a self-controlled institution beyond the grasp of state. Debate raged between the College Committee and the Magee Trustees on the interpretation of the will. Those in the Assembly of 1846 who signed a protest against co-operation with Queen’s, included, Revs. John Brown, Clarke Houston, John Barnett, James Denham, Richard Dill, John Rogers, and the elder, James Gibson.³²⁴

So hostile was each side by 1847, that the decision was taken to place the controversy about the terms of the will in to the hands of the Court of Chancery. The same arguments were repeated at the General Assembly meeting in 1849. Rogers opposed the argument that the Queen’s Colleges project was simply a natural continuation of the government’s National Education Scheme, which they had formally endorsed in 1840. He argued that whereas the Presbyterian Church had, ‘obtained from the Board a complete system of religious education and the alone control [*sic*] over their schools’, in the colleges, ‘the Presbyterian Church was hardly consulted’.³²⁵ Commenting on the scenes at the late Assembly, the *Belfast Newsletter* castigated those who were, ‘assuming an attitude of needless antagonism to the Government’, urging the Assembly to show ‘due deference to her Majesty’s government’. The paper approved that the Assembly had agreed to allow its students to enter Queen’s College on a temporary basis to receive their undergraduate education.³²⁶ A lengthy poem published on the dispute satirized the position of the College Committee:

Some say there’s no need for a college at all,
 We want but a good Theological Hall;
 Tho’ the *Will* names a college, we easily might
 Say the hall was a college, then all would be right.
 And there stands Queen’s College, – how can you oppose

³²² Rev. Henry Montgomery, Dunmurry, to James Emerson Tennent, February 25 1845, PRONI, D/2922/B/25/2.

³²³ Holmes, *Cooke*, p.170; *Times*, November 19 1846.

³²⁴ Brown, *Narrative*, pp.23-4.

³²⁵ *BU*, October 5 1849.

³²⁶ *BNL*, October 5 1849.

Whatever Lord John and the Queen may propose?
 She endows us with bounties, magnificent, royal;
 And to set up a rival would prove us disloyal:
 So take heed to your conduct, for fear you estrange her, –
 Such acts, you must know, puts the *Donum* in danger
 This kind *nursing mother* minds all our affairs;
 She has richly endowed Theological Chairs,
 Two old and four new ones maintained by her treasure;
 So be wise, don't awaken the royal displeasure.³²⁷

In a crucial letter 'To the Presbyterians of Ulster', following the Assembly's meeting, Richard Dill spoke out bitterly against the fact that, 'The Government plants a college in Presbyterian Ulster mainly for the education of Presbyterians, and yet allows them no manner of control in its principles or appointments'. Above all, Dill expressed the sentiments of a growing body of the Assembly and laity, tiring of Cooke and his allies' determination to dominate proceedings: 'That these gentlemen frequently manage to carry matters their own way, when surrounded by a certain clique in Belfast, is too notorious to be doubted'.³²⁸

In September 1850 the *Banner* reported with disgust the news that Presbyterians were not represented on the newly announced Queen's College Senate, although 'Episcopal and Roman Catholic ecclesiastics have been appointed'. In a mood of angry defiance, the newspaper accused Government of an open 'insult' to the church, and of having 'broken faith with the Presbyterian body', warning that, 'Her Majesty's advisers may discover, when too late, the impolicy of provoking the Irish Presbyterians'.³²⁹ This mood of defiance against the British government was manifest in Dill's next letter to the Presbyterians of Ireland. 'Nothing', he argued, 'has been done, nor is there the slightest hope held out of anything being done, in reference to these colleges, from a regard to the principles or wishes of Presbyterians'. Indeed, even with government's token offer of Presbyterian appointments,

Are we not already sufficiently in the power of the State? Has it not in its hands the education of our children? Has it not in its hands, to a great extent, the support of our ministers? And shall we complete its dominion by placing in its hands the education of our ministers?....Who that has the least regard for

³²⁷ *The Collegiad; or, The Will of Widow Magee* (Coleraine, 1852), pp.7-8.

³²⁸ *BU*, October 16 1849.

³²⁹ *BU*, September 27 1850.

Presbyterian independence can view without alarm, such complete dependence on the State?³³⁰

Dill lamented how, 'it has been the singular misfortune of the Irish Presbyterian Church to have been led and ruled by those who sought their own aggrandisement, or the interests of their party, or of their associates and agents.'³³¹ This stance was reiterated by the Rev. A. P. Goudy in June 1851 in a letter to the Presbyterians of Ireland, which launched a joint tirade on government and those within the Assembly, who desired closer links between the Presbyterian Church and the established order. Referring to the government, Goudy condemned the fact that, 'by the course pursued by a dominant clique of our Church, you are now tied to them and made dependent on them, for the whole of the undergraduate education of your future ministers'.³³² There was bitter criticism of the apparent deference shown to the Roman Catholic Church in the establishment of Queen's, leading Goudy to conclude that, 'the Government have not cared, do not care, and, we may fairly conclude, will not in future care one straw for the interests of the Presbyterian Church in the regulation of these institutions'.³³³

At a meeting held in Belfast in November 1851 those Presbyterians 'who are favourable to the establishment of a Presbyterian College in Derry, on the foundation of Mrs. Magee's bequest', gathered to show their support for Dill and the trustees. The meeting was not merely a show of support for a Presbyterian College, but more widely, a gathering to assert independence against Cooke's policy of government conciliation. Those who spoke included the ministers Goudy, Dill, Rogers and Brown, and the radical Presbyterian journalist, McKnight, who had also been vocal in challenging Cooke's direction and domination. The chairman was emphatic when he declared, 'I am one of those who think our Church bound to the State by too many golden links, and that she ought to do with as little Government money as possible'.³³⁴ Rev. John Brown subsequently addressed a letter to Henry Cooke, stating that, 'By dexterous movements, your party have been able to appear to control the Assembly; but rest assured that...the time is not remote when our body will fling off a dominion felt to be intolerable'.³³⁵ In defence of Cooke and the College Committee, Robert Wilson emphasized the pragmatism which had dictated their acceptance of a purely theological hall at Queen's,

³³⁰ *BU*, October 8 1850.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

³³² *Londonderry Standard*, January 9 1851.

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ *BNL*, November 12 1851.

³³⁵ *BNL*, December 1 1851.

on the grounds that, 'Our negotiations with Government for a complete college...proved utterly fruitless'.

The slow decision of the Court of Chancery allowed the ferocity of the dispute to increase rather than diminish, and when it gave a verdict in 1851 it was in favour of the Magee Trustees.³³⁶ But the matter was not immediately laid to rest, for division continued over the siting of the future Presbyterian College, with Dill and the trustees determinedly (and successfully) insisting on its establishment in Londonderry. In fact, both sides in the Assembly could claim victory; a majority agreed to accept undergraduate courses at Queen's alongside their own theological college (established in Belfast in 1853), whilst the more independently minded ministers and laity also succeeded in establishing the Presbyterian Magee College in Derry in 1865.³³⁷ Commenting on Dill's stance on the college question, Peter Brooke has noted, 'his excitement at the freedom a complete college would give the Ulster Presbyterians to develop themselves as a distinct religious community, firmly grounded in their own principles and able to defy government, the Catholics and the Church of Ireland. The spirit bears a resemblance to the spirit of Drennan in the early days of the Belfast Academical Institution'.³³⁸

The question of collegiate education was not the only source of conflict between the Presbyterian Church and the State at this time. In the late 1840s a significant dispute erupted between the General Assembly and Dublin Castle over the *regium donum* and the behaviour of a Castle employee, George Mathews. In 1847, in light of the hardships of famine, the Moderator had petitioned the Lord Lieutenant to temporarily waive the condition which stipulated that a congregation must first provide an annual stipend of £35 to its minister, in order for him to be eligible to receive the government money. The *Whig*, still highly critical of the General Assembly since the clash over the Dissenters' Chapels Bill, agreed with these sentiments. But it singled out Cooke and his clique as the main source of the problem: 'it is evident that among the half-dozen or dozen Ministers who rule the Assembly, there is a desperate love of Government-hunting, – a trusting greatly to the Treasury, and little to the independence of the people'.³³⁹

³³⁶ Holmes, *Cooke*, p.175.

³³⁷ T.W. Moody, 'The Irish University Question of the Nineteenth Century', in *History*, vol. 43 (1958), pp.90-109.

³³⁸ Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, pp.172-3.

³³⁹ *NW*, September 30 1847.

But the report produced by Dublin Castle in response to the Assembly's request caused a furore, for the stance of its architect, Mathews, towards *regium donum* and the Presbyterian Church in general, was hostile and unsympathetic. The *Belfast Newsletter* attacked the Chief Secretary for having allowed a junior clerk, a mere 'Castle functionary', to decide such an important question, accusing Mathews of deliberate misinformation on important statistics referring to numbers of congregations and members.³⁴⁰ In a letter from 'Observer' on the subject, the writer denounced the government's careless handling of events: 'In a return ordered by the House of Commons, they [the Presbyterians] are exhibited to the empire as being handed over to an official in Dublin Castle'.³⁴¹ As a result of an attack on Mathews by the Rev. John Dill, the Presbyterian minister of Clonmel found himself refused the *regium donum* in 1848 on a technicality. Dill received the support of the Presbyterian press and the General Assembly, although, as Holmes notes, Cooke attempted (fatally) to defend Mathews as essentially a good friend to the Presbyterian Church.³⁴²

The *Derry Standard* deplored Dublin Castle and the government's handling of events, and Cooke's own position was exposed to scrutiny. 'We did not conceive it possible', argued the *Standard*, 'that Government could have acted in this manner, under existing arrangements, by which the bounty cannot be withdrawn from one Minister unless it be taken from the whole body'. Moreover, McKnight's paper denounced the fact that Sir William Somerville (Secretary of State) had refused 'immediate redress' on the matter once it had come to light publicly.³⁴³ The row escalated as the government refused to relent, 'only so far as to intimate that all future instructions on the Regium Donum would be issued by the Chief or Under Secretaries rather than by Mathews'.³⁴⁴ Indeed, out of Parliament, it was the Catholic M.P for Carlow, John Sadleir and the Presbyterian director of Sadleir's bank, Wilson Kennedy,³⁴⁵ who bombarded the government with demands for an inquiry into Mathews, whom it was emerging, had a chequered and dubious past.³⁴⁶ Mathews – real name, Duncan Chisholm – was revealed to be a bankrupt, who had fled Scotland and who had defrauded almost £1,000 from the *regium donum* fund between 1846 and 1848. In May 1850, the *Banner* reported that Chisholm had absconded from Dublin Castle,

³⁴⁰ *BNL*, October 1 1847.

³⁴¹ *BNL*, October 12 1847.

³⁴² Holmes, *Cooke*, p.173. Cooke held the position of Regium Donum Agent in the Assembly, and had therefore dealt with Mathews on many occasions.

³⁴³ *LS*, April 14 1848.

³⁴⁴ James O'Shea, *Prince of Swindlers: John Sadleir, M.P., 1813-56* (Dublin, 1999), pp.120-4.

³⁴⁵ Kennedy was also one of Rev. Dill's elders.

and denounced the fact that someone with such a notorious past, was ever allowed such, 'potent influence' over the *regium donum*. It also referred to the fact that Cooke had testified in Mathews' favour.³⁴⁷ Its editorial reiterated the 'incalculable obligations' owed to Sadleir for his pursuit of government on the issue.³⁴⁸

The affair increased antagonism towards the British administration and also towards Cooke for the latter's carelessness in allowing such a fraud to have taken place and for his attempted defence of Mathews' conduct.³⁴⁹ In his attacks on Cooke over the college question, the Rev. Richard Dill could not resist referring to Cooke's evidence, 'for his friend George Mathews'.³⁵⁰ During the bitter debates in the General Assembly on the subject of tenant right, the Rev. John Rogers gleefully added to Cooke's discomfiture by referring to an old Scotch song 'Duncan was a lad of grace'.³⁵¹ Writing in 1852 on the lack of Presbyterian political representation to safeguard their rights, the Rev. A.P. Goudy recalled how, 'For several years a Castle clerk, now a fugitive from justice, trode us beneath his heel'.³⁵²

Cooke once more found the weight of Presbyterian opinion against him in another *regium donum* controversy in 1849, involving the selection of a new minister to the Rosemary Street Congregation in Belfast. Cooke's attempts to prevent them selecting their minister of choice on the grounds that the latter would not accept his *regium donum* entitlement, ended in defeat at the Synod of Belfast in May 1849. It was clear that Cooke desired absolute and unquestioned acceptance of state money by the General Assembly, and allegations of his 'tyrannical' behaviour were rife.³⁵³ Familiar opponents of Cooke's pro-establishment policy, including the elder James Gibson, the journalist James McKnight, and the Rev. John Brown, lent their support on behalf of the Rosemary Street Congregation. The elder Robert Workman told the Synod of Belfast that, 'The Confession of Faith, with its 23rd and 31st chapters, was thought, by many, voluminous enough for absolute signature; we may now have a 34th chapter, in which it shall be declared, that not only shall the Civil Magistrate take order to preserve unity in the Church, to call Synods, and to provide that all be done in them according to the

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁷ *BU*, May 10 1850

³⁴⁸ *BU*, June 24 1851.

³⁴⁹ Holmes, *Cooke*, p.174.

³⁵⁰ *BU*, November 8 1850.

³⁵¹ John A. Crozier, *Henry Montgomery* (1888), p.13.

³⁵² *LS*, June 24 1852.

³⁵³ *NW*, February 8 1849.

mind of God, but that all the Ministers of the Church shall accept the King's provision – shall eat of the King's meat'.³⁵⁴

What the Mathews controversy had also re-ignited was a more general debate on the merits or otherwise of *regium donum*, and the grant was assailed by a variety of voices in the House of Commons during the annual debate on its renewal. The General Assembly even had to rebuff attacks on the grant from Rev. John Paul's Eastern Reformed Synod.³⁵⁵ This, alongside the Mathews' debacle, increased the Presbyterian clamour for the *regium donum* to be placed on the Consolidated Fund, as the Maynooth grant had been.³⁵⁶ The *Newsletter* had urged this course back in 1848, commenting that, 'It is a scandal and a discredit to the Legislature...that the vote of Regium Donum should be the subject of an annual Parliamentary skirmish'.³⁵⁷ The *Banner* described the process of debating the matter as, 'the annual insult...offered to the Presbyterian clergy of Ireland'.³⁵⁸ In earlier defiant form, the *Banner* had warned what would be the consequences should government ever consider withdrawing the grant. Such a move, it noted would, 'madden the Presbyterians against the existing Establishment, for they would justly attribute the oppression of their ministers to the unfair dealing of Episcopalian Senators'. Furthermore, the 'most tremendous agitation' it would awaken in Ulster, would serve to strengthen 'the ravings of Repeal against English misgovernment'.³⁵⁹

Emphasizing the need for the *regium donum* to be made officially permanent, the *Derry Standard* recalled how the Synod of Ulster had stood firm against Lord Castlereagh's threat to withdraw the money in 1817. 'It is said by some that Regium Donum makes the recipients subservient to Government, and less attached to the people. Yet it is a remarkable fact that in the present agitation for tenant right....The only tribunes of the people are the endowed Presbyterian ministers. In two other recent struggles against the Government, they bore the brunt of the battle. We refer to National Education and the Marriage question'.³⁶⁰ The next major issue which brought Presbyterians into further defiant opposition to the British government for many years, was indeed that of tenant right. Once again the controversy widened the fissure between ministers such as Henry Cooke, conservative in politics, and pro-establishment

³⁵⁴ Proceedings of the Synod of Belfast, in *NW*, May 12 1849.

³⁵⁵ *BU*, February 17 1847.

³⁵⁶ *BU*, February 15 1850.

³⁵⁷ *BNL*, July 4 1848.

³⁵⁸ *BU*, July 30 1850.

³⁵⁹ *BU*, June 30 1848.

³⁶⁰ *LS*, February 28 1850.

in outlook, and those who assumed a radical and independent stance as advocates of the Presbyterian people, in opposition to both landlords and the British government.

The failure of the potato crops from 1845 onwards and the resultant famine exacerbated the precarious situation of many tenants across Ireland, leading to a focused campaign to achieve greater security for tenants through the legalisation of the tenant right custom. These events concentrated Presbyterian attention in the north on not only the British government's ineffectual handling of the famine, but also their persistent refusal to yield to the demands of an energetic tenant right campaign. This harnessed Presbyterian anger against a succession of British administrations, apparently dedicated to the maintenance of the rights of landlords over tenants – for the ‘backbone’³⁶¹ of the Presbyterian Church were the tenant farmers in the north. The Devon Commission of 1845 had concluded unfavourably on the custom of tenant right, thus prompting speculation of its imminent demise. When Lord Stanley's proposed Tenant Compensation Bill became known, there was a howl of protest from the Presbyterian press and public at the Government's unjust tampering with this ancient custom.³⁶² One ‘Co. Armagh Farmer’ writing to ‘Lord Stanley’ warned that if, ‘Government intends, either completely to destroy the Tenant-Right of Ulster, or else to interfere with it to such an extent as to enable avaricious Landlords to fritter away, by piecemeal, our dear and much valued privilege...let me advise your Lordship and you [*sic*] colleagues to beware!’ The author of the letter warned that ‘every tenant in Ulster’ would, ‘at once give his adhesion to Conciliation Hall’ and repeal. Moreover, he advised government ministers against a policy of ‘Divide and Conquer’, adding, ‘Let them not for one moment...imagine that they could, on such a subject as Tenant-Right’, create discussion [*sic*]³⁶³ between us and our Roman-Catholic fellow-countrymen’. The writer's defiant stance was emphasized in his warning that even if government, ‘poured all the troops belonging to the British crown...still would their attempt prove vain and impotent’³⁶⁴.

Whilst the opposition of the Presbyterian tenant farmers to the government's plans was strong, praise was lavished on the proposed bill of William Sharman Crawford, M.P.³⁶⁵ One farmer warned that should Government fail to recognise and secure tenant right, then the ‘Hearts of Steel’ agitation of the 1780s would be resurrected.³⁶⁶ By 1847 ‘A Co. Down Farmer’ writing on the subject, deplored

³⁶¹ Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterian Heritage*, p.130.

³⁶² *BU*, June 24 1845.

³⁶³ The only possible sense of this is that the intended word was ‘disunion’.

³⁶⁴ *BU*, July 15 1845.

³⁶⁵ See a letter to Crawford from a ‘A Farmer’ in County Antrim, *NW*, March 4 1847.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Government's failure to offer a tenant right bill and urged tenants to establish their own associations to achieve their goal.³⁶⁷ As the General Assembly officially joined the fray, declaring in an address to the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Clarendon, their support for tenant right and their desire that it be 'universally extended and legally confirmed',³⁶⁸ the campaign in the north rapidly gained momentum. When the latest government bill, proposed by Sir William Somerville in 1848, became known,³⁶⁹ Presbyterian opinion roundly condemned the measure in vitriolic terms. Sharman Crawford warned a tenant right meeting in Lurgan that the Government was under the thralldom of landlords, whilst a Presbyterian Minister, the Rev. James Moorehead declared that, 'they had but one object there that day – that was, to record their condemnation of Sir William Somerville's Bill'.³⁷⁰ In a letter to the editor of the *Banner*, 'Omega' made a similar attack on the government bill, arguing that it would curtail, if not destroy, the tenant right.³⁷¹

The usual divisions amongst the ministers of the General Assembly were quick to emerge on the subject, Cooke proving himself the pioneer of a soft approach to government. At a meeting of the Synod of Belfast in 1848, the Rev. John Rogers of Comber protested against the proposed address of loyalty to the British government (drawn up in light of the recent Young Ireland attempted rebellion). Rogers argued that, 'in the address there was an expression of sympathy with the Government. Now he for one could not understand why that should be the case, when that same Government had introduced a bill, on the face of which it had been stated that there is no such thing as tenant right in Ulster'. Responding to Cooke's opposition to his stance, Rogers, 'expressed his belief that ministers of the Synod were not prepared to place themselves at the disposal of the Government...He for one would be sorry to place himself at the service of a Government which could give the people of this province such a slap in the face as they had done'. Whilst affirming, their 'loyalty to the throne', Rogers warned that, 'they should not volunteer their services towards a Government which had acted towards them so very cavalierly'. Rogers' uncompromising comments received a horrified rebuke from Henry Cooke, but the Comber minister did succeed in having an expression relating to tenant right included in the address.³⁷²

³⁶⁷ *Nation*, June 26 1847.

³⁶⁸ 'Address of the General Assembly to the Lord Lieutenant' in, *NW*, October 2 1847.

³⁶⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd series vol.97, 874-7.

³⁷⁰ *NW*, March 28 1848.

³⁷¹ *BU*, June 16 1848.

³⁷² *BU*, May 12 1848.

In 1849 public opinion in the north of Ireland was gripped by the rate-in-aid issue, in which a campaign was mounted to oppose the government's plan to levy the solvent poor law unions in Ireland in order to save those bankrupt unions in Connaught and Munster. Lord Castlereagh³⁷³ who led northern opposition to the plan, informed Parliament that, 'if this measure was passed, he would not give one month's purchase' for the tranquillity of the north'. Despite a frenetic campaign of meetings, petitions, and press coverage, the Government succeeded in hurrying through the necessary legislation in March 1849. James Grant, in his study of the rate-in-aid crisis has emphasized, 'the unrelieved condemnation' of the government exhibited during these protests.³⁷⁴ The *Banner of Ulster* reported on the 'surge' in resistance to this contemplated measure of Lord John Russell and at one such gathering in Belfast, a number of non-subscribing ministers were in attendance, including the Rev. J.S. Porter, Rev. F. Blakely and Rev. William Bruce.³⁷⁵ At a meeting of Lord Downshire's Banbridge tenantry, the *Times* reported that one speaker had declared, 'We tell Lord J. Russell this, that the spirit of '82 (an enthusiastic burst of applause) – the spirit that animated the Volunteers of Dungannon – still lives'; the London newspaper reported with horror on the 'disaffection in the north'.³⁷⁶ At a meeting in Comber to oppose the measure, Rogers referred to, 'the intense feeling of disgust'³⁷⁷ at the scheme, adding, 'we feel it our duty to warn her Majesty's Government that the amount likely to be collected, if the proposed measure become law, will be more than counterbalanced by the cost of collection, and the alienation of those who have always been the firm friends of British connexion'.³⁷⁸ Indeed, in the early months Grant notes that, 'the early threats of widespread resistance to the rate in aid had been acted upon', but by 1851 many unions had, 'conceded defeat'.³⁷⁹

There is no doubt that the rate-in-aid issue intensified Presbyterian bitterness towards the government. In an editorial in the *Banner* in October 1849, the newspaper made a stinging attack on the government, alleging that they had exaggerated the severity of Young Ireland's bungled attempt at rebellion, in order to 'divert the attention' of Orangemen away from the issue of tenant right, because, 'the Tenant Right

³⁷³ The future Fourth Marquis of Londonderry.

³⁷⁴ James Grant, 'The Great Famine and the poor law in Ulster: the rate-in-aid issue of 1849', in *Irish Historical Studies*, 27, no.105 (May 1990), pp.30-47, quote at p.43. See also, James Grant, 'The Great Famine in County Down', in *Down: History and Society*, pp.353-381.

³⁷⁵ *BU*, March 6 1849, (supplement).

³⁷⁶ *Times*, March 5 1849.

³⁷⁷ Grant, 'Great Famine and the poor law', p.46.

³⁷⁸ *BU*, March 27 1849.

³⁷⁹ Grant, 'Great Famine and the poor law', p.46.

Association was proceeding vigorously, and fast swamping the Repeal movement'. The newspaper added that, 'the Government had no idea of *carrying* an effective measure of tenant right, unless its members could not possibly avoid it'.³⁸⁰

A reader of the *Banner of Ulster* once more invoked the spirit of the 1782 Volunteers, writing on the urgency of co-ordinating the activities of tenant right associations across the north.³⁸¹ Lord Londonderry was incandescent with rage that Government would not make a move against the General Assembly for allowing so many of its ministers to take the lead in demanding tenant right, and in denouncing the excesses of landlordism.³⁸² Lord Clarendon, the Lord Lieutenant, was clearly aware that any such attempt on the part of government to censure the ministers involved would simply encourage their defiance. Officially, Dublin Castle informed Londonderry that government did not feel such interference 'justified',³⁸³ but privately Clarendon made it clear that Government feared the effect of antagonising the Assembly further, for they, 'would consider their independence menaced by any admonition from the Government'.³⁸⁴

But it was Londonderry's suggestion in the House of Lords in February 1850, that the *regium donum* should be removed from those ministers involved, which created particular problems for the Lord Lieutenant, as it stimulated a new and aggressive wave of Presbyterian defiance. Clarendon wrote privately to Londonderry, 'I will not disguise from you my regret that you should have alluded last night to the Regium Donum as I fear that it may induce the whole of the Presbyterian Ministry to make common cause with the delinquents of their body....for they will pretend that their independence is attacked', and he urged 'great caution' in handling the General Assembly.³⁸⁵ Clarendon's fears were far from unfounded, and the *Derry Standard* led the spirit of Presbyterian defiance by stating, 'Were the Government now to attempt to make the *Regium Donum* a gag on this question of tenant right, Ulster would soon be in ferment. The General Assembly would be convoked, and the power that dared to intimidate the clergy, and to insinuate that the Bounty was the price of political subservience, would be indignantly defied to do its worst'.³⁸⁶ The paper noted that

³⁸⁰ *BU*, October 26 1849.

³⁸¹ *BU*, February 15 1850

³⁸² *Times*, March 7 1850.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁴ Lord Clarendon, Dublin Castle to Lord Londonderry, March 1 1850, DCRO, D/Lo/C 111 (32).

³⁸⁵ Clarendon to Londonderry, February 23 1850, D/Lo/C 111 (15).

³⁸⁶ *LS*, February 28 1850.

Londonderry's comments, 'would fit the tone of government in '98 better than...this age'.³⁸⁷

The Rev. William Dobbin, a vocal tenant right campaigner, attacked Londonderry's suggestion,³⁸⁸ and the Rev. Mecredy was equally scathing of the notion that, 'by withdrawing the paltry regium donum', the ministers would be prevented from speaking out.³⁸⁹ The Rev. J. B. Rentoul expressed his 'utter contempt for 'all such attempts to weaken the free expression of Presbyterian opinion', arguing that, 'They would not and could not be the tools of the State', let alone for their 'miserable pittance of Bounty'.³⁹⁰ In April 1850, speaking at a demonstration at Ballymoney to oppose Sir William Somerville's bill, Rev. J. L. Rentoul described how, 'the brethren of his own church had shown themselves prepared to risk the Regium Donum', in support of the 'just and proper' cause of tenant right.³⁹¹ It is perhaps unsurprising that the *Banner* reported the 'marked coldness' which had greeted Clarendon on his visit to the north of Ireland in September 1850.³⁹² Even the usually hostile *Scotsman* noted that, 'the pensioned Presbyterian will be found extracting the gag of Regium Donum, and expressing the sentiments he cherished some thirty years ago'.³⁹³

Lord Londonderry wrote to Clarendon in despair at the Government's refusal to act, warning that, 'if some measures are not taken with Spirit and Determination by the Government – if they will not risk a point in the Law or dread offending the Synod &c....we shall never have peace in our district'.³⁹⁴ In his response, Clarendon once more revealed the government's fear of 'arousing the independent spirit of the Body'.³⁹⁵ In a review of Presbyterianism between the years of 1800 and 1850, the *Banner* looked back to Castlereagh's augmentation of the *regium donum* in 1803, claiming with no small amount of pride that the money had never stifled their thought.³⁹⁶ Rogers was more explicit in his speech at a Tenant League demonstration in County Armagh, vowing that, 'it would not act as a padlock on the mouths of Presbyterian ministers'.³⁹⁷

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁸ *BU*, March 1 1850.

³⁸⁹ *NW*, March 2 1850 (speaking at a tenant right meeting in Ballynahinch, Co. Down).

³⁹⁰ *BU*, March 22 1850 (speaking at a tenant right meeting in Cairncullagh [*sic*] Presbyterian Church, Dervock).

³⁹¹ *BU*, April 9 1850.

³⁹² *BU*, September 17 1850.

³⁹³ Extract quoted in the *NW*, December 13 1850.

³⁹⁴ Londonderry, Mount Stewart, to Clarendon, November 12 1850, Bodelian Library, MSS. Clarendon Deposit Irish, Box 18. Londonderry presumably means the General Assembly when he refers to it by its former title, the synod of Ulster. 'Our district' he refers to is Co. Down.

³⁹⁵ Clarendon to Londonderry, D/Lo/C 111 (70).

³⁹⁶ *BU*, January 7 1851.

³⁹⁷ *BU*, January 31 1851.

It was evident that many Presbyterian ministers had certainly not been bribed into submission to the British government and adherence to the established order by the state bounty. It is not surprising that the involvement of so many Presbyterians in the tenant right movement, and by 1850, in the Tenant League of north and south, caused pro-establishment figures such as Cooke such disquiet.

On the issue of tenant right, the government was bitterly assailed by Presbyterians, both laymen and ministers. 'English tyranny and misrule' was denounced by one speaker within the walls of the Cairncullagh Presbyterian Church,³⁹⁸ whilst the *Derry Standard* speculated on how a 'united voice' from Ireland would, 'startle Downing-Street' when plans for a national tenant right conference was first suggested in May 1850.³⁹⁹ It was Presbyterians who dominated the deputation to London to express opposition to Somerville's bill, and Rev. Rogers stated the case to Sir James Graham.⁴⁰⁰ Three months later, in a somewhat less diplomatic role, Rogers denounced Sir William Somerville as a 'blockhead', and he criticised the government's handling of the tenant right question.⁴⁰¹ Moreover, he declared Lord Clarendon to be, 'our decided enemy',⁴⁰² and speaking at Ballybay, Rev. David Bell told his audience, 'I tell Lord Clarendon.....that this will not do. We shall have governors that will know the people's wants'.⁴⁰³ Little wonder the Lord Lieutenant referred to the Presbyterian ministers involved as a 'pestilential nuisance' in a private correspondence to Londonderry.⁴⁰⁴ At a large Tenant League demonstration in Newtownards at the close of 1850, James McKnight denounced Lord John Russell's administration for encouraging sectarian feeling in order to destroy the League. These sentiments were echoed by Rogers in typically dramatic style: 'What is it to you whether Toryism or Lord John Russellism rules the State, if you and your children are oppressed?.....whether a flag of orange, or of green floats over the country, while the present state of law crushes without distinction....'.⁴⁰⁵

As results failed to be achieved, the rhetoric of the Presbyterian Tenant League speakers on the subject of the British administration became more bitter and hostile. The Rev. Coulter of Gilnahirk roused a League meeting in Dublin with the cry of,

³⁹⁸ *BU*, March 22 1850. (speech by James Moore Esq.)

³⁹⁹ PRONI, T/1234/1

⁴⁰⁰ *BNL*, May 7; 14 1850.

⁴⁰¹ *BU*, August 13 1850 (speaking at the inaugural meeting of the Tenant League in Dublin).

⁴⁰² *BU*, October 1 1850.

⁴⁰³ *BU*, October 4 1850.

⁴⁰⁴ Clarendon to Londonderry, (received) October 6 1850, D/Lo/C 111 (45).

⁴⁰⁵ *BU*, December 31 1850.

'Ireland for the Irish',⁴⁰⁶ whilst the Rev. Julius McCullough of Newtownards told a meeting in Armagh that, 'they should, as united Irishmen, press their claims home upon the Government'.⁴⁰⁷ There is certainly a significance, albeit a rhetorical one, to the language employed as the campaign for tenant right became increasingly radical. Speaking in Ballymoney in February 1851, Rev. Rogers recalled the Presbyterians' recent struggles with government: 'An agitation in the North of Ireland a few years ago compelled the Government to respect Presbyterian marriages; and he would tell the British Government, that by this agitation the people of this country would compel them to protect Presbyterian property – that they would compel them to protect Irish property'.⁴⁰⁸ Mounting frustration with the situation was evident in Rogers' comments at a tenant right meeting in Annaghlonge, where he declared, 'that the Government of the country are as callous as ever on the subject...that it has looked on with indifference for years, while the population of this country has been melting like snow'.⁴⁰⁹ Another Presbyterian minister, the Rev. J.L. Rentoul of Ballymoney stated, in language which must have given Henry Cooke cause for deep concern, that, 'he did not expect much from Lord John Russell, for he believed that neither he, nor the English people, as a whole, were disposed to put Irishmen on an equality with the British nation. They must be taught that the Irish people are determined to have their rights'.⁴¹⁰

The speeches made during the tenant right campaign throughout 1851 and into 1852 continued to attack Government's loyalty to the landlord interest over that of the tenants.⁴¹¹ The Prime Minister himself attacked the Tenant League, claiming that, 'the difficulties of legislating had been aggravated greatly' by their 'extravagant expectations'.⁴¹² When Presbyterian tenant farmers and the Tenant League gave their full support to William Sharman Crawford's latest proposed tenant right bill in February 1852,⁴¹³ it was a direct attack on both the landlords and the British government, and the *Banner of Ulster* condemned 'Lord John Russell and his Cabinet landlords' for resolutely opposing Crawford's scheme.⁴¹⁴ As an advocate of an independent Presbyterian college, it no doubt delighted Rogers that Presbyterian students at both Queen's College and Assembly's College had petitioned government in favour of

⁴⁰⁶ *BU*, January 28 1851.

⁴⁰⁷ *BU*, January 31 1851.

⁴⁰⁸ *BU*, February 14 1851.

⁴⁰⁹ *BU*, December 12 1851.

⁴¹⁰ *BU*, January 30 1852.

⁴¹¹ Rev. John Rutherford asked a tenant right meeting in Donaghadee why Government would not grant sufficient funds, 'to emancipate a nation from landlord bondage?', *BU*, February 10 1852.

⁴¹² *BU*, July 18 1851.

⁴¹³ *BU*, February 17 1852.

Crawford's bill.⁴¹⁵ Speaking in support of Crawford's Landlord and Tenant Bill, Rogers urged a tenant right audience in Newtownards to, 'prosecute their mission of patriotism till the Government and Legislature will be compelled to break the fetters of the agricultural masses'.⁴¹⁶ In February 1852 the *Belfast Newsletter* referred to a recent meeting in Banbridge, convened by an Australian, a Mr. J. C. King, to exhort the benefits of emigration, at which the Rev, John Rutherford, according to the paper, induced those present, 'to go to a free soil, where they would be rid of British rule and be no longer kept in a state of slavery and bondage'.⁴¹⁷

When Russell's Whig government fell from power in February 1852, the minority Tory government (led by Lord Derby) which replaced it was met with equal, if not even greater, criticism from Presbyterian tenant righters. The impending general election only exacerbated the bitterness, as tenant right supporters fielded their own candidates, in opposition to landlord and government interests, most notably, with their support for Sharman Crawford in County Down (see Chapter Five). Within the House of Commons, the *Banner* reported with horror on the serious opposition voiced against the *regium donum* by various M.P.s. In June 1852, the grant had only passed with a tiny majority of 23 votes, and the paper urged the necessity of its transference to the Consolidated Fund. Furthermore, it noted, that 'the most serious opposition which has yet been made in Parliament to the annual endowment of the Presbyterian ministers has been witnessed under the administration of the Derby government', the paper suggesting that government adherents had deliberately stayed away to increase the strength of the *regium donum*'s opponents.⁴¹⁸

On the issue of tenant right, and most particularly, the Derby government's attempts to oppose the League's strength at the forthcoming election, the *Banner* launched a bitter attack on government's efforts to, 'identify the League with Ribbonism', through the work of a committee instigated to inquire into the causes of agrarian outrage in Ireland. The paper's editorial claimed that, 'because the Tenant League has, for once in Irish history, largely extinguished the sectarian capital upon which Tory oppression had maintained itself for centuries',⁴¹⁹ significant efforts had thus been made to discredit the League and sow dissension in the apparent union of

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁵ *BNL*, February 1852

⁴¹⁶ *NW*, March 11 1852.

⁴¹⁷ *BNL*, February 16 1852.

⁴¹⁸ *BU*, June 15 1852.

⁴¹⁹ *BU*, June 22 1852. The aspect of Presbyterian-Catholic co-operation exhibited over tenant right is discussed fully in Chapter Four.

Catholic and Presbyterian in the movement. This theme of government's 'divide and rule' policy had in fact been a refrain also employed against the previous Whig administration, most notably concerning the infamous Ecclesiastical Title's Bill in England.⁴²⁰ In February 1851, the Rev. Julius McCullough accused Lord John Russell of adopting the bill in order to stir up the nation – 'it was a trick – a dodge – to kindle afresh old grudges and differences – to divide a people now happily uniting'.⁴²¹ Writing 'To the Protestant Electors of Ulster', the Presbyterian Thomas Neilson Underwood recalled Russell's actions over the so-called 'Papal aggression' as deliberately, 'intended to sow discord amongst the Irish people, and thereby break up the only truly national political association formed in Ireland since the Volunteers grounded their arms, and the fatal Act of Union condemned your country to a base dependence on the will of another'.⁴²² In a more general denunciation in March 1852, in Portaferry, Rev. Julius McCullough declared that, '...ever since England set foot in our native land, [her] motto has been to divide and conquer'.⁴²³

At electioneering meetings across County Down in June and July 1852, Presbyterian ministers assumed the leading role in advocating tenant right candidates, whilst ferociously denouncing the British government.⁴²⁴ Urging the Presbyterian electorate of County Derry to vote for the Presbyterian tenant right candidate, Samuel Greer, 'An Ulster Presbyterian' writing in the *Derry Standard*, attacked the Derby government: '...they tell us they are going to consolidate the various laws regarding landlord and tenant – that is, to extract the essence of numberless oppressive enactments, and concentrate and combine all in one measure for the spoliation of industry, and the grinding down of the people'. The writer accused Lord Derby of being allied with the Puseyite section of the established church, concluding that, 'If, then, we love liberty better than despotism, we will vote against all supporters of the present Government'.⁴²⁵ These sentiments were echoed in the *Banner of Ulster's* editorial on July 13 1852, urging Presbyterian opposition to government candidates, reiterating once again Derby's alleged 'Puseyite' associations, and adding that, 'The Derby government...is pledged to revolutionise the Irish National System (*i.e.* of

⁴²⁰ See Chapter 4.

⁴²¹ *BU*, February 25 1851.

⁴²² *Nation*, May 22 1851.

⁴²³ *BU*, March 23 1852.

⁴²⁴ See reports of meetings in *NW*, June 26; 29 1852 and *BU*, June 28 1852.

⁴²⁵ *LS*, June 24 1852.

education), so as to hand it over virtually to an intolerant clique in the Established Church'.⁴²⁶

For Presbyterians involved in the tenant right campaign, their resounding defeat at the 1852 election was softened somewhat with the fall of the Derby administration in December 1852. The *Banner* rejoiced in its downfall,⁴²⁷ and moreover offered tentative support to the new government led by Lord Aberdeen, seeing the appointment of two prominent Catholic southern Leaguer MPs, John Sadleir and William Keogh, as a positive step in the direction of an adequate tenant right bill. The Presbyterian paper reasoned, '...Has the habitual curse of Ireland not been that every place, high and subordinate, in the Government, has been usually filled with officials hostile to the rights of the popular masses...if we had, in the Irish administration, 20 or 30 pledged advocates of tenant right, instead of only 2 or 3, the prospects of our national question would be...mightily improved'.⁴²⁸ McKnight attempted to convince the General Meeting of the Council of the Tenant League of this, arguing, 'Was not one of the most notorious evils of which the Irish complained, that every place, from the Lord Lieutenancy down to a justiceship of the peace, was filled by the enemies of the people. They were not entitled, in point of justice, equity or common sense, to assail the present Government in the style of hostility that might be properly directed against the Derby Administration. The latter was rank Toryism, sympathising with every species of tyranny at home and abroad; but the present Government was established on a different principle'.⁴²⁹

The confidence of tenant leaguers such as Rogers, McCullough and McKnight in the potential of a new Liberal administration was not entirely misplaced, for by 1853, a Select Committee was convened to consider all the various tenant right bills before Parliament, resulting in a new 'Tenants' Compensation Bill'.⁴³⁰ Although far short of their full demands it was, significantly, 'the first occasion on which the principle of tenant right has ever been conclusively affirmed ...'.⁴³¹ Certainly, the differing Presbyterian attitudes to the Liberal and Tory British administrations were as in part a reflection of broader political allegiances,⁴³² and a continuing antipathy to Toryism, with its associations with landlords and the established church.

⁴²⁶ *BU*, July 13 1852.

⁴²⁷ *BU*, December 21 1852.

⁴²⁸ *BU*, January 11 1853.

⁴²⁹ *BU*, January 14 1853.

⁴³⁰ Landlord and Tenant (Ireland), Parliamentary Reports, 1852-53 (726) XCIV.605, *mf* 57.691.

⁴³¹ *BU*, August 5 1853.

⁴³² *BU*, April 5 1853 (see editorial)

Henry Cooke, who had maintained resolute opposition to the tenant right campaign, despite the support of most of his brethren in the Assembly for its legalisation, found that his position had been further undermined during these years. As Chapter Five demonstrates, his open support for the Tory/landlord interest in the 1852 election, and his refusal to support the Presbyterian/tenant right candidates, weakened him within his own Church, and Holmes has referred appropriately to his 'dethronement'⁴³³ in the Assembly. Radical ministers such as Goudy and Rogers, launched bitter and scathing attacks on Cooke's sycophancy towards successive British governments (especially Tory) and towards the landlord class. Goudy denounced Cooke's persistent patronage of successive British governments arguing that, 'He has ever...been the obsequious sycophant and tool of varying administrations'.⁴³⁴ In another attack, 'A Presbyterian Elector of Down' described how, 'His obsequiousness to every Government as its "pensioner" and tool is notorious to all'.⁴³⁵

Finally, it is interesting to note that when in 1858, the efforts of the Rev. Richard Dill to campaign for the right of Presbyterian soldiers to have their own Presbyterian chaplaincy bore success, the Government, influenced by Cooke, refused to allow Revs. Rogers and Goudy to be appointed to the new posts. Cooke and the government had already decided on two ministers, but the General Assembly over-ruled this, and voted by a majority for the selection of the two liberals.⁴³⁶ As one hostile commentator on Rogers recalled in 1861, 'the Secretary at War was of opinion that a political agitator, a turbulent mob-orator, and advocate of wholesale spoliation and communism, was not the person best adapted for preaching law and order, and subordination to Her Majesty's soldiery; and consequently he refused to entertain the Assembly's recommendation'.⁴³⁷ Rogers may have blotted his copybook in Tory and government circles, but there was clearly still strong support for the independent line advocated by Goudy and himself amongst their own colleagues. Indeed, Rogers was appointed Moderator of the General Assembly in 1863 and again in 1864.⁴³⁸

⁴³³ Holmes, *Cooke*, p.193.

⁴³⁴ *Right Versus Might; or Irish Presbyterian Politics Discussed in Five Letters, by the Rev. Alex P. Goudy, D.D., Minister of the First Presbyterian Church, Strabane* (Londonderry, 1852), p.20.

⁴³⁵ *The "Juvenile" Presbyterian Ministers, Being a Letter Addressed to the Editor of the "Northern Whig", in Reply to a Speech Delivered at the County Antrim Election, by the Rev. Dr. Cooke: With an appendix, by a Presbyterian Elector of Down* (Belfast, 1852), p.11.

⁴³⁶ Latimer, *History*, pp.219-222; Holmes, *Cooke*, pp.193-5.

⁴³⁷ *The Ballygowan Revival Demonstration of Messrs, Rogers, Woods, and Co., Analysed and Exposed. By a Member of Donegall Street Young Mens' Society.* (Belfast, 1861), p.5.

⁴³⁸ See W. Osborne Harper, *A History of Second Presbyterian Church Comber 1838-1990* (1992), p.41. Dill and Goudy both died in December 1858.

As this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, the tentative approach towards government in the early years after 1798, gradually gave way to an increasingly self-confident Presbyterian body who proved themselves prepared to challenge or attack any government which it believed to be failing their interests. Certainly, political allegiances had the potential to influence perceptions of the various Whig and Tory administrations, but the overriding position of the largest Presbyterian synod by 1852, was one of an inherent desire to maintain their independence. Throughout this period, the greatly augmented *regium donum* did clearly draw Ulster Presbyterianism into closer association with the British State, and their increasing adhesion to the British connection certainly altered the boundaries of the relationship. However, the state bounty and its impact remained the focus of divided opinion, and its effects were ambiguous – it certainly did not have the salutary influence that Castlereagh and the government of 1803 had envisaged. Indeed, it was still a relationship marked with mutual suspicion, and at times, outright hostility. And, as ever, the bitter schisms within Irish Presbyterianism itself added an extra dimension to the Church and the community's relationship with the British State. Henry Cooke very much followed in the footsteps of those Presbyterians who had been loyalists to the British government in '98 but, as demonstrated by his increasing isolation in the General Assembly by the mid-nineteenth century, whilst disloyalty was certainly not the order of the day, neither was submission to the state.

Of course, by contrast, for the majority of Roman Catholics the problem was not so much the behaviour of the British government, but its very existence over them. Rebellion and separatism were certainly no longer the aims of most Presbyterians in Ulster, but what many continued to exhibit, especially during the 1840s and 1850s, was a radicalism no less fervent, but which now operated within the boundaries of the British-Irish connection. A. P. Goudy encapsulated their position in his political letters of 1852. Referring to the Derby government's failure to legislate on tenant right, Goudy advised that,

The British Government should consider well what possible advantage they can derive from denying so long, so wantonly, and so gallingly, all legislative protection to the industrial rights of our people. They cannot but be aware that in a very emphatic sense they "have need of us" – that Presbyterianism, as has often been said with undeniable truth, is, "the mainstay of British connexion"...Why

should they then make “sick with hope deferred” the hearts of those whom it is so much their interest, as well as duty, to conciliate?⁴³⁹

Presbyterian ‘radicalism’ certainly no longer meant taking up arms against the British government, but what it did represent was the survival of a vigorous and robust tradition of political liberalism, opposition to ‘the establishment’ (government, landlordism, Toryism and the established church), and defiance of state policy. But this time, it was within the parameters of the British connection.

⁴³⁹ Goudy, *Right versus Might*, p.18.

CHAPTER 2
‘PROTESTANT PEACE’¹ OR WAR? PRESBYTERIANS AND THE
ESTABLISHED CHURCH OF IRELAND.

In 1834 Rev. Henry Cooke famously proclaimed the banns of marriage between the Presbyterian and the Episcopalian Churches; what he called a ‘Protestant union’.² Was this a sign that the traditional hostilities between the two Protestant denominations had been forgotten? The Hillsborough banns of marriage was indeed a crucial turning point, but not in the way that Cooke had envisaged. It certainly did *not* mark the beginning of matrimonial bliss, but on the contrary, provided the catalyst for an outpouring of Presbyterian hostility towards Cooke’s policy of friendship with the established church – a hostility that was remembered for many years. Indeed, somewhat ironically, the period between 1834 and 1853 witnessed a series of major conflicts between the Presbyterian and Established Churches, encompassing bitter verbal and written disputes. This chapter will examine the way in which Cooke’s dream of reconciling the two Protestant churches in Ireland was never realized during this period, nor ever supported by the majority of Presbyterians, whether orthodox, Remonstrant or Covenanter. In 1852 the Rev. A. P. Goudy, grandson of the executed Rev. James Porter of Greyabbey, launched a vitriolic attack on the Hillsborough banns, encapsulating the sentiments of many Ulster Presbyterians at this time:

....Dr. Cooke tried to gull the public into the belief that there is no appreciable distinction between Presbytery and Prelacy. This has been his doctrine throughout his whole career. None of us have forgotten the ever memorable and ill-omened nuptials which he once attempted to celebrate between this strange couple at Hillsborough....the inculcation of these views the Dr. baptizes “Protestant Peace”. One is ready to ask, is this man a Presbyterian at all?³

In the early decades of the nineteenth century it appeared that improved relations between Presbyterians and Anglicans were a real possibility. The evangelical movement, which advanced amongst both Protestant denominations in Ireland, was hastened by the events of 1798.⁴ In an atmosphere of the legacy of political upheaval,

¹ Goudy, *Right versus Might*, p.7.

² J.L. Porter, *The Life and Times of Henry Cooke* (1871; Belfast, 1875), p. 236.

³ Goudy, *Right versus Might*, p. 7.

⁴ For discussion of the evangelical movement, see David W. Miller, ‘Presbyterianism and “Modernization” in Ulster’, *Past and Present*, 80 (1978), pp. 85-89; Myrtle Hill, ‘Popular Protestantism in Ulster in the Post-Rebellion Period, c. 1790-1810’, in W.J Sheils and D. Wood (eds.), *The Churches, Ireland and the Irish: papers read at the 1987 summer meeting and the 1988 winter meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society (Studies in Church History, 25)* (Oxford, 1989), 191-202 and David Hempton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society, 1790-1840* (London, 1992), p. 75.

destruction and, as Holmes has described, ‘disillusionment with political utopianism’,⁵ a movement which offered spiritual security provided a safer, more certain alternative for many lay Presbyterians. The impact of the dislocation of 1798 and of burgeoning industrialization tended to swing the balance against the ‘New Light’ thinking which had come to the ascendancy in the Synod of Ulster towards the end of the eighteenth century. Always more predominant in urban, bourgeois, intellectual Presbyterian congregations, ‘New Light’ thinking found itself rejected by rural congregations, especially those in a frontier situation in Ulster.⁶ As the nineteenth century Presbyterian historian W.T Latimer noted, the first evangelical society was formed in Co. Armagh in 1798, to establish a system of itinerant preaching: ‘This evangelical movement was a step in the development of that tendency to appeal to emotions rather than instruct the understanding.’⁷ At the same time, the Anglican Church itself was undergoing internal ferment. As D.H Akenson has shown, administrative reforms and an increasing spiritual zeal marked the years after 1800 for the established church.⁸ Both Anglicans and Presbyterians found themselves co-operating in prayer meetings and bible distributions. For the first time in its history, Ulster Presbyterianism began to look beyond its own province, and commenced missionary activity in parts of southern Ireland.⁹

The growth of evangelicalism, whilst it has been examined by historians in considerable detail, has tended to be treated as an essential element of the argument for the ‘transformation’ of Presbyterian politics in the years after 1798. It is not within the scope of this research to examine it in depth, but certainly, as Sean Connolly has acknowledged, it did offer the potential for Protestant unity, combined with increasing alienation from Irish Catholics.¹⁰ However, he has argued that fundamentally, the impact of evangelicalism on transforming Presbyterian politics has been greatly exaggerated – ‘In fact it is doubtful whether there was any such connection’.¹¹ The growth of evangelical zeal took place against one crucial factor – the growing self-confidence of Irish Roman Catholicism after 1800. Under Daniel O’Connell’s energetic

⁵ Holmes, *Presbyterian Church: A Popular History*, pp.88-9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁷ Latimer, *History*, p. 186.

⁸ D.H. Akenson, *The Church of Ireland: Ecclesiastical Reform and Revolution, 1800-1885* (New Haven, 1971). The Roman Catholic Church was also undergoing a similar ‘revival’ to the Protestant Churches at this time.

⁹ Holmes, *Presbyterian Church: A Popular History* pp. 98- 103. The significance of this missionary work will be examined in more detail in Chapter Four.

¹⁰ S.J. Connolly, ‘Mass politics and sectarian conflict, 1823-30’, W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland, V: Ireland Under the Union, 1*, pp.77-8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*



leadership, through the Catholic Association, the numerical strength of Catholic Ireland was mobilized into political potential. Henry Cooke, of course, epitomized the most extreme form of this in Presbyterian circles; his fervent anti-Catholicism was his main motivating factor in his desire to unite with the established church and in his proclamation of the banns. Was Presbyterian awareness of their minority status in the face of Catholic domination strong enough to push them into harmony and closeness with their age-old rivals? Or did Presbyterians reject Cooke's vision, and succeed in combining a commitment to union with Britain, whilst simultaneously rejecting union with Episcopacy?

It has been argued that Cooke's success in forcing the removal of the Arians from the Synod of Ulster in 1828, in theory, also helped pave the way for better Protestant/Presbyterian relations.¹² Robert Mahony, writing on the impact of the schism during John Mitchel's formative years, has argued that Cooke, 'forced a conflict within the Ulster Synod, with the ostensible goal of confirming the orthodox purity of Irish Presbyterianism', but in fact his 'ulterior motive' was a united political front with the Church of Ireland 'to oppose Catholic political advances', for Anglicans could hardly ally themselves with a church that tolerated dissent from creedal Trinitarianism'.¹³

However, despite developments which offered the potential to promote Protestant harmony, it was clear that old resentments against the established church were not so easy to eradicate, especially when Church of Ireland arrogance perpetuated the treatment of the Presbyterian Church as its social inferior. This can be seen for instance in the various disputes which took place over Presbyterian burial rights in Ulster. For instance there was intense newspaper coverage of the refusal of Bishop Mant, Bishop of Down and Connor, to grant permission for the Presbyterian Rev. William Bruce to read the funeral prayers at the graveyard in Holywood, County Down, for a member of his congregation who was being buried there.¹⁴ The *Northern Whig* highlighted the ridiculous and unjust restrictions that surrounded Presbyterian burials. It claimed that in preventing the Presbyterian funeral service being performed within the

¹² The vast historical debate which has raged on the subject of Cooke's motivations in ousting the Presbyterian non-subscribers from the Synod, has been divided largely into those who argue for genuine religious conviction, and others who argue it was a largely political move. For the argument that it was a purely political manoeuvre, see Barkley, 'Arian Schism', pp. 323-339; For a more measured approach, see R. F.G Holmes, 'Dr. Henry Cooke: The Athanasius of Irish Presbyterianism', in Derek Baker (ed.), *Religious motivation: biographical and sociological problems for the Church historian: papers read at the sixteenth summer meeting and the seventeenth winter meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society (Studies in Church History 15)* (Oxford, 1978), 367-80.

¹³ Robert Mahony, '“New Light” Ulster Presbyterianism and the nationalist rhetoric of John Mitchel', in Laurence M. Geary (ed.), *Rebellion and Remembrance in Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), p. 155.

¹⁴ *BNL*, January 23 1824.

walls of the common-burying ground of Holywood, Bishop Mant had agitated the Presbyterians of Ulster.¹⁵ The paper's reaction to the second reading of the Burials in Ireland Bill was similarly scathing, arguing that, 'so far as the Protestant Dissenters are concerned, the Bill must increase rather than diminish the evils of which they complained'. For the *Whig*, the fact that an established church minister could grant permission to allow a Presbyterian to conduct a graveside service, if written application was received, was regarded as something of a humiliation to a Presbyterian minister, reinforcing the continuing inequality between the two sets of clergymen.

In 1827 outrage erupted over Henry Cooke's acquiescence in the opinion that there was 'no material difference between the Presbyterian Church, under the care of the Synod of Ulster, and the Established Church'.¹⁶ In response to this, 'An Orthodox Presbyterian' addressed a letter to Cooke that was published in the *Whig*, and in a stinging reply told Cooke,

I hope Sir, you will see the impropriety of any longer allowing the Presbyterians of this country to tax themselves for your support...when no material difference exists between Presbyterian principles and those of the Church established by law; – a church which all are obliged to support, and which is complained of as a grievous burden by every individual, not a member of its communion, who has the honesty to give a candid opinion.¹⁷

The *Whig* itself did little to discourage hostility to the Church of Ireland, reminding its Presbyterian readers of the pamphlet disputes between Bishop Woodward and Rev. Campbell in the 1780s, and of the rancorous opposition with which the established church had opposed Presbyterian efforts to obtain civil rights.¹⁸ Later in 1827 they ran a series of articles entitled, 'Prelatic Persecution of the Presbyterians of Ulster', signed by 'A Presbyterian', in order to prove that, 'there *are* great and "material differences" between those churches, as well as in doctrine as in church government – differences so well known to every true Presbyterian...'. It concluded by denouncing Cooke as a 'reverend calumniator', and noting that, 'our forefathers did fully experience that there were very material differences in those churches; and, till of late years, even within some of our memories, Presbyterians have smarted under the persecution of the Establishment, and in several instances, even to this day'.¹⁹ In a direct hit at Cooke, the *Whig* deplored, 'the preposterous conduct of those ministers, who think themselves

¹⁵ *NW* April 8 1824.

¹⁶ *NW*, July 19 1827.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *NW*, July 26 1827.

¹⁹ *NW* October 4 1827.

honoured, by being allowed to play second fiddle to the Established Clergy'.²⁰ As this chapter will demonstrate, such criticism was to be levelled again and again, not merely by Cooke's Arian rivals, but particularly by members of his own orthodox brethren, in the years after the Hillsborough banns of marriage.

The year 1827 also witnessed a furore erupt over comments made by the minister of the Presbyterian congregation of Moneymore, Rev. John Barnett, attacking the established church – calling it “a limb of Anti-Christ, and that God in his righteous judgement would sweep it off the earth”.²¹ One individual present during Barnett's conversation confirmed that the minister had commented that, *'he considered any measure justifiable to get rid of that intolerable nuisance, the Church Establishment; which he considered contrary to the laws both of God and man'*.²² The subsequent recriminations filled many pages of the *Newsletter*. In particular Barnett became embroiled in a war of words with the Anglican land agent to the Drapers' estate, Rowley Miller, in Moneymore, where Barnett resided.²³ One correspondent claimed that when Barnett had told Miller that, 'there was not a Dissenting minister, if he were faithful, that would not pull down the Episcopalian Church', the agent had warned him, 'that the opinions which Mr. Barnett had expressed, were the sentiments of a great number of the Ministers in the Synod of Ulster, in the years 1796, 1797 and 1798... and which brought some of them to the gallows'.²⁴ Barnett's subsequent denial that he had expressed anything other than a conscientious hostility to the established church based on religious principle, failed to silence the matter, and in August a sympathizer calling himself 'Observer', defended Barnett's criticism of the tithe system: 'the sentiment that tithe is a great grievance in this country, would be re-echoed by every Presbyterian in Ulster, unless he happens to be in the discreditable situation of making gain by the system'.²⁵ Rev. Barnett's father, John Barnett Esq., was an active Presbyterian in Belfast's radical circles, had been present at the infamous St. Patrick's Day Dinner in 1816 where disloyal toasts were made by Presbyterians connected with Belfast Academical Institution, and himself attacked tithes in a speech at a Belfast Reform Meeting in 1830.²⁶

²⁰ *NW* June 21 1827.

²¹ *BNL*, July 24 1827.

²² *BNL*, September 7 1827.

²³ See *BNL*, July 31; August 24; and September 7 1827.

²⁴ *BNL*, July 24 1827.

²⁵ *BNL*, August 10 1827.

²⁶ For John Barnett's radical reforming activities, see Chapter 5.

The protracted dispute at Moneymore, resulting ultimately in a Presbytery inquiry in October 1827, did little for feelings of 'Protestant unity'. Furthermore, Miller's allusion to 1798 suggests that many Anglicans had certainly not forgotten the extent of Presbyterian clerical involvement in the rebellion. The evidence given at the Moneymore inquiry provides some interesting information on Established and Presbyterian Church attitudes to one and other. In Miller's sworn affidavit, he recalled the pertinent point he had put to Barnett in the course of their discussion and the Presbyterian minister's reply:

when the said John Barnett asserted, that the Presbyterian ministers were all opposed to the Established Church... this deponent mentioned there were many dissenting ministers who met their Episcopalian brethren at the Bible and other benevolent societies on the ground of their common Christianity...and gave to them the right hand of fellowship, the said John Barnett replied, that if the dissenting ministers spoke the sentiments of their hearts, their desire was to pull down the Established church.²⁷

Undoubtedly the single most significant bone of contention between Presbytery and Episcopacy in the 1820s and 1830s was that of tithes. Castlereagh, the British foreign secretary and an Ulster Presbyterian by birth, was well aware of the importance of settling the vexed subject of tithes in the battle to win Presbyterian loyalty. In a memorandum to the British cabinet, at the time of the Act of Union, he commented:

...In addition to the steady application of authority in support of the laws, I look to an arrangement of tithes, and to a provision for the Catholic and Dissenting clergy, calculated in its regulations to bring them under the influence of the State, as essentially necessary to mitigate, if it cannot extinguish faction, to place the Established Church on its most secure foundation....²⁸

But his idea remained just that, and although Castlereagh warned the Duke of Portland in 1799 that tithes were, 'the most comprehensive cause of public discontent in Ireland'²⁹, it was not until 1838 that the Tithe Commutation Bill was adopted by Parliament.

Unsurprisingly, William Drennan's radical periodical, the *Belfast Monthly Magazine* was unequivocally opposed to tithes. An editorial of December 1808 described them as, 'an oppressive tax on agriculture',³⁰ lamenting the injustice that the

²⁷ *BNL*, October 12 1827.

²⁸ Marchioness of Londonderry, *Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh* (London, 1904), p.24.

²⁹ Castlereagh to Portland, Dublin Castle, January 28 1799, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, vol.2: Arrangements for a Union*, pp.139-41.

³⁰ *BMM*, December 1808, p. 311.

greater burden fell on those not of the established church. Moreover, the *Magazine* argued that, 'On the subject of the hereditary claim of tithes, the clergy have no right to immutability. No one is born a bishop or a rector'.³¹ The Presbyterian-owned *Northern Whig* newspaper in Belfast (its proprietor, F. D. Finlay was an Arian) offered by far the most sustained and consistent attack on the tithe system. The newspaper's constant scrutiny of the established church emphasized that old resentments continued to divide Presbyterian and Episcopalian. In June 1827 it commented that, 'It is very remarkable, in a country like Ireland, where the great body of the people are poor, and where so much misery still exists, that the Established clergy should be the wealthiest in Europe', commenting that much of this wealth was drawn from people who have nothing to do with that church.³² In 1831 Catholic discontent against tithes erupted in violence in the south of Ireland.³³ At the same time many Presbyterians in the north reiterated their opposition to the tithe system, and supported the anti-tithe campaign through the peaceful medium of the press and public meetings.

In 1830, the new Whig administration offered good prospects for meaningful reform in Ireland, and the *Northern Whig* was in full support of plans to reform the Church of Ireland. In 1831 the paper was involved in a dispute with an established archdeacon, the Rev. Anthony Trail. It attacked him for receiving tithes from several different parishes, including some, 'where he does not even pretend to do any duty'. 'He is seldom in his Parish; but keeps a curate to do the drudgery of "curing the souls" of his flock'. It concluded by stating that, 'The Church system is odious to all, except those who have *an interest* in perpetuating it...'.³⁴ Three months later Rev. Henry Montgomery launched a similarly scathing attack on Trail's affluence, in a speech at a Belfast Reform Meeting.³⁵ An editorial of July 1831 made clear the paper's stance, describing tithes as, 'The iniquitous system by which the Church of England has hitherto been supported, a system based on the grossest injustice*Tithes must be altogether abolished.*'³⁶

The Rev. Henry Montgomery was one of those Presbyterians who spoke out most forcibly against tithes and the established church in these years. He had a chance to give full vent to those feelings in 1832 when he was called to give evidence before

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

³² *NW*, June 14 1827.

³³ See Patrick O'Donoghue, 'Opposition to Tithe Payment in 1830-31', in *Studia Hibernica* 6 (1966), pp.69-98; also his 'Opposition to Tithe Payment in 1832-33', in above, 12 (1972), pp.77-108 and his 'Causes of the Opposition to Tithes, 1830-38', as above, 5 (1965), pp.7-28.

³⁴ *NW*, January 13 1831.

³⁵ *NW*, October 17 1831.

³⁶ *NW*, July 4 1831.

the Tithe Committee of the House of Commons.³⁷ In a private letter to Rev. William Porter, Montgomery commented on the evidence he had given, ‘...it may suffice to say that I opposed tithes as an unchristian and impolitic tax, and represented the entire system of an established church as unjust in itself, oppressive to conscience, hostile to civil and religious liberty, and subversive of true religion’.³⁸ Montgomery told the committee that ‘all, or almost all’, Presbyterians were opposed to tithes, and he stated his belief that of Presbyterian involvement in the 1798 rising, ‘one of its principal causes was their hostility to tithes’.³⁹ Moreover, when asked whether this had diminished among Presbyterians since then, he answered, ‘I do not conceive that any change has taken place in the hostility to tithes; although I am persuaded [*sic*] the Presbyterians of Ireland would now be very much disinclined to rise in opposition to the laws’.⁴⁰ Montgomery proceeded to read from an extract relating to County Down and southern Antrim, the authorship of which he refused to reveal to the Committee, which stated that, ‘as a Commissioner, in all my inquiries from Catholic, Protestant, or Presbyterian, they agreed in a common detestation of the tithe system; and if the North is not in open revolt, it is from a little more civilization than the South, and not from any love of the Establishment.’⁴¹ Montgomery reminded the committee that ‘the Protestant Establishment has been, in a great degree, looked upon in Ireland as a political church’.⁴²

Montgomery’s liberal colleagues in Belfast’s reforming circles shared Montgomery’s opposition to the established church. Condemnation of the tithes system featured strongly in the liberals’ election campaign in Belfast in 1832. The Declaration of the Independent Electors of the town stated, ‘We demand of our Representative a pledge, that they will support a real and not a nominal abolition of tithes and vestry assessments’, and they took this one step further, adding, ‘and that, with a due regard to existing interests, they will exert themselves to appropriate the immense property of the Church in Ireland, to national purposes.’⁴³ Several leading Presbyterian liberals, including John Barnett, John Sinclair, and James Gibson, signed this declaration. On

³⁷ Report of Select Committee on Collection and Payment of Tithes in Ireland, First Report, Minutes of Evidence, 1831-32 (177) XXI.1 *mf* 35.175-177; Second Report, Minutes of Evidence, 1831-32 (508) XXI.245 *mf* 35.177-182

³⁸ Quoted in, Robert Allen, ‘Henry Montgomery, 1788-1865’, in D.B Quinn (ed.), *Essays in British and Irish History in honour of James Eadie Todd* (London, 1949), p. 265.

³⁹ *NW*, July 12 1832.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *NW*, July 19 1832.

⁴³ PRONI, D/410/2.

news of government's offer to increase the *regium donum* in April 1832, the *Whig* noted how,

The TITHE QUESTION comes on; Mr. Montgomery, of the Belfast Institution, is examined before the Parliamentary Committees; the Ministry learn to their amazement, that the objection to the payment of tithes, and to the continuance of the Established Church, is scarcely less strong among the Presbyterians of the North than among the Catholics in the South. Their eyes are suddenly opened...⁴⁴

But the *Whig* added, 'the public feeling in the North of Ireland cannot much longer be suppressed, with respect to the Church, and its overgrowing, grinding revenues', and on the subject of government's offer, 'It is tendered as a bribe, to silence the expression of Presbyterian hostility to the perpetuation of the Establishment'.⁴⁵

The anti-tithe campaign did not lose momentum, and grass roots Presbyterian opinion on the subject of tithes was expressed at a series of meetings concentrated across County Down in early 1834.⁴⁶ One meeting in Comber attracted much attention and stimulated a war of words in the columns of the *Belfast Newsletter* between several Presbyterian writers in June of 1834. Advertised as a '*Meeting for the extinction of tithes, the withdrawal of the Royal Bounty, the introduction of the Poor Laws, and to oppose the Repeal of the Union*', the meeting was attended by the Rev. Fletcher Blakely, Remonstrant minister of Moneyrea.⁴⁷ One of the correspondents suggested that there was mixed feelings towards the *regium donum*; 'many Presbyterians in Ulster are just as anxious for the withdrawment [*sic*] of the compulsory support given to their ministers, as they are for the abolition of the tithe system'.⁴⁸ A month prior to the controversial Comber meeting, an anti-tithe conference was held on the *Northern Whig* newspaper's premises in Belfast, attended by delegates from parishes across Down and Antrim.⁴⁹ As Sean Connolly has emphasized, the anti-tithe movement was 'an open, constitutional agitation', and 'a direct attack on the privileges of the established church'.⁵⁰

The tithe agitation placed Presbyterian radicals in a difficult and ambiguous position, not only for the apparent inconsistency in the receipt of *regium donum* by so many of their clergy, but also the movement's strong associations in the south with

⁴⁴ *NW*, April 9 1832.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Flann Campbell, *The Dissenting Voice. Protestant Democracy in Ulster from Plantation to Partition* (Belfast, 1991), p. 151.

⁴⁷ *BNL*, June 2, 6 and 10 1834.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Campbell, *Dissenting Voice*, pp.150-1.

⁵⁰ Connolly, *Religion and Society*, p.29.

O'Connell. And although they shared some common ground – as Peter Brooke has noted, ‘Ulster Presbyterians had no love for the Church of Ireland and too were victims of tithes’ – yet they could not ally too closely with a man whose ‘ultimate goal’ was Repeal.⁵¹ It is certainly possible that this checked the expression of tithe hostility amongst some Presbyterians. As has been shown, prior to 1834 the most vocal Presbyterian clerical opposition to the established church came from the Remonstrants and, beyond that, the Presbyterian liberal political class of Belfast. The Synod of Ulster remained quiet on the issue, undoubtedly wary that an attack on tithes opened a much wider debate on the propriety of their own state endowments.

Cooke recognized the anti-tithe campaign as detrimental to his vision of ‘Protestant unity’ for it highlighted the gross inequalities which still existed between the two churches, and stimulated traditional feelings of resentment towards the Church of Ireland. But if he could manage to curb such feelings in his own Synod of Ulster, then perhaps it would prove possible to maintain the prospect of Protestant unity. What changed the situation so dramatically and roused many orthodox Presbyterians was undoubtedly Cooke’s speech at Hillsborough in 1834, and the sense of indignation and outrage which it elicited.

The government’s reforming scheme for a system of National Education, which was unveiled in 1831, threatened to end the established church’s monopoly of education, and represented the first major inroads made by the Whig administration to curtail their exclusive privileges. Of course, as Chapter Four details, it was not only the Anglican clergy who opposed the measure – Presbyterians themselves were bitterly divided on the matter.⁵² Some ministers, most notably Rev. James Carlile (who accepted a place on the new Board of Education) did support the system, whilst others, notably Cooke, balked in horror at the prospect of Catholic and Protestant children educated together, and at the proposed exclusion of the bible from school hours. Beyond the mere confines of whether the system was ‘unscriptural’, national education in a much wider sense was proof of Catholic inroads into Protestant territory. For Cooke, the introduction of national education convinced him more than ever of the need to seek the hand of co-operation with the established church. It was largely this that propelled him to appear at Hillsborough in 1834. Equally, for their part, Anglican clergymen were quick to appreciate the importance of Presbyterian backing in their

⁵¹ Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, p.158.

⁵² See Carlile, *To the Ministers and Elders* (Belfast, 1832); Stewart, *National Education: in Three Letters*; and Henry Cooke, *National Education: A Sermon, Preached in the Presbyterian Church, May Street, Belfast, Sunday 15th January 1832* (Belfast, 1832).

opposition to the system. At a Protestant orange meeting held at Inch, near Downpatrick in January 1832, one Anglican clergyman called on ‘my Presbyterian brethren, who I both love and esteem, to make common cause with us...’.⁵³ If Protestant unity could be a reality, then this was clearly the time of its best chance.

But for many Presbyterians, Cooke’s concerted campaign for ‘Protestant unity’ which sprouted upon the back of the national education plans, was already beginning to cause concern. He found himself increasingly under attack, not least because his Tory politics were a significant factor in his co-operation with the established church, a political stance which was not shared by the majority of his fellow orthodox clergymen.⁵⁴ The Whig government’s reforming zeal in Ireland seemed to be threatening the Protestant establishment, and whilst the Presbyterian church stood outside that establishment, Cooke regarded their amalgamation into it as essential in Ireland’s changing climate. He regarded support for the established church as a price worth paying to safeguard Irish Protestantism. The liberal administration’s associations with O’Connell, culminating in the Lichfield House pact of 1835, following the passing of the Church Temporalities Act,⁵⁵ seemed to confirm to nervous Protestants and conservatives that Catholicism was indeed making significant gains.

But the anti-reforming tone of Cooke and his Anglican conservative friends was not popular with liberal Presbyterians, nor was his fraternizing with men such as the Rev. Mark Cassidy of Newtownards, the epitome of the Anglican establishment. In June 1832 Cooke came into conflict with Seceders when his periodical, the *Orthodox Presbyterian*, attacked the Belfast Secession Presbytery for its acceptance of the National Education system. In a determined reply to Cooke from the Secretary of the Presbytery’s Education Committee, John Coulter, they defended themselves from Cooke’s charge of “cunning Jesuitism”. Above all the letter attacked his over-friendliness with the established church:

We think it would be unwise to multiply Prelates in a Presbyterian church; and to prelacy in any shape, we are thankful our honour is not united....If we have not been misinformed, considerable dissatisfaction was expressed in at least one of the Presbyteries of the Synod of Ulster, with the Prelatical doings of a certain Rev. Doctor...⁵⁶

⁵³ See the pamphlet entitled, *A Voice from Inch. Great Protestant Meeting at Inch, near Downpatrick. From the Guardian of 24 January, 1832* (Belfast, 1832), PRONI, D/3244/G/1/75.

⁵⁴ See Chapter Five.

⁵⁵ The Church Temporalities Act involved a significant assault on the Established Church’s legal privileges, including reducing the numbers of archbishops and bishops. Connolly, *Religion and Society*, p. 32.

⁵⁶ *NW*, June 14 1832.

The *Whig* naturally delighted in this assault on Cooke, all the more potent as it came from staunch Presbyterian orthodoxy: 'He cannot fall back on his usual reserve of raising the cry of heterodoxy, his opponents, in this instance, being a body rather above him and his friends, in soundness of faith'.⁵⁷

Concern amongst Presbyterian clergymen at Cooke's efforts to move their church closer to the establishment was already significant prior to his appearance at the Hillsborough demonstration, so much so that his allies in the Synod of Ulster warned him of the potential criticisms he would face if he went ahead. Even Cooke's sympathetic biographer, J. L. Porter admitted that on both political and ecclesiastical grounds, 'a large number of the Presbyterian clergy looked upon the meeting with no friendly eye. They seemed to regard it as a demonstration in support of Tory politics and High Church Ascendancy.... Cooke was warned against attending'.⁵⁸ In a letter to Cooke, Lord Roden, the high Tory leader of the Orange order, commented, '....in all our politico-religious views..... I am anxious to have you with me, in our common cause.'⁵⁹ The meeting was not only a sign of Protestant defensiveness, but also against encroachment of the rights of the established church, and more generally, against the reforming Whig government. Holmes attributes Cooke with the authorship of a letter to the *Londonderry Standard* in June of 1834 attacking the non-subscribers's recent address to the Lord Lieutenant in favour of reform, and claiming that 'the real presbyterians' were, 'faithful friends to the established church'.⁶⁰ Certainly, if Cooke was behind this letter, it demonstrates his awareness of the need to create an impression of orthodox Presbyterian support for his Protestant unity campaign in Ulster's popular press.

On the Hillsborough platform, alongside the great landlord symbols of Protestant Anglican Ascendancy, the Marquises of Downshire, Londonderry, Hertford and Donegall and Lord Roden, Cooke declared: '....that never, in the history of Ireland, was Protestantism in greater danger than at this hour..', and he called for unity, 'in defence of our general and common Protestantism'. 'I know that both in high and low places the Presbyterians of Ulster have been represented as unfriendly to the United Churches of England and Ireland. The truth of this insinuation...I openly and positively deny. There are no doubt Presbyterians, so called, who hate the Church of England.... But what are these amongst the hundreds of thousands of Ulster Presbyterians? A few

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Porter, *Life and Times of Cooke*, p.223.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.229-231.

⁶⁰ Holmes, *Cooke*, p.114.

drops in a bucket; a few feathers in the scale....'. He announced, the 'pledge of Protestant union and co-operation. Between the divided churches – I publish the banns of a sacred marriage...'.⁶¹

The 'few drops in a bucket', was to turn into more of a flood: immediately the names of leading Presbyterian reformers in Belfast appeared on a list of protesters to the meeting: Robert Tennent, Robert James Tennent, John McCance and John Barnett, alongside some New Light ministers, including Hugh Woods of Bangor.⁶² The Moderator of the Synod, Rev. William McClure, immediately moved to reinforce that Cooke was *not* Moderator of the Synod, nor did he express the views of that Synod in his declaration of the banns of marriage between Episcopacy and Presbytery.⁶³ And although an angry letter appeared in the pro-establishment and conservative *Guardian* newspaper in Belfast, from 'A Presbyterian' offering support for Cooke and attacking McClure's statement, it was quickly obvious that his claim that Cooke had expressed the 'sentiments of the great body of the genuine Presbyterians of Ulster' was ill-founded.⁶⁴ This letter re-echoed that which had appeared in the *Derry Standard* supposedly of Cooke's authorship, referring to 'real' Presbyterians. It is clear that Cooke and fellow conservative Presbyterians were keen to portray opposition to the marriage of the two Protestant Churches as emanating purely from Arian, rather than orthodox, Presbyterians. This was certainly far from the case, as one of the most vociferous attacks on Cooke and his Hillsborough appearance came from the Reformed (or Covenanting) Presbyterian minister, Rev. John Paul, who had led the attacks on Arianism in the Synod of Ulster at the time of Cooke's battle in the 1820s.

In 1835 John Paul's Eastern Presbytery published a tract which directly contradicted Cooke's emphasis on Protestant unity, expressing abhorrence for tithes, which it described as, 'not only a grievance, but a very great evil'.⁶⁵ It commented, 'As Dissenters we complain that Episcopalians, who do not constitute one-tenth of the inhabitants of this country, should domineer over the other nine-tenths, and force them to maintain a hierarchy which they regard as anti-Christian'.⁶⁶ The established church hierarchy came in for particular criticism, Paul arguing that the system of 'deacons, priests, rectors, deans, archdeacons, bishops, archbishops, primates &c. &c. &c. with a

⁶¹ Porter, *Life and Times of Cooke*, pp. 231- 237 and *Guardian and Constitutional Advocate*, November 28 and continued December 2 1834.

⁶² *Guardian*, November 4 1834

⁶³ Holmes, *Cooke*, p. 116.

⁶⁴ *Guardian*, November 18 1834. This letter had originally appeared in the *Derry Sentinel*. (My underlining)

⁶⁵ Eastern Presbytery, *The Sign of the Times*, 2nd edition, p.4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

king or a queen at the head of the system', was totally opposed to 'the simplicity of Christian religion': 'Such a hierarchy we regard as Antichristian; and to force Dissenters to support it, we regard as a national sin...'.⁶⁷ In a direct hit at Cooke's performance on the Hillsborough platform, it attacked 'the enemies of civil and religious liberty' who were, 'raising the cry of No Popery'. 'They are endeavouring to frighten simple churchmen and Dissenters. They are striving to convince us that Prelacy is a barrier between us and Popery; that Prelacy must be kept up and the tithe system supported.... Such is the strategy employed to stop the progress of civil and religious liberty'.⁶⁸ Here of course, John Paul had hit at the very heart of Cooke's cause. The savage criticism of the established church continued: it was a creature of the state; it was not a so-called 'High Church', so much as a 'Low Church', indeed, 'there never was a church so low as she is at present'.⁶⁹ They also denounced the 'evils flowing from an unscriptural connection between Church and State' and gave, as one of the reasons for thanksgiving, the abolition of church cess.⁷⁰ The Eastern Presbytery denounced the *regium donum* as a bribe and attributed it as the reason why so many Presbyterians in receipt of it had not spoken out more forcefully on the subject of the evils of tithes, despite the fact that, 'Presbyterians, as well as Catholics, hate the tithe system'.⁷¹

A series of letters from 'A Member of the Synod of Ulster' appeared in 1835 and were subsequently published together in pamphlet form later that year.⁷² The author offered another scathing critique of the established church and tithes, and *regium donum*. He began by highlighting the social inequalities still prevailing between the two Protestant churches, and the contempt in which Anglican churchmen held the Presbyterian Church.⁷³ Their dignitaries, he argued, '...look upon Dissenting ministers as persons beneath the dignity of a mitre to acknowledge'.⁷⁴ He examined the abuses of the established church, and directly challenged Cooke 'who, merging his feelings as a Presbyterian in his opinions as a political partisan, speaks of the Established Church as "*Our Sister*", and in the language of sycophantic adulation!'.⁷⁵ 'In the first place, allow me to remark, that the Established Church has always been the same time-serving

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20 and 32.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-19. The Covenanters were the only Presbyterian denomination who continued to refuse to accept any state endowment by this date.

⁷² *Letters to the Presbyterians of Ulster, on Tithes, Regium Donum, and the Abuses of the Church Establishment*, 2nd edition.

⁷³ *Ibid.* The Bishops in Dublin had refused to join the Bible Society since, 'it placed the Clergy of the Established Church on an equal footing with Dissenting Ministers!'.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. iii-iv.

Hierarchy – greedy of power and place...’⁷⁶. Moreover, he reminded the Presbyterians that, ‘the Established Church has, when opportunity offered, always *persecuted*’, reminding them of the odious Test and Corporation Acts.⁷⁷ As to the matter of tithes, he denounced the system as ‘bloody’ and ‘barbarous’. ‘Is it not strange’, he asked, ‘that seven millions of people should yield to the abominable oppression of 500,000....?’ And, ‘what, in return, do the Irish people receive for all this oppression? They receive fox-hunting and immoral Curates, Parsons, Vicars, and Rectors! who not only cheat and swindle the peasant out of his money, but would fain do so, too with his religion and his morality!’⁷⁸

In May 1835 William Sharman Crawford presented a petition to the Commons against tithes from County Down, signed by 800 Presbyterians, and, ‘altogether denying the truth of the statement made by the noble Member for Down (Lord Castlereagh), that the Presbyterians were willing to pay tithe. He was proud of the Presbyterians of Ulster, and proud that they had made him their organ’.⁷⁹ Speaking again in June Crawford informed the Commons that, ‘Dr. Cooke, it was well known, did not speak the sentiments of the Presbyterian body. At this meeting Dr. Cooke, in his speech, talked of a marriage between the Protestant Episcopalian and the Presbyterian Churches. The Presbyterians repudiated such an idea. From Dr. Cooke’s own parish of Killyleagh, he had presented a petition, signed by a large number of Presbyterians, repudiating such a principle, and calling also for the abolition of tithes’.⁸⁰

In 1834 an equally strong attack on Cooke’s behaviour was published under the title of *An Interesting Review of the Great Hillsborough Meeting, by Doctor Grattan of Kildare*.⁸¹ This pamphlet once again argued that the main aim of the demonstration had been to delude the Presbyterians into supporting the established church and defending tithes by playing on fears of Catholicism.⁸² (This was precisely John Paul’s argument.) Cooke was attacked as ‘a moral nuisance, an intolerable evil’, and ‘an agitator’, and the author stated, that as a Protestant Dissenter who supported religious liberty, he firmly denounced Cooke’s speech.⁸³ Attacking Cooke’s support of tithes as being ‘necessary to religion’, the writer sarcastically added,

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10 and pp. 12-13.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8.

⁷⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd series vol.27, 1172-4, May 18 1835.

⁸⁰ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.28, 593-594, June 10 1835.

⁸¹ *An Interesting Review of the ‘Great Hillsborough Meeting’, By Doctor Grattan* (Belfast, 1834).

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.

...the Presbyterian clergy, if what their leader says be true, should take up their houses of meeting, and their respective congregations, and, creeping with them into the church, like a snail with his shell, lay them down at the foot of the pulpit, placing them all under the apostolic care of “their Graces of Armagh and Derry”. If this not be done, it is downright absurdity to talk of a ‘union between the churches’; for most certainly, “their Graces of Armagh and Derry” will not go to Mahomet – Mahomet must go to the tomb!! Are the Presbyterians of the North prepared for this?⁸⁴

The notion of Protestant unity being purely a ‘one-way’ street reappeared many times in the years after 1834, expressed by both Arians and Cooke’s own orthodox brethren.

In 1835 another series of letters appeared in the *Londonderry Standard* which were subsequently published under the title, *The First and Second Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Union of Presbytery and Prelacy*, by ‘John Knox Junior’. Widely believed to be the work of the Rev. D.G. Brown of Newtownhamilton,⁸⁵ it was another attack on Cooke’s banns of marriage from a thoroughly orthodox (but clearly liberal) Presbyterian source: like John Paul, Brown had supported Cooke’s campaign against the Arians in the Synod of Ulster. (He was also to become a Tenant League supporter in the 1850s.) Brown attacked the ‘*Erastianism*’ which he believed had crept into the Presbyterian Church and denounced the ‘rectorial scorn and insolence’ experienced by Presbyterian ministers.⁸⁶ ‘Why then’, he asked, ‘should there have been found Ministers in the Synod of Ulster so far forgetful of their principles, or so ready to sacrifice them at the shrine of this world’s expediency, as to identify themselves with the abettors of what they are pleased to designate the *integrity* of the Church established in this land?’⁸⁷ He expressed his horror that Presbyterians such as Cooke were happy for ministers to be taught, ‘to covet the purple and gold and fine linen of Babylon’.⁸⁸

Cooke, however, was not deterred in his campaign to bring the two Protestant churches closer. As Chapter Five emphasizes, he was extremely active in Belfast conservative circles, and spoke frequently at Conservative Dinners. In one such speech in Belfast in 1836, at a meeting to celebrate the Fourth Anniversary of the Belfast Society, he revealed his increasing anti-Catholicism and declared, ‘Our surname indeed is Presbyterian, but our family name is Protestant’.⁸⁹ The Synod of Ulster was introduced by the Chairman, as ‘the younger, but not less gifted daughter of the same

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸⁵ See Holmes, *Cooke*, p. 116.

⁸⁶ *First and Second Blast of the Trumpet*, p.5 and p. 7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

pure and hallowed faith'.⁹⁰ Even Anglicans within the Belfast Society recognized that Cooke's policy of Protestant unity was not shared by all Presbyterians. In December 1836, J.E Jackson M.P. wrote to James Emerson Tennent to inquire how many Presbyterians were members of the society, and whether it would therefore risk 'producing discord by referring to the assaults made by O'Connell and co. on our Church and its property'.⁹¹

A letter signed 'Q.E.D' which appeared in the *Northern Whig* in March 1837, suggested that the established church's friendliness towards its old rival was borne purely from political expediency: 'At one time they are but *half*-Voluntaries, elected, and partly supported by the people... But, when they figure at Hillsborough or Banbridge – when in some Orange pavilion, they raise their sweet voices... in favour of tithes and Prelacy – gracious smiles come down upon them from Episcopal countenances...'.⁹² Later that year he again warned Presbyterian ministers not to be fooled: 'the Establishment feels itself to be in danger, and courts your alliance', despite the fact that 'You are not qualified even for *communion*' in their church.⁹³ The Presbyterian *Whig* editor, James Simms, denounced the established church as 'unchristianized', and 'over-loaded' with wealth and property.⁹⁴

In September 1837, Cooke once again reiterated the unity between the established and Presbyterian churches at a meeting held in his own May Street Church to form the 'Belfast Protestant Association'.⁹⁵ And at a Great Conservative Dinner in October Cooke declared, 'I am less a Presbyterian than a Protestant...Presbyterian but designates our regiment and our facings; Protestant, the united army of which we form a division', and in fulsome praise of the established church, he denounced those who fomented 'jealousies' between the two.⁹⁶ Cooke's old enemy, the *Northern Whig* revelled in Cooke's activities, providing them with a platform to launch a tirade of abuse against the minister. They questioned his Presbyterianism, asking why he did not simply, 'go over to the tithe church, which he seems to prize so much above the

⁸⁹ *Times*, December 27 1836.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ J. E. Jackson to James Emerson Tennent, December 13 1836, PRONI, D/2922/C/6/12.

⁹² *NW*, March 21 1837.

⁹³ *NW*, October 12 1837. 'Q.E.D' has been identified as the Rev. James Godkin, a Congregationalist minister, and opponent of the Church of Ireland. See Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, p.161.

⁹⁴ *NW*, January 7 1837.

⁹⁵ *Times*, September 5 and 7 1837; and A.T. Jackson, *Friends and Acquaintances of Henry Cooke* (Bangor, 1985), p. 51.

⁹⁶ *Speech of the Rev. Henry Cooke, D.D, L.L.D, at the Conservative Dinner, Belfast, on Thursday the 19th October, 1837* (Belfast, 1837), pp. 21-23.

Presbyterian’?⁹⁷ A correspondent to the *Whig* under the pseudonym ‘Amicus Justile’ reminded Presbyterians of the abuses of the established church which so-called Presbyterians like Cooke were so eager to uphold, attacking him as the champion of ‘religious bigotry’ and tithes.⁹⁸ In a dinner given to Dr. Paul and the Eastern Presbytery by the ‘friends of civil and religious liberty’ in Belfast, the Rev. John Dill of Carnmoney attacked Cooke’s fraternising with the established church and criticized the spirit of ‘bigotry and intolerance’ manifested by some of its clergy.⁹⁹

The opposition from his own brethren, and in the wider Presbyterian press, which Cooke faced for his established church policy, confirmed that many Presbyterians in Ulster supported the reform of the established church, despite the threat from O’Connell and resurgent Irish Catholicism. The attacks on tithes, which accompanied the attacks on Cooke’s banns of marriage, showed that Presbyterian hatred of the system had certainly not been mitigated by other factors. When the government did finally pass the Tithe Act in 1838 it did offer some substantial concessions, but, according to Boyce, still did not go far enough for many liberal Presbyterians who desired to see the entire system abolished.¹⁰⁰ It was clear that Cooke’s call for ‘Protestant unity’ had in fact prompted a bitter articulation of their opposition to the established church.

In 1838 a pamphlet controversy erupted between Presbyterian and Episcopalian clergymen, seriously undermining any notion of Protestant unity. An Episcopalian curate in Londonderry, Rev. Archibald Boyd, published a strong attack on Presbyterianism¹⁰¹ and in the following year, four Presbyterian ministers from the Derry and Strabane area published a hostile and detailed reply, entitled, *Presbyterianism Defended*.¹⁰² These ministers included the Rev. A. P. Goudy and Rev. McClure, moderator of the Synod at the time of the Hillsborough demonstration.¹⁰³ A review of this work, in the *Orthodox Presbyterian* periodical, reflected the increasing hostilities and noted that,

We confess we cannot but pronounce it a very crazy kind of foundation for Christian unity which leaves Episcopalians the full right of unchurcing Presbyterians, and denies to the latter the right of vindicating their church

⁹⁷ *NW*, July 4 1837.

⁹⁸ *NW*, February 9 1837.

⁹⁹ *NW*, September 29 1838.

¹⁰⁰ D. George Boyce, *Nineteenth Century Ireland: the search for stability* (Dublin, 1990), p.73.

¹⁰¹ See Latimer, *History*, p.206 and D. Stewart, *History and Principles*, pp.156-6.

¹⁰² *Presbyterianism Defended, and the Arguments of Modern Advocates of Prelacy examined and refuted, in Four Discourses, by Ministers of the Synod of Ulster*. (Glasgow, 1839).

¹⁰³ The other ministers were the Rev. W.D. Killen, Raphoe and the Rev. James Denham, Londonderry.

privileges. Yet this is precisely the state of affairs between Presbyterians and Episcopalians, at the present period.¹⁰⁴

The review praised the authors of *Presbyterianism Defended*, and recommended that it be read by every Presbyterian family. However, the ante was increased further by the publication of a reply to this by Rev. Boyd, which in turn prompted another, formidably lengthy reply from the four Presbyterian ministers, entitled, the *Plea of Presbytery*.¹⁰⁵ The Presbyterian historian, W.T. Latimer commented that, Goudy and his colleagues, 'struck hard, and aroused the wrath of both priests and people in the Prelatic Church'.¹⁰⁶ Significantly, the *Plea* ran to three separate editions and in 1840 its four authors received the thanks of the Synod of Ulster, the very last motion to be passed before the formation of the General Assembly later that year.¹⁰⁷ Brooke notes the significance of the fact that the work received the Synod's warm thanks, yet Cooke had received no such credit for his efforts for Protestant unity in 1834.¹⁰⁸ In July in the new Assembly, even Cooke was forced to admit that although he was 'most anxious to preserve Protestant peace', Rev. Boyd's original publication had been, 'one of the most impudent productions he had ever read'.¹⁰⁹

The *Plea of Presbytery* defended, amongst other issues, Presbyterian polity, forms of worship and Presbyterian ordination, so often denied by many advocates of Prelacy. Significantly, the ordination issue was to become a central point of conflict between the two churches during the marriages question in the early 1840s. Highlighting the continuing social inequalities between them, the authors of *Plea* commented that, 'Episcopalians are in the habit of maintaining that they are the Church, whilst all others are treated by them as schismatics...'.¹¹⁰ The pamphlet war did not end there: another reply from Rev. Boyd entitled *Misrepresentation Refuted* prompted the Presbyterian ministers to answer with 'Mene Tekel',¹¹¹ and to this Boyd offered a lengthy book entitled 'Episcopacy and Presbytery'. The dispute reached beyond the confines of the Synod of Ulster, with the debates also played out in the columns of the

¹⁰⁴ *Orthodox Presbyterian*, August 1839, pp. 278-82.

¹⁰⁵ *The Plea of Presbytery in behalf of the Ordination, Government, Discipline and Worship of the Christian Church, As Opposed to the Unscriptural Character and Claims of Prelacy. In a reply to the Rev. Archibald Boyd, A.M., on Episcopacy, By Ministers of the General Synod of Ulster*, 2nd edition (1840; Belfast, 1841).

¹⁰⁶ Latimer, *History of Irish Presbyterians*, p. 207.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, p. 158.

¹⁰⁹ *NW*, July 16 1840.

¹¹⁰ *Plea of Presbytery*, p. ii.

¹¹¹ *Misrepresentation Refuted; in Letters, Addressed to the Authors of "Plea of Presbytery". By the Rev. A. Boyd, Author of "Letters on Episcopacy".* (Belfast, 1840); and *Mene, Tekel, or The Rev. A. Boyd's*

local press. Writing in defence of *Plea*, one correspondent in the *Belfast Newsletter* celebrated it as ‘a signal defeat to the exclusive pretensions of *High Churchmen*’.¹¹² With each new publication, fresh bitterness was breathed into the controversy.¹¹³ Boyd’s departure from Derry shortly after, finally brought closure to the war of words, but new, even more bitter conflicts were soon to follow between the two churches.

As mentioned previously, whilst those Presbyterians opposed to national education had found some common ground with the established church on the subject, this changed rapidly in 1840 when the government compromised on Presbyterian demands and the Church offered its official adherence to the scheme. The torrent of abuse which subsequently fell upon Presbyterians, and Cooke in particular, from the established church was vehement and bitter. The Anglican clergyman, the Rev. Thomas Drew, who had once been an ally of Cooke in their staunch opposition to the Education Board, led the attacks on the Synod of Ulster. The *Whig* claimed that Drew’s response epitomized the real attitude of the established church towards the Presbyterians – that the Dissenters were useful allies when they played a role, ‘in subordination and subserviency to the Established Church’, but that in acting independently and against the interests of the Anglican church, then they were denounced as no better than Romanists, and as not being a ‘Bible-honouring body’.¹¹⁴

Drew’s letter prompted a sharp rebuke from the Rev. Robert Stewart of Broughshane, one of Cooke’s closest allies, who commented, ‘The Synod owes much of fraternal good will, but no allegiance, to the “Episcopal Church”’. He continued, ‘I have for some time back lamented to see what I considered indications of a growing spirit of superciliousness and intolerance towards Presbyterians, in members of the Established Church’.¹¹⁵ Coming from the pen of a conservative and one of the staunchest advocates of Cooke’s Protestant Peace, these were certainly significant comments. The editor of the *Orthodox Presbyterian* agreed with Stewart, remarking that, ‘our Episcopal brethren have manifested towards the General Synod of Ulster a degree of acrimony and vituperation which we regret to find them exhibit’.¹¹⁶ In March, Stewart addressed a letter to the Editor of the *Londonderry Standard* in reply to Cooke’s

Defence Examined, and the Charges against him Substantiated, By the Authors of “The Plea of Presbytery” (Londonderry, 1840)

¹¹² *BNL*, August 7 1840.

¹¹³ Stewart, *History and Principles*, p. 157.

¹¹⁴ *NW*, February 11 1840.

¹¹⁵ *Orthodox Presbyterian: New Series*, (April 1840), pp. 136-7.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

assailants in the established church. With its theme of Anglican ingratitude, ironically, it was a direct echo of the comments of his Arian rivals at the *Whig*:

Dr. Cooke has.... been the consistent and unwearied advocate of union, harmony and brotherly kindness, between the Episcopal and Presbyterian Churches. He has been the warm apologist of the "Episcopal Church" in private among his friends, sometimes to the annoyance and offence of some of his Presbyterian brethren; and often, in public, has he fearlessly and successfully battled in her cause. The Established Church knew this well. They knew that on this account Dr. Cooke not only excited the jealousy of some of the more anti-prelatic Presbyterians, but incurred the wrath of Radicals of every grade and description, and became the object of their most bitter and incessant persecution. They knew all this, and they lauded *him to the skies* while he was gratuitously incurring risk and suffering inconvenience on their account. But the moment that he ventured to do a public act as a Presbyterian, and, in conjunction with his brethren, succeeded in obtaining Presbyterian Education for the poor of his own communion, they have opened upon him like a pack of hounds...¹¹⁷

The *Belfast Newsletter* was outraged that the Rev. Drew had deliberately slighted Presbyterians in a recent speech, by referring to them as 'Dissenters'.¹¹⁸ In the same speech Drew accused the Presbyterians of entertaining hopes that, 'in our [Anglican] degradation and ruin would be found the uprising and predominance' of their church.¹¹⁹ Even the *Newsletter's* editorial admitted 'the breach which is daily becoming wider between the Established Church and the Presbyterian bodies of this country...'.¹²⁰ At the same time, the leading Remonstrant minister, Henry Montgomery declared that, the established church, 'had uniformly set itself up against the liberty of the people'.¹²¹ The conflict between the two churches lurched into 1841 and when the Rev. Drew criticized the grants given to Presbyterian 'Dissenting' congregations by the government,¹²² there was a bitter Presbyterian response, highlighting the financial inequalities between the two Protestant churches. The author of one letter, 'Vigilans', used House of Commons returns to estimate that whilst the average annual income of

¹¹⁷ Reprinted in the *Orthodox Presbyterian: New Series*, p. 146. The spirit of Anglican hostility was reflected in the comments of the *Dublin Evening Mail*, which was indignant that the Synod of Ulster chose collaboration with the 'Government anti-Scriptural Board', rather than unity with the Established Church's newly formed, 'Church Education Society'. See *NW*, March 7 1840.

¹¹⁸ *BNL*, August 28 1840.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *NW*, October 6 1840.

¹²² Quoted in a letter to the Editor of the *BNL*, signed, 'Vigilans', February 16 1841.

the Irish established church was £815,333, that of the Presbyterian Church was a mere fraction of this.¹²³

In the course of the dispute, age-old issues such as the Established Church's continuing failure to acknowledge the validity of Presbyterian ordination, whilst acknowledging that of the Catholic clergy, raised its head. The *Belfast Newsletter*, usually a staunch advocate of Protestant unity, acknowledged that if the 'Protestant Peace' was to be preserved, 'the conditions must be equally honourable to the two great parties concerned'.¹²⁴ The widening gulf between the orthodox Presbyterians and the Established Church was a source of delight to Henry Montgomery. In a speech to the Ulster Constitutional Association in February 1841 he mockingly laughed at the so-called marriage declared by Cooke in 1834. Montgomery said that he had,

Strongly suspected that the marriage... would be but a left-handed affair....Great persons occasionally merely married for convenience; and when they grew tired of their spouses, they soon managed to get rid of them.... It was impossible... that with all their coquetting, the two churches could unite cordially. As well might they expect oil and water to amalgamate, as that a sincere union could take place between them.¹²⁵

As late as 1849 the dispute remained potent, as Rev. Drew advised Presbyterians to disown their ministers who supported the Board of Education.¹²⁶ The Rev. William Johnston of Townsend Street Presbyterian Church led the defence of the Presbyterians' connection with the Board,¹²⁷ accusing the Established Church clergy of 'selfish and shameful conduct'.¹²⁸ In a letter to the editor of the *Banner of Ulster*, 'A Presbyterian' claimed that, 'high-flying prelatists have, in many parts of the country been endeavouring to persuade the Presbyterian laity to withdraw their children from the national schools, and to send them to those in connexion with the Church Education Society'.¹²⁹ The *Londonderry Standard* described it as, 'the recent crusade against Presbyterianism in Belfast, under pretence of the advocacy of Scriptural education'.¹³⁰ Rev. Robert Stewart denounced the Church Education Society as, 'outrageously sectarian and exclusive in character. The patrons or superintendents must be all of the

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *NW*, February 27 1841.

¹²⁶ *BU*, January 19 1849.

¹²⁷ *LS*, November 17 1848.

¹²⁸ *BU*, February 23 1849.

¹²⁹ *BU*, January 19 1849.

¹³⁰ *LS*, November 17 1848.

communion of the Established Church, and so, without exception, must be the teachers'.¹³¹

By 1842 the emerging marriages crisis constituted the most bitter controversy between the two Protestant churches in Ireland, as it had first commenced with the comments of Edward Stopford, the Archdeacon of Armagh in a series of letters in 1839.¹³² He had argued that a marriage by a Presbyterian minister in Ireland, between parties, of whom one or both belonged to the established church, was illegal. The Presbyterian minister of Augnacloy, John Henderson, offered an immediate response, in which he warned Stopford of the impact of his comments on Episcopal-Presbyterian relations in the area: '...the Archdeacon should bear in mind, that the Presbyterians in this parish have never regarded him, nor the church to which he belongs, with friendly feelings; and that, by his late conduct, he has very considerably widened the breach, fanned the flame of discord, and kindled a fire that will not easily be extinguished'.¹³³ Following an adverse ruling in Armagh's ecclesiastical courts the following year, a prominent case followed in 1841. In this, an Anglican church member convicted of bigamy, succeeded in having his conviction quashed in the Queen's Bench Division of the High Court, by arguing that his first marriage, performed by a Presbyterian minister, had been invalid.¹³⁴ When the case came before the Law Lords there was equal division on the matter, and the Irish bench judges' ruling was allowed to stand. The reaction in Presbyterian Ulster was, unsurprisingly, one of shock and anger. Not only did it undermine the validity of ordination in the Presbyterian Church, but it also threatened to bastardise children from those mixed marriages now deemed to be illegal. As well as immense practical ramifications for Presbyterian Ulster, the situation constituted a gross insult, by emphasising that in the eyes of the Establishment, they were not viewed on anything like an equal footing with the Anglican Church.

In January 1842, when the decision of the Irish Judges in the bigamy appeal was announced, the Belfast press immediately launched a campaign to encourage Presbyterians to petition parliament for a new law to confirm the legality of the disputed marriages.¹³⁵ At a meeting of Presbyterians in Armagh, convened by the Rev. P. S. Henry, Rev. Dr. Miller who had been responsible for the ruling in Armagh, was denounced as 'an Ecclesiast Judge'. In a bitter attack on Cooke, and his 'Protestant

¹³¹ *BNL*, December 15 1848.

¹³² *BNL*, September 20 1839. (A full copy of Stopford's original pamphlet was reprinted at the height of the controversy in the *BNL*, July 23 1842.)

¹³³ *BNL*, November 1 1839.

¹³⁴ See Latimer, *History of Irish Presbyterians*, p.212; Holmes, *Cooke*, p.152.

¹³⁵ *BNL*, January 14 1842.

union', Henry questioned why the Presbyterian Church had not responded sooner to Stopford's original letters: 'Some of them were too busy publishing the banns of matrimony with a Church that spurned them. (Hear, Hear)'.¹³⁶ It was certainly clear that Cooke was in a difficult and vulnerable situation. As a Presbyterian, and in the face of growing Presbyterian anger on the matter, he simply could not attempt to defend the indefensible, even though it threatened his vision of Protestant peace.

It was not only orthodox Presbyterians who rallied to denounce the adverse rulings made against Presbyterian marriages: at a meeting of Non-subscribers in February, a petition was drawn up to Parliament, praying for an act to remedy the evils which had arisen from the ruling of the Judges.¹³⁷ At that meeting the Rev. William Glendy, asked, 'What was there belonging to the Presbyterians which the Established Church had not impugned? Their Presbytery – their ordination – both had been impugned by that Church...'.¹³⁸ At a meeting of Presbyterians in Dublin to discuss the Marriages issue, Rev. W. B. Kirkpatrick denounced the growing 'Puseyism' of the established church,¹³⁹ which he, believed was behind their increasing hostility to Presbyterian ordination:

The extraordinary pretensions of the Oxford School in England, a large and rapidly growing section of the Established Church – their claims to apostolic succession – their fierce denunciations of all other Protestant Churches whose Ministers have not had Episcopal ordination – their assertion that Presbyterian Ministers are in fact no Ministers at all – these lofty and exclusive claims of the new school of theology had painfully called public attention to the points wherein the two Churches disagreed... and produced a soreness of feeling which it would require the most vigorous efforts on the part of the representatives of the two Churches to allay and remove.¹⁴⁰

By February, even the pro-Protestant union, *Belfast Newsletter*, was forced to admit that the Episcopalians, far from rallying to their 'sister' church, were distinctly apathetic on the matter, and it lamented the 'petty jealousies' that were increasing day by day between the two Churches.¹⁴¹ When news of Eliot's bill reached Ulster there was consternation that it merely proposed to confirm the validity of existing

¹³⁶ *NW*, January 22 1842.

¹³⁷ *NW*, February 3 1842.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ For more on this, see S. Peter Kerr, 'Tolerant Bishops in an Intolerant Church; the Puseyite Threat in Ulster', in W.J. Shields (eds.), *Persecution and Toleration (Studies in Church History 27)* (Oxford, 1984), pp.343-355 and Peter Nockles, 'Church or Protestant Sect; the Church of Ireland, High Churchmanship, and the Oxford Movement, 1822-1869', *Historical Journal*, 1xi, no.2 (June 1998), pp.457-494.

¹⁴⁰ *BNL*, February 15 1842.

marriages.¹⁴² Carefully avoiding too sweeping an attack on the Established Church, Cooke blamed the Puseyite faction within it for the hostility lately so manifest towards Presbyterian ordination and he staunchly defended the right of the Presbyterian minister to be called ‘Clergyman’.¹⁴³ The Rev. Johnston of Tullylish noted that both Dr. Miller of Armagh, and Sir T. Staples, the Dublin Judge, who had pronounced on the invalidity of mixed marriages conducted by a Presbyterian minister, were High Churchmen.¹⁴⁴ The Rev. Bell of Clare was more explicit: ‘...I am compelled to state, that to the Ministers of the Established Church I attribute all the present alarm and agitation about the validity of our marriages, when we join together a member of our Church with an Episcopalian...’, and he claimed that, in the Armagh area, the, ‘Episcopalian Ministers have been saying behind our backs that our marriage in such cases is illegal’.¹⁴⁵ Clearly, not all ministers were exercising Cooke’s caution.

Similar sentiments were expressed in a letter from ‘An Orthodox Presbyterian’, addressed to Henry Cooke, in which the author attributed the marriage agitation not merely to the Puseyite faction, but to the ‘fundamental constitution’ of the entire Established Church, which he said, ‘embodied all the offensive, arrogant exclusiveness of which you complain...’.¹⁴⁶ On the subject of the Hillsborough banns of marriage of 1834 and Cooke’s untiring campaign of Protestant unity, ‘Orthodox Presbyterian’ reminded him that, ‘Very little thanks I believe you have received, on this account, from any quarter’. He continued his assault on the established church by adding, ‘So long as Prelatists have need of Presbyterian succour, they carefully veil the repulsive features of their system; but no sooner has the emergency passed away, than they ascend the throne of Apostolic supremacy, and spurn contemptuously away the men upon whose stern courage they had been fain to rely in the moment of danger’.¹⁴⁷

In April a dispute erupted between the established church organ, the *Ulster Times*, and the Rev. Robert Stewart of Broughshane, over a letter written by Stewart on the marriages controversy, which subsequently appeared in pamphlet form.¹⁴⁸ Stewart described how several years earlier, Rev. Dr. Miller of Armagh had approached Stewart

¹⁴¹ *BNL*, February 22 1842.

¹⁴² *NW*, March 5 1842. *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.60, 1006 (February 24 1842)

¹⁴³ *Presbyterian Marriages: Authentic Report of the Rev. Dr. Cooke’s speech at the special meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, held in May-Street Church, on Thursday 10th March, 1842, on the Subject of Mixed Marriages* (1842), pp. 4-5.

¹⁴⁴ *BNL*, March 12 1842.

¹⁴⁵ *BNL*, March 25 1842.

¹⁴⁶ *NW*, March 24 1842.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Rev. Dr. Stewart of Broughshane, *Presbyterian Marriages: Review of the Rev. Dr. Miller’s Judgment in Lemon v. Lemon, and Mr. Whiteside’s Argument in Regina v. Smith.* (1842).

in eagerness on the need for union between the two Protestant Churches in Ireland. Stewart notes, 'The Prospects of the Irish Church Establishment were indeed at that period considerably lowering, as the O'Connell anti-tithe agitation was rising like a portentous cloud in the political atmosphere, and it is the uniform character of the Prelatic Church to be all condescension and kindness to Presbyterians, when it is in danger or adversity, and requires friends...'. Stewart added that when, however, 'the storm had lulled – the scared vessel laden with Church property, had arrived safe in port', Dr. Miller did not hesitate to 'unchurch' Presbyterian ministers.¹⁴⁹ This was an important attack and reflected the awakening sense of Episcopal ingratitude felt by even conservative Presbyterians, both lay and clergy. The *Ulster Times* accused Stewart of disturbing the Protestant peace, and in equally defiant tone, the Broughshane minister responded in a second letter, claiming that, 'There is not a Presbyterian in Ireland who is not firmly convinced that the crusade was concocted near the Cathedral of Armagh, and that Dr. Stopford, Dr. Miller, and Counsellor Whiteside [the Anglican Irish bench judge], are directors of it...'.¹⁵⁰

In June 1842 Presbyterian-Episcopalian relations deteriorated further with, not only the establishment of the Presbyterian newspaper, the *Banner*, but also the celebration of the bicentenary of Presbyterianism in Ireland. Both events became the focus for an increased outpouring of Presbyterian hostility and criticism of the established church. At a bicentenary meeting in Belfast, the Rev. John Edgar referred to, 'these days of supreme ecclesiastical arrogance, when one small sect has the impudence to unchurch and excommunicate the whole Christian world.... in these days of rampant intolerance, when our Church is declared to be no Church.... and all her ministers are asserted to be no clergy at all – nothing but impostors in "pretended holy orders"..'.¹⁵¹ A war of words between the organ of the General Assembly, the *Banner of Ulster*, and the established church organ, the *Ulster Times*, quickly ensued. The *Times* recalled the *Plea of Presbytery* as, 'a sample of the animus prevailing in the General Assembly with regard to the Episcopal Church',¹⁵² and in June the *Banner* ran an article entitled, 'Presbyterianism, Episcopacy, Conservatism, and some other matters'. It contained a tirade of abuse against the 'high Church party' in Belfast and defended recent comments of Rev. McClure who had referred to the 'deeds of atrocity and blood perpetrated by the Church of England' throughout history, at a bicentenary

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵⁰ *LS*, May 18 1842.

¹⁵¹ *BU*, June 14 1842.

¹⁵² *Ulster Times*, June 18 1842.

meeting.¹⁵³ It was the *Belfast Newsletter's* leading editorial which perhaps most appropriately summed up the situation: 'THE LATE BI-CENTENARY MEETINGS – PRESBYTERIANS AND EPISCOPALIANS – PEACE or WAR', in which it lamented the, 'coldness, indifference, and in some cases, open hostility' which existed between the two Churches.¹⁵⁴

Rev. Robert Stewart told the established church that matters may have been different, 'Had you treated Presbyterians with anything approaching to equity or toleration'.¹⁵⁵ Reflecting the increasingly bitter and defensive stance of Presbyterians towards the established church, he recalled that, 'Presbyterians have been for a length of time past, subjected to a succession of insults from Archbishops, Bishops, Curates, Magazines, Newspapers, and though last not least, by the present attempt to deprive them of the privilege of being married by their own ministers, in cases where they wish to intermarry with members of the Irish Establishment'.¹⁵⁶ One correspondent to the *Ulster Times* accused the Presbyterians, and in particular the *Banner*, of sowing the seeds of discord in the 'Protestant Peace'.¹⁵⁷ The correspondence of Edward Stopford with Primate Beresford indicates that he certainly did not envisage the equality of rights between the two churches to which the Presbyterians felt entitled. On the forthcoming marriages legislation he commented in a private letter of June 13th, 'whatever general plan be laid down must operate in our favor [*sic*]'.¹⁵⁸

The annual meeting of the General Assembly in the summer of 1842 offered another platform for anti-established Church sentiment to be expressed and the tone of the proceedings was one of strong defiance.¹⁵⁹ Even Henry Cooke, the architect of 'Protestant union', warned Presbyterians that if they allowed one right to be trampled over, it would set the precedent for more losses. Whilst he avowed his reluctance to break the 'Protestant Peace', '...it cannot be maintained on a basis which robs the Presbyterian minister of the station of a clergyman'. Cooke set out his position by stating that 'while he had Presbyterianism to maintain, he also had Protestantism to maintain'.¹⁶⁰ He vehemently opposed Rev. Dr. Brown's proposal to form associations to defend Presbyterian civil and religious rights, clearly aware that any such organisation

¹⁵³ *BU*, June 21 1842.

¹⁵⁴ *BNL*, June 24 1842.

¹⁵⁵ *LS*, June 22 1842.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ulster Times*, June 28 1842.

¹⁵⁸ Edward Stopford, Bishop of Meath to Primate Beresford, June 13 1842, PRONI, T/2772/17/24.

¹⁵⁹ For proceedings of, on the marriages question, see *BU*, July 8, 13 and 15 1842.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

would be incompatible with his vision of Protestant unity.¹⁶¹ Once again, it was John Edgar, Moderator of the Assembly, who led the most severe attack on the established church in his closing address, stating that he was pledged ‘to endeavour to extirpate Prelacy’.¹⁶² Referring to ‘the preservation of the Protestant peace’, Rev. H.J. Dobbin of Ballymena argued that, ‘...If this was to be received as an imposition of silence when their religious rights were invaded, he did not think that the thing sought to be maintained was so very desirable’.¹⁶³ ‘A Church Protestant’ denounced the ‘invective and inflammatory abuse against the established church’ at the recent Assembly proceedings.¹⁶⁴

There is no doubt that the strength of hostility expressed towards the established church at the annual meeting of the General Assembly placed any notion of Protestant unity on weak ground. The feelings expressed certainly unnerved Bishop Stopford who commented in a letter to Beresford, ‘Every virulent misrepresentation of our Church was hailed with loud applause’.¹⁶⁵ In a similar letter that month he commented, ‘they are determined not to admit to any principle of inferiority – they must marry two Episcopalians as we may marry two Presbyterians. They must no longer be called “Dissenters”, but “Presbyterians”’.¹⁶⁶ His paranoia on the matter was clear, as he added, (alluding no doubt to Edgar’s comment), that many in the Assembly, ‘look forward with delight to the near approach of the happy time when Prelacy shall be wiped off from the earth and all nations become subject to the General Assembly’.¹⁶⁷ The *Banner* was unrepentant at the Assembly’s proceedings, reminding its readers that, ‘It is notorious that the vexatious lawsuit in which the Assembly is involved may be traced to a certain faction in the Establishment, and that the Primate of Armagh has undertaken to defray the expenses of the defendants’.¹⁶⁸

The *Banner* was subsequently outraged at the comments of Rev. Henry Montgomery at the annual Remonstrant Synod later that month, in which he regretted the extreme tone of the ‘senseless, irritating, unprofitable and abusive clamour’ raised

¹⁶¹ *BU*, July 13 1842.

¹⁶² *BU*, July 15 1842.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ulster Times*, July 26 1842.

¹⁶⁵ Stopford to Beresford, July 20 1842, PRONI, T/2772/17/39.

¹⁶⁶ Stopford to Beresford, July 17 1842, PRONI, T/2772/17/38.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *BU*, July 22 1842.

against the clergy of the establishment by members of the General Assembly.¹⁶⁹ On the subject of Cooke's 'Protestant peace', Montgomery commented,

The hollow alliance formed between the two parties, some years ago... will be broken up by it...I have said the hollow alliance, because I believe, that the alliance was insincere...Prelacy could not look favourably on Presbyterianism, and Presbytery could not look, with an eye of genuine affection, on Prelacy, in this country.... The two parties had their own views in [*sic*] the union which was formed. The Established Church desired to have, in her political contests, the weight of Presbyterian influence, in addition to her own; and the Presbyterians, on the other hand, desired to have, on their side, the influence and support of those in connexion with the Establishment.¹⁷⁰

Bishop Stopford recognized the uncomfortable irony that the non-subscriber, Montgomery, was less virulent in his anti-establishment attacks than many of Cooke's orthodox Presbyterian colleagues. 'It is unfortunate', he commented in a letter to Beresford, 'that the Arians should show a more Christian spirit than the Trinitarians'.¹⁷¹

When the much anticipated marriage bill became law in August 1842, it was immediately denounced by the Presbyterian press as a 'gross insult'¹⁷² to their church. In a set of resolutions from the General Assembly it was stated that 'in the late attempts to abrogate our right to celebrate certain Protestant marriages, the Established Church in Ireland appears in the attitude of our opponent...'.¹⁷³ The strong anti-established church tone of the *Banner* newspaper led the *Newsletter* to claim that it 'is labouring with all its might to sow discord among the Protestants of Ulster', and labelled it the 'sectarian mischief-maker'.¹⁷⁴ The formation in November of the 'Presbyterian Church Defence Association' consolidated the increasingly self-conscious promotion of Presbyterian interests, and as well as significant political ramifications,¹⁷⁵ it marked a further blow to Cooke's 'Protestant peace'. At its first meeting in Coleraine, even the Rev. Robert Stewart, who had initially opposed any such organisation, argued, that the recent attacks on Presbyterian marriage rights, 'had greatly changed their position and his opinions'.¹⁷⁶ The Rev. Clarke Houston confirmed that, 'Presbyterian ministers could never degrade

¹⁶⁹ *NW*, July 21 1842 (and *Banner's* response, July 22 1842). More than anything, Montgomery's comments emphasized the bitterness of relations between the General Assembly and the Remonstrants. Montgomery – no particular friend to the Protestant established church – had even less sympathy with Cooke and his allies who had been spurned by their so-called Anglican friends.

¹⁷⁰ *NW*, July 21 1842.

¹⁷¹ Stopford to Bersford, July 25 1842, PRONI, T/2772/17/40.

¹⁷² *BU*, August 16 1842.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *BNL*, October 4 1842.

¹⁷⁵ See Chapter Five.

¹⁷⁶ *BU*, November 11 1842.

themselves by yielding up one of their dearest rights to the Established Church'.¹⁷⁷ In November a withering attack on the established church appeared from a 'A Black-Mouthed Presbyterian':

Prelacy is the religion of the titled and rich; and who would not like to touch skirts with them? Prelacy is the religion of power and patronage, and of all things fat and good; and if...a Presbyterian minister dines with the rector, or if some of his people have rich Episcopalian friends, it is very natural that deference should be paid to the religion of the surplice and mitre. It is very becoming too that vulgar and poor Presbyterianism should move its hat to Episcopacy, and Presbyterian ministers evidence a laudable sense of their own inferiority, when, in the marriage case for example, they do not claim their right to marry two Episcopalians, or presume on an equality with the men of the coal-shovel hat and the apron. The Prelatic Church lays claim to the exclusive, or at least emphatic, title
PROTESTANT.

The writer attacked Tory Presbyterians such as Henry Cooke, for 'hankering after the cheese-parings of Prelacy', saying that, 'however insignificant may be their compliments to Prelacy, or their imitation of its ceremonies and usages', the only benefactor is Prelacy, not Presbytery. He denounced such behaviour as 'unworthy of stern Presbyterian integrity'.¹⁷⁸

The attacks and counter-attacks between the two Protestant churches continued apace. The *Irish Ecclesiastical Journal* accused Presbyterians of resisting the law of the land, and recalled their acts of 'treason' during the past two hundred years.¹⁷⁹ Newspaper references to an attack on Presbyterians by the Bishop of Down and Connor at a consecration service did little to dampen the antagonism.¹⁸⁰ Bishop Stopford commented in a private letter of March 1843 that the object of Presbyterianism was, 'the subversion of the established church...an object to which their efforts are now dedicated in a manner which requires the greatest attention from us'.¹⁸¹ In June, the *Banner* ran a scathing attack on the absenteeism of many of the Established clergy.¹⁸² The tone of the next annual General Assembly meeting was no less forgiving, and despite his best efforts, Cooke failed to curb the increasing expressions of hostility to the Episcopal Church, from many ministers. This was exacerbated by the announcement that the House of Lords had upheld the decision of the Irish Judges on the invalidity of

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *BU*, November 18 1842.

¹⁷⁹ Reprinted in the *Ulster Times*, March 11 1843.

¹⁸⁰ *BNL*, January 20 1843.

¹⁸¹ Stopford to Beresford, [?March] 29 1843, PRONI, T/2772/17/89.

¹⁸² *BU*, June 30 1843.

the marriages in question.¹⁸³ The Rev. Richard Dill launched a mighty attack on Cooke, criticising his leadership, his Tory politics, and, referring to his appearance at Hillsborough, he highlighted the wholly unreciprocated nature of Cooke's efforts at friendship with the established church.¹⁸⁴ On their present marriages crisis, he denounced Cooke and his allies as, 'men who....devoted much of their energy to the advancement of another Church', yet received nothing in return.¹⁸⁵

John Edgar commented that, 'it was all very well for some persons to talk of Protestant peace, and of preserving Protestant peace', but Presbyterians could not, 'remain quiescent' whilst their rights and privileges were at stake.¹⁸⁶ He went on to attack, the 'over-bearing High Church party [who] are in sermons, speeches and varied publications, and Bishops' charges, speaking with unmeasured disrespect of Presbyterian ministers'. Stopford subsequently commented in a letter to Beresford, that Presbyterians, 'think that no Dignitaries of our Church can have any thing good in them'.¹⁸⁷ In 1843 the Rev. Clarke Houston of Coleraine published a series of letters, which first appeared in the *Londonderry Standard*, and subsequently in pamphlet form.¹⁸⁸ Houston argued that 'the great mass of the clergy connected with the Prelate Church are influenced by the bitterest hostility to the Presbyterian cause', and he attacked their refusal to acknowledge the validity of Presbyterian ordination, calling it the 'late crusade against Irish Presbyterian ministers'.¹⁸⁹

The adverse judgement of the House of Lords in the bigamy case of the 'Queen v. Millis' had reaffirmed the illegality of marriages solemnized by Presbyterian clergy between an Episcopalian and a Presbyterian,¹⁹⁰ and triggered an extreme and intense outpouring of hostility between the two churches involved. A special meeting of the General Assembly was held in 1844, calling on all Presbyterians to meet, protest and petition to procure from Government a satisfactory Act to remove the stigma now attached to Presbyterian marriage privileges.¹⁹¹ The response was immense; throughout the months of March and April meetings were held the length and breadth of the north,

¹⁸³ Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, P. 157.

¹⁸⁴ *BU*, July 11 1843.

¹⁸⁵ *BU*, July 14 1843.

¹⁸⁶ *NW*, July 11 1843.

¹⁸⁷ Stopford to Beresford, October 6 1843, PRONI, T/2772/17/90.

¹⁸⁸ Houston, *Letters on the Present Position, Enemies, Prospects, and Duties*.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ For details see *Times*, February 24 and 27 1844.

¹⁹¹ *NW*, March 7 1844.

from Dromore to Donaghadee, from Ballymena to Bangor, and from Killyleagh to Cookstown.¹⁹²

At one such ‘monster meeting’ in Strabane, the Rev. A. P. Goudy confirmed his position as one of the new generation of ministers in the Assembly opposed to Cooke’s policies and politics.¹⁹³ He launched a withering attack on ‘the highest dignitary of the Irish Establishment’, the Primate of Armagh:

The worthy Primate has....plenty of money to employ greedy lawyers to argue us down. He has upwards of £20,000 a year – a very respectable income for a parish minister. (Laughter) I wonder what he does with it all. If he would take my advice, I would strongly recommend him to employ some thousands of it in supplementing the miserable income of the starving curates who do most of the work, and get least of the pay.... Let him do that with the larger portion of his disproportioned and bloated income.... I can assure him, and all the dignitaries of the hierarchy, that they will do far more good to Ireland by spending their superfluous wealth in this way, than they will ever do by degrading and trying to put down Presbyterians. Degrade us they may – to put us down we defy them.

Goudy continued his onslaught by reminding his audience,

that we have as yet received no sympathy in our trials from the Established Church of this country..... they regard us as an unauthorised ministry.... I do not saddle with this unspeakable bigotry every Episcopalian minister in Ireland... but I do fasten it on them as a body. As a Church, that is, their belief.... Talk about Puseyism, with its monstrous claims! I’ll tell you what Puseyism is – it is just candid, outspoken, honest Prelacy (Cheers).

He attacked the Church personages, from,

‘the mitred bigot, who misspends his time in the House of Peers to the most imperceptible midge of a curate... that floats in the sunbeam of metropolitan patronage, or gasps for promotion in some obscure nook of the country.... We have not forgotten that it has been said that *every Presbyterian minister’s house is nothing else than a little Gretna Green.*¹⁹⁴

Supporters of the established church reacted with horror at Goudy’s comments. The *London Times*, the *Derry Sentinel* and the *Newry Telegraph* led the denunciations of this Presbyterian, ‘monster agitation’,¹⁹⁵ whilst at the same time, the *Nation* repeal newspaper in Dublin delighted in the conflict between the two Protestant churches.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² *BU*, March 26 1844.

¹⁹³ *BNL*, April 2 1844.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ See *Times*, March 30 and April 3, 4 1844.

¹⁹⁶ *Nation*, March 30 1844.

In its editorial it rejoiced that the Presbyterians, 'seem about to be restored to their independence' and noted that, as well as the series of meetings, there were other signs of the increasing collapse of any hope of Protestant unity: 'The *Banner of Ulster*, is publishing ballads which recount the former enmities between Prelacy and Presbyterianism'.¹⁹⁷ The *Belfast Newsletter* was horrified at this support, nervously commenting that 'the Repealers are trying to engage the Presbyterian interest'.¹⁹⁸ The *Times* showed no sympathy to the Irish Presbyterians, denouncing their activities as, 'uncalled for blustering'.¹⁹⁹

Even the *Northern Whig*, which had little love for the Established Church, was surprised at the 'absurd strain of violence indulged in by some of the speakers at the Presbyterian meetings', especially the, 'vulgar and vituperative flippancy of that small Reverend bigot, Mr. Goudy'.²⁰⁰ (However the *Whig's* hostility was in reality far more of a reflection of the ferocious dispute between the General Assembly and the Remonstrants over church property at this time, than any disapproval at an attack on Anglicanism). Presbyterian anger was also directed at the House of Lords committee which had been appointed to investigate their grievances, since, 'one fourth of the committee are prelates, and the remaining three-fourths, prelatists'.²⁰¹ At a speech in Aghadowey, Rev. Dr. Brown denounced this as a complete lack of justice to Presbyterian interests, and he rallied them to fight for their rights: 'Let us...never cease the battle which has been forced upon us until we break down the hostility that oppresses us, and to secure to ourselves and our successors equal rights with our neighbours'.²⁰²

What stance did Cooke, the architect of the Protestant peace, assume during these months? The increasingly hostile tone of his fellow brethren towards the Established Church led to a breach between Cooke and the rest of the Assembly; he had already abandoned attending its meetings in protest at the passing of a resolution to secure proper Presbyterian parliamentary representation.²⁰³ The growing fervour of hostility towards the Established Church was accompanied by increasing attacks on Cooke's stance as epitomized by his Hillsborough banns. In April, Cooke attended an anniversary dinner of the Belfast 'Protestant Operative Society', and the *Whig* enjoyed

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *BNL*, April 9 1844.

¹⁹⁹ *Times*, April 4 1844.

²⁰⁰ *NW*, April 9 1844. The *Whig's* particular hostility towards Goudy was of course coloured by the latter's prominent stand against the Arians during the ongoing Dissenters' Chapels dispute.

²⁰¹ *Times*, April 10 1844.

²⁰² Reprinted from the *BU*, in the *Times*, April 15 1844.

²⁰³ See *NW*, July 13 1843. See Chapter Five.

highlighting his increasing isolation in the General Assembly: ‘How is it, when the Presbyterians are working away against the Prelatists, “hammer and tongs”.... That Dr. Cooke, the head of the Assembly, the man who moves them all, or at least tries to do so, is thus found with “Protestant Ascendancy”...’.²⁰⁴ Furthermore the *Whig* caught the mood of many Presbyterians, including orthodox, in 1844 when it commented on Cooke and Hillsborough 1834, ‘His conduct, on that occasion, was felt to be humiliating to the Presbyterians’.²⁰⁵

The Presbyterian meeting in Newtownstewart in May 1844²⁰⁶ emphasized that the Hillsborough ‘marriage’ of ten years earlier, barely consummated, was well and truly dissolved. Rev. Mr. Little of Newtownstewart began by telling the audience gathered in the town’s second Presbyterian meeting house that, ‘Presbyterianism is the religion of the Bible, and Prelacy is diametrically opposed to it’. Rev. Johnston, of the Reformed Presbyterians, followed this up with a prediction of Prelacy’s downfall: ‘every man goes forth with pitchforks and spades to slay it; and gives no rest to himself, until he rejoices over its grave’. As the speakers continued, the tone of the meeting became more hostile; the Rev. W. Hazlitt denounced the Established Church as the ‘tool’ of the state, and rejoiced that at last, the Presbyterian Church was finding her proper position again, because for half a century, ‘she has been dragged by the power of ambitious ecclesiastics, after the tail, and in the wake of the Established Church’. In a barely disguised attack on Cooke and his allies, Hazlitt attacked those, ‘very ignorant and unprincipled Presbyterians’, who ‘are prepared to go over to the ranks of the enemy’.

Cooke’s chief opponent in the General Assembly, the grandson of the executed James Porter of Greyabbey, Rev. Goudy, reaffirmed his growing reputation, with a long and vitriolic speech. Beginning with an old-fashioned Presbyterian attack on the wealth of the Anglican bishops, he denounced the presence of seven such bishops on the Lords’ Presbyterian Marriages Committee. Above all, he attacked their refusal to recognise the validity of Presbyterian ordination, commenting that, ‘the Episcopal Church in this country...has ever been a bloody and persecuting Church’. Goudy attributed the present campaign against Presbyterian marriage rights to, ‘Presbyterianism...making too rapid inroads on the Episcopal domain’, and ended defiantly by predicting that, ‘into the pit they have dug for Presbyterianism, *Prelacy will yet fall*’.²⁰⁷ The spirit of the

²⁰⁴ *NW*, April 25 1844.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *NW*, May 14 1844.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

meeting was encompassed in the speech of the Rev. F. J Porter of Donagheady, who attacked both the established church, and those Presbyterians who had attempted to foster Protestant unity:

Away then, for ever with that spirit that prompted *some of our Ministers*, and many of our people, to desire that Presbytery might be more closely connected with Diocesan Episcopacy than it had previously been. (Hear.) Woe to that Presbyterian, be he Minister or layman, who would attempt to ingraft *so corrupt a system* on a stem so healthy and pure! The banns on Ulster's plains will never be proclaimed again! (Loud Cheers.)'.²⁰⁸

It is not surprising, that given his recent performances, the *Whig* noted Goudy's ascendancy amongst his Presbyterian brethren, 'the holy man of Strabane, whom Dr. Cooke pronounces to be a "maniac"...is, nevertheless, throwing the Doctor into the shade'.²⁰⁹ At the same time, the *Nation* rejoiced to state that, 'a divorce between the Meeting-house and the Church', 'has been fully accomplished'.²¹⁰ In 1844, Rev. Richard Dill of Dublin published a pamphlet of a speech he had given in Glasgow in June, on the subject of Presbyterian mixed marriages.²¹¹ He endorsed Goudy's recent comments and denounced what he called, 'the exclusive pretensions that are advanced in favour of Episcopal ordination'.²¹² Furthermore, Dill noted that, 'the dominant and overwhelming majority', of the Established Church, 'view the present crusade with sentiments of entire satisfaction and concurrence'. In particular he highlighted Bishop Stopford for individual attack; 'the confidential adviser of the primate... who has since, by way, I presume, of rewarding his zeal, been raised to the bishopric of Meath'. Dill added, 'we hold the Church of England, and that Church exclusively, responsible for the entire proceedings and for all the evils that have already, and may hereafter, result from it'.²¹³ The Hillsborough banns could not, of course, be forgotten and Dill lamented the 'suicidal succumbency', which Presbyterians had, for too long, showed towards the Established Church. 'Prelacy', he concluded, was, 'the same intolerant system it ever was'.²¹⁴

The Rev. Porter of Newtownstewart warned the Episcopalians that, 'our hands... are at present on the collar of the Establishment – our grasp of it we will not relax, till we have either wrested from it what...it has deprived us of, *or it lies a*

²⁰⁸ *NW*, May 21 1844.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Nation*, May 25 1844.

²¹¹ *Mixed Marriages; The Substance of a speech by the Rev. Richard Dill.*

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 8; 12.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-4.

prostrate victim at our feet'.²¹⁵ The minister also led the Presbyterian charge in response to a pamphlet of the Rev. George Scott, Rector of Balteagh, in which Scott attacked the Presbyterian alarm as 'imaginary' and denounced the recent clamouring, 'for our Church's downfall'.²¹⁶ In particular, Scott highlighted Revs. Goudy, Dill, McClure, Wallace and Porter himself, as the chief orchestrators of hostility to the Established Church, and he mounted a strong defence of the Primate of Ireland.²¹⁷ In reply,²¹⁸ Porter reminded Scott, that despite his protestations of so-called friendship towards all Presbyterians, neither Scott nor any other Episcopalian, had offered any support to them in their defence of the marriage rights which they had previously enjoyed for two hundred years: 'you are guilty of the sin of hypocrisy, when you call us your Presbyterian friends'.²¹⁹ Porter argued that, 'the principles of intolerance are so deeply imbedded [*sic*] in the constitution of the Church of England and Ireland, that she cannot, consistently, permit any other religious body to live quietly and happily beside her'. As for Prelacy itself, he added, 'a principle that refuses to be regulated ought to be destroyed'.²²⁰

The marriage dispute added a very new and bitter dimension to Presbyterian-Episcopal Church relations, and for the first time, direct attacks on Henry Cooke had been raised within the General Assembly. Increasing repudiation of Cooke's direction of leadership represented not only a rejection of his politics, (see Chapter Five), but also his efforts for closer co-operation between the two Protestant churches. In the years following the settlement of the marriages crisis, old hostilities continued to rise to the surface, and the increasingly sectarian and defensive Presbyterian press were quick to criticise the established church and its treatment of Presbyterians. For instance, in 1846 a dispute arose between an Episcopal minister, the Rev. J.B. Monsell, and several Presbyterian ministers involved in the Belfast Dispensary Committee, including Rev. Johnston of Berry Street.²²¹ Monsell, as secretary, had omitted the title 'Reverend' from the names of the Presbyterian clergy in his written communications, and when challenged by Johnston for this 'mark of disrespect', Monsell replied that he had quite deliberately done so, for as a minister of the establishment, 'he could not

²¹⁵ *NW*, May 14 1844.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3 and 10.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-53.

²¹⁸ Rev. Francis J. Porter, *The Adviser Advised: A Letter Addressed to the Rev. George Scott, A.M, Rector of Balteagh, in reply to his pamphlet upon the Present Excitement Respecting Mixed Marriages* (Londonderry, 1844).

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²²¹ *BU*, March 20 1846.

conscientiously concede the title of “Reverend” to any Presbyterian *teacher*.²²² Similarly, in 1847, there was criticism of the allegedly preferential treatment of Episcopal clergy over Presbyterian ministers at a dinner for Lord Castlereagh in Newtownards, at which the establishment clergy had dined with the guests: ‘Presbyterians were kept in their place’, despite the fact that they represented four-fifths of the tenants on Lord Londonderry’s Newtownards estates.²²³ Although no serious issues were at stake, such incidences highlighted Presbyterian sensitivity to their continuing unequal treatment as social and religious inferiors of the established church.

The large numbers of Presbyterian clergy who came out in support of the tenants’ cause during the campaign for tenant right underlined their alienation from the ‘establishment’ – both Irish landlordism and the ‘Church of the Landlord’. Furthermore, the appearance of Presbyterian and Roman Catholic clergy side by side on platforms across the country, underlined Cooke’s increasing isolation, and emphasized the hollowness of ‘Protestant Unity’. In July 1850 the *Banner* rejoiced in the General Assembly’s declaration in favour of tenant right, commenting that, ‘As associated with the rights of the people at large, Presbyterianism now stands in advantageous contrast to those other lordly systems whose clerical devotees have hitherto acted as “dumb dogs”...’.²²⁴ Those comments were echoed nearly two years later by the Rev. Julius McCullough at a Tenant Right Electioneering meeting in Saintfield in which he accused the Established Church clergy of propping up, ‘irresponsible and tyrannical landlordism’ in Ireland.²²⁵ In 1850 the paper attacked the ‘politico-religious alliance’, which had attempted to be established between Presbyterianism and Prelacy. Once again, the comments of the Rev. McClure in the *Plea of Presbytery*, on, ‘the deeds of atrocity and blood perpetrated by the Church of England’, were recalled.²²⁶

Rev. John Rogers, one of the leading Presbyterian ministers involved in the campaign for Tenant Right, described a report he had heard of various established churchmen preaching against the Tenant League.²²⁷ At a Tenant Right meeting in Donaghadee in 1852, Rogers went further, reminding his audience that they had ‘no sympathy to get from the Church of the Establishment’, and they should therefore do away with it.²²⁸ Later that year, Rogers denounced the established church as, ‘a blot

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *LS*, August 27 1847.

²²⁴ *BU*, July 5 1850.

²²⁵ *BU*, March 16 1852.

²²⁶ *BU*, December 10 1850.

²²⁷ *BU* February 21 1851.

²²⁸ *BU*, February 10 1852.

upon the face of the country'.²²⁹ The conservative *Downpatrick Recorder* was appalled that Rev. Dr. Coulter had been elected Moderator of the General Assembly at its annual proceedings in July 1851, lamenting that a party of ministers, 'inimical' to the Established Church, now dominated the General Assembly.²³⁰

Presbyterian attacks on the Established church were intensified in the months preceding the general election in July 1852. The *Banner's* campaign that Presbyterian voters should vote *only* for Presbyterian candidates, increased tensions, since the parliamentary representation of the north remained largely in the hands of landlords, and other members of the Episcopal Church. The *Down Recorder* attacked such a policy as simple 'bigotry'.²³¹ There was little sign of 'Protestant unity' at a Tenant right meeting in Newtownards, when Rev. David Bell spoke of Presbyterians and Protestants as being quite distinct.²³² Henry Cooke, who had been resolutely opposed to the Tenant League candidates at the election, came under the greatest attack of his career thus far, and in the months following the election, denunciations of his, 'usual slang of Protestant Peace',²³³ were commonplace and increasingly ferocious. In a *Banner* editorial of July 30 1852, entitled, ' "Protestant Peace" versus Presbyterian Principle', the newspaper denounced Protestant Peace as a mere euphemism for 'a compromise between Presbyterians and Episcopalians to maintain the Established Church...', and it echoed the question already posed by the *Northern Whig* in 1837 – why did Cooke not simply join the Established Church.²³⁴ The newspaper encapsulated the feelings of Presbyterian disillusionment with Cooke and his pro-established church policy. In 1853, a '1688 Whig' wrote to the Editor of the *Banner*, describing Protestant Peace as a 'gigantic humbug', and attacked the proclamation of the banns at Hillsborough as, 'the mongrel marriage that could never take place'.²³⁵ The ultimate attack on Cooke's policy was Goudy's series of letters in 1852.²³⁶ These expounded the age-old Presbyterian attacks on the Established church's wealth and on its close association with the country's landowning class, referring to, 'the Episcopal parsonocracy enrolling

²²⁹ *Downpatrick Recorder*, September 18 1852.

²³⁰ *DR*, July 5 1851. Not only was Coulter a prominent Tenant Righter, but he had also recently made headlines for his comments against, 'the regal headship, the prelatial hierarchy, and the patronage system in the Anglican Church'.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, May 8 1852.

²³² *Ibid.*, July 3 1852.

²³³ Letter from 'A Presbyterian Elector of Down', to the *Whig* Editor, *NW*, July 29 1852.

²³⁴ *BU*, July 30 1852.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, December 22 1853.

²³⁶ These Letters first appeared over a number of weeks in the *Londonderry Standard* in 1852, and were subsequently published together as, *Right versus Might; or Irish Presbyterian Politics Discussed*.

themselves as partisans of the landlords', whilst so many of the Presbyterian ministers had fought in the tenant's corner.²³⁷

In 1852 it seemed as if there were certainly more factors pulling the two Protestant Churches apart than together. The period had witnessed many bitter controversies between the two, culminating in the Tenant Right movement which, although not directly involving the churches in religious dispute, had highlighted the immense social and political differences which continued to keep them fundamentally divided – the established church remained in many ways the church of the landlord – the other bulwark of 'Protestant Ascendancy'. The 'anti-establishment' tendencies of Presbyterians were undoubtedly demonstrated by the relationship of the two main Protestant Churches during these years. Cooke aimed at a policy of Protestant Peace, to blur, or at least minimize, these distinctions and differences. But it was clear that consensus between the Presbyterian and Established Churches on the importance of maintaining the union with Britain, and a shared fear of Roman Catholic Ascendancy, were still not yet sufficient to bring a fundamental unity or co-operation: the repudiation of Cooke's vision is evidence of this. As one Presbyterian Elector in Down noted, 'Dr. Cooke ought to go to Prelacy at once, and not bring any more Prelacy into the Church, which he has dragged already into such deep degradation'.²³⁸

Indeed, the same hostility to the Established Church continued long after 1852. Rev. John Edgar sparked controversy in 1858 with the publication of a pamphlet entitled, *Presbyterian Privilege and Duty*, in which he commented, 'Whenever Prelacy has had the power to oppress, it has oppressed with all its power',²³⁹ and described a bishop as, 'a costly excrescence'.²⁴⁰ 'A Presbyterian', recalled the marriages question,²⁴¹ and repudiated as, 'utterly untrue', the claim that, 'there is little or no difference between the Established and the Presbyterian Church'.²⁴² Another Presbyterian writer, defending Edgar from his Episcopal assailants, commented, 'They would have us believe that it makes no difference whether the Head of the Church is the Lord Jesus Christ or Queen Victoria; that it is the same whether the Church is governed by the elders and deacons of the New Testament, or by man-made prelates, who fatten on the

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.20.

²³⁸ *The 'Juvenile' Presbyterian Ministers*, p.7.

²³⁹ Quoted and defended in, *Dr. Edgar and his Calumniators; A Reply to "Vindex" with an Exposure of the Popery of Prelacy*, By A Presbyterian (Belfast, 1858), p. 8.

²⁴⁰ See J.C. Beckett, 'Ulster Protestantism', in T.W. Moody and J.C. Beckett (eds.), *Ulster Since 1800: A Social Survey* (London, 1957), p. 160.

²⁴¹ *Dr. Edgar and his Calumniators*, p. 10.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

heritage of God'.²⁴³ Of course, there was nothing new in the content of these debates, but they do provide a sense of the continuing antagonisms that existed well into the second half of the century.

As late as 1871 the age-old issues were still being debated. In a lecture which was subsequently published as a pamphlet entitled, *Barriers to Protestant Union*, the Rev. T.Y Killen, a Presbyterian minister in Belfast, asked, '...if there cannot be union might there not be co-operation? Between the Churches as such there cannot; and that because of the exclusive claims and arrogant pretensions of Prelacy'. 'I am for Protestant Peace', Killen stated, 'but it must be peace on equal terms – it must be peace on a platform of equality..... I am not prepared to cry peace to a less Scriptural Church which treats my own with contempt, and much less to fawn upon her and lick her feet'.²⁴⁴ In particular Killen, like so many Presbyterian writers, highlighted the Episcopal Church's continuing refusal to acknowledge the validity of Presbyterian ordination. It is perhaps not surprising that when the question of the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland was raised, as many historians have noted, Presbyterian electors did not rally to her side, nor respond to Henry Cooke's 'death bed plea' to stand by the establishment, as the 1868 election results demonstrated.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ *Dr. Edgar's Critics Criticised: A Complete Review of the Prelatic Controversy in three parts.* (Belfast, 1858), p. 4.

²⁴⁴ Rev. T. Y. Killen, *Barriers to Protestant Union. A Lecture* (Belfast, 1871), pp.16-17.

²⁴⁵ See Holmes, *Cooke*, p.197 and Holmes, 'From Rebels to Unionists', pp.42-3.

CHAPTER 3
‘LORD OF THE SOIL, BUT NOT OF THE SOUL’¹: PRESBYTERIANS, IRISH
LANDLORDS AND TENANT RIGHT.

If United Irish propaganda vilified the established church in Ireland and the British Government, there was another section in society that came under equally brutal scrutiny from Presbyterian radicalism, as this 1796 rebel song reveals:

See shame-fac’d mis’ry at our door,
 IERNE’S Peasants starving;
 While landlords, absentees and knaves,
 In England waste each farthing:
 And thus their crimes our country stain,
 Vile robbers and oppressors,
 We hope that yet a time will come
 To punish such transgressors.²

In a similar tone, County Down Presbyterian ministers denounced landlordism in the following terms:

...it was high time that the people should be made aware of the nature of irresponsible and tyrannical landlordism, and that it should not be propped up, as hitherto it had been, by the clergy of the Established Church.³

...the Apostle says, he that does not work should not eat. Landlordism, and its apologetic divines, say that he who does work should not eat, and that the idle, improvident, and extravagant upper classes, like the locusts that came up on Judea, are to eat up every green thing.⁴

However, these comments were not 1798 United Irish propaganda, but rather were made in 1852, at the height of the tenant right campaign.

During the nineteenth century the inherently anti-landlord outlook of Ulster Presbyterians continued long after the rebellion, in much the same way as their hostility to the Church of Ireland and the British government. It manifested itself primarily, as Chapter Five details, during times of political excitement – for instance the Reform Bill of 1832 – and at times of economic hardship, most dramatically in the aftermath of the Famine and the emerging tenant right movement. In language often reminiscent of

¹ *LS*, (editorial) June 24 1852.

² *Paddy’s Resource* (1795), p.69.

³ *BU*, January 30 1852, from speech of Rev. Julius McCullough at a tenant right electioneering meeting in Saintfield, County Down. The comment reveals the traditional Presbyterian antipathy to both landlord and established church clergyman.

⁴ *BU*, January 30 1852, from speech of the Rev. John Rogers of Comber at a tenant right meeting in Belfast.

1798, Presbyterian journalists, tenants and ministers focused their antipathy on the traditional figure of resentment – the Irish landlord. This chapter will focus on that period and the subsequent tenant right campaign.⁵

In 1809 Drennan and Robert Tennent's *Belfast Monthly Magazine* contained 'A Letter addressed to a Young Nobleman Just Entering Upon the Possession of a Great Estate', the piece clearly aimed at the new Marquis of Downshire who had just come of age.⁶ The letter began with economic grievances and attacked those absentee landlords who left the management of their estates to an agent, 'whose principle business is to ingratiate himself with his master, by squeezing the uttermost farthing of rack-rent out of the starved bellies of a laborious and industrious tenantry'. It contrasted the proprietor who, 'riots in the wantonness of luxury', whilst his tenants are kept in 'naked poverty'. Such images of an oppressed tenantry suffering at the hands of arbitrary landlordism was nothing new, and the *Magazine's* comments suggest that Drennan and Robert Tennent still regarded the evils of the landed system as an enduring grievance: 'My lord, such men, however dignified they may be by titles...are a disgrace to human nature'. Such rhetoric was typical of that used throughout the period, especially during the tenant right campaign, by Presbyterians against the landed class. The letter warned him not to follow the 'mistaken policy' of granting short and transitory leases, 'with a view to transfer the produce of your tenants' industry into the coffers of your successors; that cruel injustice of robbing the industrious peasant of the fruits of his own labour'.⁷ Once again, the notion of securing tenant improvements prefigures the main theme of the tenant right campaign forty years later.

At a time when he was deeply involved in the reform movement which aimed at curbing the political influence of the landlord classes, the Rev. Henry Montgomery also offered a typical Presbyterian critique of Irish landlordism. In December 1829 and January 1830, his three articles, which appeared anonymously in the *Whig*, described the condition and management of the vast estates of the Marquis of Hertford.⁸ Montgomery painted a damning picture of peasant misery and poverty, contrasted with the luxuries and opulence of Hertford, the absentee landlord. The Marquis responded by issuing an action for libel against the Presbyterian minister, but shortly before the case was due at the Antrim Assizes, he hastily withdrew the charge on hearing that Daniel O'Connell had offered to defend Montgomery free of charge. Montgomery's

⁵ The political agitation directed against landlords both prior to and during the tenant right era is discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

⁶ *BMM*, July 1809, pp.29-37.

⁷ *Ibid.*

biographer, Robert Allen, has commented that these articles, 'did much to initiate the tenant right movement'.⁹

The 1830s and 1840s witnessed the birth and early development of the major challenge to landlordism in the form of a movement to legalize the custom of Ulster Tenant Right, led by Presbyterian tenant farmers, ministers and press. It was an issue that cut across not only economic and agricultural grievances against northern landlords, but also the continued resentment of their political influence. The custom of 'tenant right' which had developed over two centuries in Ulster was based upon the premise that a tenant had 'a right to undisturbed possession of his holding until he gave his landlord just cause of eviction or terminated his tenancy of his own accord'.¹⁰ Moreover the custom also dictated that a tenant was entitled to compensation for the value of the improvements and cultivation he had carried out on the land – perfectly fair, says D.L. Armstrong, given that, 'the contribution of Irish landlords to the development of agriculture was negligible'.¹¹ Above all, the tenant's right to sell on his 'tenant right' to the next incoming tenant was a crucial element.

W.E. Vaughan has described the custom as a somewhat curious practice, 'both in the many ways it could be interpreted and in its implicit recognition that tenants somehow possessed property rights in land they did not own'.¹² It is unsurprising, therefore, that landlords who did allow its working on their estates did so somewhat reluctantly, largely because it was believed that recognition of the custom promoted thrift, industry and tranquillity. Acceptance of the custom across many of the northern counties was widely (although not necessarily accurately) cited as the explanation for the more settled and prosperous state of agriculture there compared with the more lawless south, where tenant right was not so widely recognized. But tenant right was merely a custom which had evolved – it had no formal basis whatsoever nor any legal standing, and it was entirely at the mercy of the landlord's will.

In the 1830s, isolated cases of landlords refusing to allow their tenants to sell their interest in their holding had resulted in the agrarian outrages of the militant 'Tommy Downshire Boys' in the vicinity of Lurgan in County Armagh.¹³ It certainly highlighted the precarious nature of tenant security and in 1835 constitutional efforts

⁸ Allen, 'Henry Montgomery' p.266

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ D.L. Armstrong, *An Economic History of Agriculture in Northern Ireland, 1850-1900* (Oxford, 1989), p.10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² W.E. Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants in Mid-Victorian Ireland, 1848-1904* (Oxford, 1994), p.89.

¹³ Armstrong, *Economic History*, p.14

were afoot to campaign for legalizing tenant right by act of parliament. A first meeting of tenant farmers was held in Comber that year, and attended by the Presbyterian minister, Rev. Fletcher Blakely and William Sharman Crawford.¹⁴ Crawford, always a staunch defender of the tenant position, proposed a bill in Parliament in 1835 to safeguard the value of tenant improvements, but his efforts met with strong hostility from the landlord classes, which dominated the House of Commons.¹⁵ Indeed, the efforts of these early campaigners remained largely unrecognized until the seismic events of the 1840s in Ireland.

In 1843 the government appointed a Commission, led by Lord Devon, to inquire into the agricultural situation in Ireland. Taking evidence from land agents, clergymen and landlords, the Commission revealed that two-thirds of the occupiers of land held it as tenants from year to year. Moreover, the findings emphasized the contrast between the wealth and influence of the great Ulster landowners – Lord Hertford, for instance, owned 66,000 acres in Antrim – and the thousands of small tenant farmers.¹⁶ Most significantly, the Commission's findings were generally hostile to the tenant right custom, and as Dr. C. R. Fay noted, this suggested that tenant right was facing the very real 'threat of submergence under a genuine programme of agricultural improvement'.¹⁷ John Andrews, the land agent to Lord Londonderry's Down estates, famously told the Commission that if any attempt was made to destroy the custom, '...You would have a Tipperary in Down'.¹⁸ Rev. Fletcher Blakely emphasized to the Commission the significant sums of money that were exchanged frequently in the sale of 'tenant right',¹⁹ emphasising why the custom was so highly prized. That a committee composed of landlords should, however, have ruled against tenant right, was perhaps not surprising, and there were some landlords all too eager to accept, and implement its conclusions.

The Dublin repeal newspaper, the *Nation* advised Ulster Presbyterian farmers to mobilise to secure their ancient right, which now appeared under threat, by Parliamentary legislation, and moreover to secure its extension across the whole country: 'Oh sons of the United Irishmen! grandsons of the Volunteers, are ye not patriots?...' The paper advised Ulster to appeal to the legislature directly, irrespective of 'the tricks and toys of the Land Commission'.²⁰ In 1845 Crawford also put forward

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ See Campbell, *The Dissenting Voice*, p.172

¹⁷ Dr. C.R. Fay, PRONI, T/1092/1

¹⁸ *NW*, March 27 1845

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Nation*, March 15 1845

another Tenant Right Bill in parliament,²¹ but it was eclipsed by the government's own effort, in the form of Lord Stanley's proposed Tenant Compensation Bill in June of that year. Stanley's proposals, however, received a swift and sharp rebuke from the Presbyterian press and tenantry, and the Presbyterian organ, the *Banner of Ulster* warned the government that it was, 'pursuing a bad, a cruel, and a heedless course' if it tampered with the unwritten law of tenant right.²²

One writer to the *Banner*, signing himself, 'An Ulster Man' addressed a letter to 'The Presbyterian Clergy of Ulster', warning them of the implications of Lord Stanley's Bill on their own ability to acquire a small farm and land to build a manse in country congregations. Moreover, he added ominously, 'These are changing times. I can conceive many things to occur that might make it duty in a minister to oppose the political and religious doings of his landlord and agent....I would rather, for the interest of young ministers settling in a country congregation, have the old tenant-right than any new right that my Lord Stanley's Bill proposes to confer'.²³ Already, the Presbyterian press were constructing an inevitable conflict of interests with the northern landlords, by referring to the tenant right as 'property in the hand of the tenantry', and it offered enthusiastic support to Crawford's bill: tenant right, it argued, 'has been bought and paid for, or inherited, by the present tenantry, and is, in every moral point of view, their property'.²⁴

The *Northern Whig* reiterated the need to secure tenant right by law and it deprecated the fact that, 'thousands and thousands of Ulster tenants [were]...at the mercy of their landlords...'.²⁵ It added, 'A security which is dependent upon the will of the landlord...is evidently far from sufficient'. To the delight of the *Banner*, Lord Stanley's Bill was subsequently abandoned. The chasm between the Presbyterian tenant and his Anglican landlord on the legal status of tenant right was clearly revealed in their respective responses to its legal standing. Whilst the tenant movement denounced Lord Stanley's bill as destructive of their traditional right, the landed classes regarded it as, 'destructive to the rights of property', as seen in the responses of northern landlords in the House of Lords.²⁶ It was evident that even landlords such as Londonderry, who fully recognized the custom on their own estates, viewed the prospect of its formal legalization with utter abhorrence. The question of tenant right

²¹ *BU*, March 28 1845

²² *BU*, June 24 1845

²³ *BU*, June 20 1845 (my underlining)

²⁴ *BU*, March 28 1845

²⁵ *NW*, September 20 1845

²⁶ *BU*, July 1 1845

may have been a fundamentally economic issue, but it was not long before it was linked to the traditional political grievances levelled at landlords.²⁷

By 1846 events were taking a new and devastating turn in Ireland, as the impact of the widespread failure of the potato crop was beginning to be felt across the country. Whilst historians in the past were quick to argue that Ulster had escaped relatively unscathed from the worst excesses of the Irish Famine, more recent work has emphasized the scale of suffering which did in fact occur, even in relatively prosperous agricultural areas such as Down.²⁸ The campaign for the legalization of tenant right which was already well under way by 1846 amongst the Presbyterian press and farmers, was to be dramatically effected by changing relations between landlord and tenant as a result of the Famine. As Finlay Holmes has stressed, the upheaval of the famine compounded the poverty and insecurity of many Presbyterian tenant farmers in the north.²⁹ In addition, the collapse of the corn laws brought a plummet in agricultural prices, not matched by a similar drop in rents, and the burden of a rising poor rate owing to the Famine, began eroding the very value of tenant right.³⁰ This potent combination of factors brought landlord-tenant tensions to a new level, and increasingly, demands for the legalization of tenant right were accompanied by demands for a reduction in rents. As Campbell has emphasized, 'contrary to popular impression, there were many poor Presbyterians as well as Catholics, suffering from high rents and threats of evictions'.³¹ Indeed, images of the suffering of the famine were evoked by Presbyterian ministers in their tenant right/anti-landlord rhetoric during the campaign of the early 1850s.

Throughout 1846 numerous meetings of Farmers' Societies across the north, and particularly in Antrim and Down, were reported in the newspaper press.³² A letter to the Editor of the *Banner*, signed, 'One of the farming class, or, A Tenant-at-Will', sounded a defiant note, as the writer warned, 'Let not farmers be deterred from claiming their "tenant-right" through fear of landlords.

Let them not be frightened by the frowns of tyrant agents, or led astray by their wily insinuations and hollow promises. Landlords will not be deterred by any fear, from insisting on a perfect compliance with any law securing their interests. Agents will not be frightened by your looks....in the execution of a law that

²⁷ *Ibid.* See Chapter Five.

²⁸ See for example, Trevor McCavery article, 'The Famine in County Down', in C. Kinealy and T. Parkhill (eds.), *The Famine in Ulster: the regional impact* (Belfast, 1997), pp.99-128.

²⁹ Holmes, *Irish Presbyterian Heritage*, p.128

³⁰ See Armstrong, *Economic History*, pp.15-16

³¹ Campbell, *Dissenting Voice*, p.171.

secures their master's interest and perpetuates their own obnoxious influence....Circumstances are combining to promote your cause, and the present nature of the times require the relation between you and your landlords to be improved, and your interest in your farms increased....this is a subject with which the Presbyterian people, and even many of their ministers, are intimately connected...³³

The famine did not merely compound Presbyterian demands for the legalisation of tenant right, but the apparently cold response of many landlords to the tenants' plight, also increased Presbyterian feeling against landlordism in general. This is evident from the situation in Newtownards in County Down where Lord Londonderry's unyielding stance regarding his tenants' requests for rent abatements, and his less than generous contributions to local Famine relief efforts, formed an ugly contrast with the lavish renovations under way at this time to his family home, Mount Stewart.³⁴ In November 1846 the *Banner* attacked Lord Londonderry for his refusal to accede to rent reductions³⁵ whilst the *Derry Standard*, in the hands of its Presbyterian editor, James McKnight,³⁶ criticized Lord Londonderry's recent sojourn to his Derry estates as purely show and formality: 'no time was taken to inquire into the wants and requirements of the tenantry'.³⁷ In a bitter attack on Lord Londonderry's apparently harsh attitude towards his tenants during the prevailing hardships, 'A Tenant of Lord Londonderry', writing in the *Belfast Newsletter*, also made a cutting reference to the much-resented political domination of the landlord class.³⁸ On Lord Londonderry's Down tenantry, the writer noted, 'They are as fine a yeomanry as ever tilled the green acres of any proprietor, or swelled the array of his power in a political contest', and yet their 'pleas were not heard'. The 'Tenant' continued to paint a scene of the 'pauperism' and suffering prevalent in Comber and Newtownards, arguing that 'a rent reduction is required!', but that his Lordship never ventures beyond the estate office to comprehend the situation. He concluded that, 'this letter....will produce a change of opinion regarding Lord Londonderry as a benevolent landlord'.³⁹ William Sharman Crawford's address to his tenants in December, in which he expressed his belief that landlord power should be limited, 'within just bounds', offered a significant contrast to Londonderry's

³² See *BU*, August 18 1846; Armstrong, *Economic History*, pp.15-16

³³ *BU*, September 8 1846.

³⁴ McCavery, 'Famine in County Down', p. 113.

³⁵ *BU*, November 27 1846

³⁶ McKnight was editor of the *Londonderry Standard*, 1846-9, and then the *Banner of Ulster*, 1849-53.

³⁷ Reported in *BU*, November 27.

³⁸ *BNL*, December 8 1846

³⁹ *Ibid.*

attitude, and it is evident why many landlords regarded the tenants' hero, Crawford, as a betrayer of his class.⁴⁰

The distress on Lord Londonderry's Newtownards and Comber estates, described by the tenant in the previous letter, was clearly a picture shared by the land agent, John Andrews. In a letter to Londonderry, Andrews informed him, 'Matters, I lament to say, are getting daily worse....The want of potatoes causes an immense consumption of grain...which diminishes the quantity available for the Market, and I regret to say, diminishes the resources available for Rent, which I fear will be deficient...to a large extent'.⁴¹ The *Banner's* visiting reporter presented a scene of 'destitution and misery unequalled for many years in Antrim and Down'.⁴² In January 1847, the *Derry Standard* ran a withering attack on Lord Londonderry, entitled, 'The Three Marquises', attacking his lack of generosity towards the destitute of Newtownards and his response to the impact of the Famine, which it claimed had been distinctly lacking.⁴³ Andrews' immediate published response, in defence of the Marquis, was satirized by the *Standard*, who mocked Londonderry's miserly offer of £30 to the Newtownards soup kitchen.⁴⁴ In a letter to Londonderry, Andrews accused McKnight, the paper's editor, of attempting to, 'disorganise the Social Relation between Landlord and Tenant'.⁴⁵ There was certainly no deference shown, indeed, on the contrary, the series of articles were clearly aimed at discrediting him as a landlord. Andrews, too, did not escape from the onslaught, and the *Standard* painted a comical scene of the 'terrible fatigue' for the agent in distributing all the Marquis' 'princely charities', 'to say nothing of the extra toil of distributing his own five pound note'.⁴⁶ The sarcastic and critical tone of the *Standard* set the benchmark for the bitter attacks on landlords meted out by Presbyterian clergy, tenants, and journalists during the subsequent tenant right campaign.

Lord Londonderry complained, not only of Presbyterian newspaper comments, but also at the response of the Presbyterian tenants themselves: 'I will not deny', he wrote to Andrews, 'that I am deeply wounded at the silent lethargy of the mass who have long been benefited...'.⁴⁷ Trevor McCavery has argued that the controversies surrounding the Famine in Lord Londonderry's Down estates, 'inevitably...damaged

⁴⁰ Draft of Crawford's address to his tenants, PRONI, D/856/G/85

⁴¹ John Andrews to Lord Londonderry, January 10 1847, DCRO, D/Lo/C 512 (2)

⁴² *BU*, February 16 1847

⁴³ *LS*, January 29 1847

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Andrews to Londonderry, January 18 1847, DCRO, D/Lo/C 512 (5)

⁴⁶ *LS*, February 19 1847

⁴⁷ Londonderry to Andrews, February 15 1847, DCRO, D/Lo/C 512 (12)

landlord-tenant relationships. There is a direct connection between the Famine and the Tenant-Right agitation that followed'.⁴⁸ It is certainly significant that Newtownards and Comber became one of the leading areas in the northern tenant right campaign from 1848.

In 1847 the tenant right campaign was offered fresh impetus with another (unsuccessful) attempt by Crawford, to introduce a new Bill in Parliament. Speaking in the Commons, Crawford highlighted the misconduct of many Irish landlords, and questioned the justice of their power to charge tenants inflated rents.⁴⁹ Far from censuring McKnight and the *Derry Standard's* recent efforts, a tenant right meeting in Belfast gave thanks to their work on behalf of the Presbyterian tenantry.⁵⁰ It was also at this time that McKnight first delineated his theory of Ulster land ownership, arguing that, 'the landlords, at the period of the Ulster Plantation....were specially bound to grant to their tenantry perpetuities, or long leases for lives, at moderate rents'.⁵¹ Little wonder then, that landlords like Londonderry issued a notice to tenants forbidding them to petition Parliament on the matter.⁵² Andrews accurately articulated landlord feeling on the subject of tenant right, when he wrote to Londonderry, '...neither do I relish the idea of any attempt to establish it by law.... I have never yet met with any digested practicable scheme, consistent with the rights of property, for affecting this object, and I had much rather leave the matter as it stands'.⁵³

A letter in the *Northern Whig* by, 'A Farmer', in County Antrim threw out a stark warning to landlords not to claim tenant right to be a mere 'concession', entirely dependent on themselves, recalling the activities of the Hearts of Steel in the eighteenth century who used their own methods to punish 'tyrannical landlords' who rack-rented and disregarded tenant right.⁵⁴ He warned, '...if this custom be not recognized and secured – if it be infringed – the spirit of illegal vengeance, that actuated the "Hearts of Steel", may again be called forth...'.⁵⁵ A sense of the high feeling running against landlords among many Ulster Presbyterians at this time can also be seen in the bitter attacks of the *Londonderry Standard* in March 1847 in which Irish landlords were likened to 'a race of the most grinding despots'.⁵⁶ It was not only northern tenants who

⁴⁸ McCavery, 'Famine in County Down', p.126.

⁴⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.89, 1159-60, February 12 1847.

⁵⁰ *LS*, February 26 1847

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Andrews to Lord Londonderry, February 14 1847, DCRO, D/Lo/C 512 (10)

⁵⁴ *NW*, March 4 1847

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *LS*, March 12 1847

were finding their voice in opposing the economic and political dominance of Irish landlords; as early as 1847 the first attempt at tenant organisation in the south had occurred in county Cork, and by 1849 tenant protection societies were being formed across the south.⁵⁷ Northern Presbyterians established the first formal association in the north in 1847, under the leadership of McKnight, who was quickly consolidating his reputation for radical, anti-landlord sentiments.⁵⁸

The *Derry Standard* continued its tirade against the Marquis of Londonderry, this time, pouring scorn on his claim in the House of Lords that County Down had not been severely affected by the Famine, as shown by it failing to produce one single petition for rent reduction; ludicrous reasoning, argued the *Standard*, given that Londonderry had only a few months ago forbidden his tenants to engage in any such petitioning.⁵⁹ At a tenant right meeting in Coleraine in March, reference was made to the fact that the House of Commons was composed almost exclusively of landlords, who are, 'liable to be influenced by the prejudices of their class'.⁶⁰ The *Standard* delighted in this and similar such meetings taking place across the north, as signs that the tenantry of Ulster were no longer prepared to accept being, 'the passive slaves of feudal caprice'.⁶¹ A letter to the *Banner of Ulster* from 'One of the Farming Class', similarly lamented the injustices facing tenants, given that, 'at present, the law is almost exclusively on the landlord's side...'.⁶²

At a speech at a tenant right meeting in Derry, McKnight did not spare landlords from attack: 'I have frequently felt bitterly indignant at the slavish flattery by which even the worst acts of aristocratic despotism have been covered with all the seeming attributes of virtue..'.⁶³ On the economic rights of the tenant, he stated that, 'the permanent improvements made by a tenant in the soil, over and above the fair rent he pays to his landlord, are demonstrably his own property....The people, then, were not made for the aristocracy, but the landed aristocracy for the people (Prolonged cheering). Landownership is, to a certain extent, a public trusteeship'. He accused the Ulster landlords of having increasingly violated tenant right in recent years and of having attempted to 'throw the entire burden of the poor rates' onto the tenants' shoulders.⁶⁴ The tone of McKnight's speech was very much one of 'them' and 'us'; a portrayal of

⁵⁷ J.H. Whyte, *The Independent Irish Party, 1850-9* (Oxford, 1958), pp.5-6.

⁵⁸ *LS*, July 2 1847

⁵⁹ *LS*, March 19 1847

⁶⁰ *BU*, March 23 1847

⁶¹ *LS*, March 26 1847

⁶² *BU*, April 9 1847

⁶³ *LS*, May 28 1847

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

landlord interests and tenants interests as quite distinct and in many ways competing. His words certainly did little for relations between Presbyterian tenant and Anglican landlord.

Whilst the *Times* deplored the activities of the tenant movement, north and south, calling it a large scale attack 'against the whole system of Irish landlordism',⁶⁵ the General Assembly voiced its official approval of the movement for the legalization of tenant right, and for its extension across the whole country, in an address to the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Clarendon.⁶⁶ The *Whig* rightly interpreted the move as a significant sign of Cooke's lessening influence within the orthodox body of the Presbyterian Church, noting that the Assembly had finally rejected the rule of, 'the little knot of dictators' who had 'unwarrantably misrepresented' it in the past.⁶⁷ The Assembly's comments were certainly the formal sanction to a movement that was already drawing extensive unofficial support from a large number of Presbyterian ministers. This can be seen in their attendance at a dinner in Derry given to the radical Sharman Crawford by the friends of tenant right.⁶⁸ There was immense praise for Crawford's single-handed pursuit of their cause, 'for a measure, opposed... to the interests of the nobility and aristocracy of the country at large'. Crawford reciprocated the praise, congratulating the General Assembly for bringing the subject of tenant right to such prominent attention.

But it was the speeches of several individual ministers which showed that Presbyterian anti-establishment tendencies were still alive and well. Rev. Henry Wallace, a Presbyterian minister from Derry argued that the legalization of tenant right, 'was essential to the political independence' of every tenant. Another minister attacked the absenteeism of many landlords, whilst McKnight recalled the activities of the Hearts of Steel and, more recently, the 'Tommy Downshires' which had each sprung up in response to attempts by landlords to infringe tenant right.⁶⁹ One tenant farmer writing to the Editor of the *Banner* commented that in many places, 'the terms landlord and tenant have become synonymous with tyrant and serf'.⁷⁰ The Presbytery of Ballybay, in connection with the General Assembly, organized a local petition calling for the

⁶⁵ *Times*, September 13 1847

⁶⁶ See *NW*, October 2 1847

⁶⁷ *NW*, October 2 1847

⁶⁸ *NW*, October 30 1847. The meeting in Derry was attended by McKnight, Crawford, and many Presbyterian ministers, including Revs. Robert Gray of Burt, Henry Wallace of Derry, James Crawford of Derry, Reid of Derry, Chambers of Donemara, William Scott of Newtowncunningham and Robert Rodgers of Carn.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *BU*, December 14 1847

legalization of tenant right,⁷¹ and demonstrated that the movement had taken root in various parts of the north, among both Presbyterian clergy and laymen. A letter signed 'C.D., A Tenant Farmer', which appeared in the *Banner* in January 1848 was typical of the type of rhetoric being employed against the landlord class in general, referring to, he 'who wields an iron sceptre, enforces his caprice as law, and withholds the security of a constitution from ill-starred millions'.⁷² This tenant also advocated the notion of 'joint proprietorship',⁷³ and it is not surprising that both the *Belfast Newsletter* and the *Northern Whig* offered a note of caution at the increasingly daring claims of some of the tenant right movement.

1848 began enthusiastically for the tenant right campaign in Ulster, and a large demonstration in Ballybay showed that demands for the legalization of the custom were now accompanied by demands for permanently lower rents.⁷⁴ As McKnight told the audience at Ballybay, '...the principle of tenant right, as it has been understood and practised in Ulster for upwards of 200 years, recognises the right of the tenant to hold his land, at a fair and equitable rent, without interference from his landlord...'.⁷⁵ It was not merely the landlord class themselves who regarded this claim as a gross violation of the rights of property. Even the *Whig* was extremely concerned by the implication that any owner of 'property' should not have the right to set whatever rent or price for it he deemed fit.⁷⁶ The Rev. David Bell of Ballybay was to become one of the most radical and active of the Presbyterian ministers involved in the tenant right campaign and later, the Tenant League. He was also one of the harshest critics of landlords, demanding to know why, '...if it be deemed sufficient to secure the landlord's rights, why is it not deemed equally sufficient to secure the tenants'?' At the meeting he also attacked the immense power of a landlord over every aspect of a tenant's life, asking, 'is it any of the rights of property to charge such an exhorbitant rent for land, as will oppress and ruin the poor tenant...'?⁷⁷

Divisions quickly began to emerge amongst the Presbyterian advocates of tenant right; between those early, fundamentally more moderate tenant right campaigners such as Guy Stone of Comber, the Rev Fletcher Blakely, and Henry Montgomery, and the increasingly radical tone of McKnight, certain Presbyterian ministers, and some tenants

⁷¹ *BU*, December 31 1847

⁷² *BU*, January 4 1848

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *BU*, January 14 1848

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *NW*, January 15 1850

⁷⁷ *BU*, January 14 1850

themselves. At a dinner in Downpatrick, Stone repudiated the notion of fixed rents and 'fixity of tenure...which some parties, with more zeal than knowledge...have lately advocated'.⁷⁸ Whilst more ardent Tenant-Righters were forced on to the defensive, denying that they were hostile to the entire landed interest, the attacks on landlords, however, continued apace. At a meeting in Cookstown attended by several Presbyterian ministers, the Rev. John Maxwell of Brigh attacked the current laws as investing the landlord, 'with an almost arbitrary and irresponsible power...a power which in a free country, should not be possessed by any man', and he attacked the land owners for their, 'growing disposition...to withhold both leases in perpetuity and terminable leases from their tenantry'.⁷⁹ He went further, arguing that, 'as the landlord furnishes the material to be wrought upon, while the tenant applies industry and capital, both are entitled to a proportionate share of the profits arising from the joint result'. The Rev. Dr. Barnett of Moneymore moved a resolution stating that, 'The absolute power of raising rent, at any time and to any amount the landlord pleases, should be limited'.⁸⁰ The ultimate catalyst for the rapidly mushrooming tenant movement came in February 1848 with the government's proposal to settle the land question, in the form of Sir William Somerville's Bill. The outraged and angry response across Presbyterian Ulster to the proposals gave the tenant right campaign a new and strengthened impetus as meetings were held across the north denouncing the measure as, 'an insult to the people'.⁸¹

Meanwhile, Lord Londonderry made his position clear in a letter published in the *Times* in March 1848, declaring his opposition to any 'legal enactment' on tenant right, stating, 'if such an act was to be brought in so as to wrest from me or other landlords who know and acknowledge our tenant right in Ulster, the powers we now have in our estates, it would meet my unqualified opposition'.⁸² A letter from 'One of the Farming Class', urged Ulster tenants to stand up and rally to oppose the Bill, calling it, 'a piece of wholesale robbery, under the guise of parliamentary sanction', that threatened to convert the tenants into, 'a race of base and unprivileged serfs'.⁸³ The spirit of the hour was demonstrated at a Tenant Right meeting in Dunmurry held for the purpose of preparing a petition to Parliament against the government's proposals.⁸⁴ At a

⁷⁸ *BU*, February 1 1848

⁷⁹ *LS*, February 18 1848

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *BU*, February 18 1848. Comment of Rev. Carmichael, denouncing Sir William Somerville's Bill at a meeting of tenant farmers from Antrim and Down, held in Belfast. See report in *NW*, March 4 1848.

⁸² *Times*, March 8 1848

⁸³ *BU*, March 10 1848

⁸⁴ *NW*, March 11 1848

meeting in Lurgan in March, several Presbyterian ministers gave vent to their anti-landlord sentiments.⁸⁵ Rev. Mr. Miller propounded McKnight's belief that during the Plantation, landlords had only been given property on public trusteeships, and he advocated fixity of tenure and the right of the tenant to a permanent property in the soil.

Another active tenant right campaigner was the Lurgan Presbyterian solicitor, William Girdwood. In April 1848 the *Derry Standard* printed a letter of Girdwood's advocating rent limitations, which the *Whig* had refused to publish.⁸⁶ '...Of what value would tenant-right legalization be', asked Girdwood, 'if landlords had the power of arbitrarily increasing rents?...why should not landlords be restrained from exacting rack-rents, which they as a body do, and thereby keep, I may emphatically say, the people steeped in poverty?...Did the landlords reclaim the soil of Ireland – make the ditches, the fences, the drains, and other improvements...No; it was the tenantry...though they absolutely possess nothing'. Girdwood concluded his letter by stating,

...it being manifest that the unjust relations subsisting between the two classes have been the cause of Ireland's poverty, and that an enactment is necessary to put tenants in a more independent position, by curtailing the arbitrary powers of the landlord, I humbly submit that any such will be a mere humbug unless rents are in some manner restricted...'.⁸⁷

McKnight denounced the excesses of landlordism, referring to a recent case involving a Galway woman, 'proven in open court to have eaten the limbs off her own dead child from sheer starvation'. He criticized the inadequate response of landlords to the Famine, their spendthrift habits abroad, and their 'exorbitant powers'.⁸⁸

Whilst many Presbyterians became enthusiastic champions of tenant right, and extremely critical observers of Irish landlordism, many urban liberal Presbyterians remained somewhat contemptuous of the plight of the tenant farmer. In a letter to Robert James Tennent, James Simms, the Presbyterian editor of the *Whig*, dismissed the agitation in Down as having been 'much exaggerated....there is indignation at the extravagant claims put forward'. Indeed, he alleged, that, 'in Belfast, the whole thing is laughed at'.⁸⁹ Such feelings were undoubtedly the response of an urban middle class, displaying little sympathy with the economic concerns of agricultural life, and motivated by an increasingly genuine fear of the radical content and tone of the tenant

⁸⁵ *NW*, March 28 1848

⁸⁶ *LS*, April 14 1848

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *LS*, April 28 1848

⁸⁹ James Simms to Robert James Tennent, April 1848, PRONI, D/1748/G/603/8A

right advocates respecting the fundamental rights of property. John Andrews, agent to Lord Londonderry in Down, certainly viewed the situation with more concern. In a letter to his master, he noted that, 'The agitation for Tenant Right Legislation still proceeds', and warned Londonderry of the problems he could foresee in gathering the next set of rents in Down.⁹⁰

One Presbyterian minister in particular distinguished himself at this time as a radical and hostile commentator of Irish landlordism, that was Rev. John Rogers of Comber in County Down. Like so many of the younger generation of orthodox ministers, Rogers was strongly liberal in politics and encapsulated the resentments felt by many Presbyterians against the Irish establishment. Having already gone head to head with Cooke in the Synod of Belfast in 1848 over tenant right, a week later, Rogers reinforced his credentials as the energetic enemy of landlords – in particular, his own local landlord, the Marquis of Londonderry – at a meeting in Comber, called to declare the town's loyalty to Government.⁹¹ Once again, Rogers pushed to have a tenant right resolution read out at the meeting, but this time he encountered the opposition of John Andrews and Robert Cassidy (local solicitor and advisor to the Marquis) who refused to allow any allusion to tenant right. After a bitter altercation, Andrews and Cassidy retired from the meeting in protest, leaving Rogers to give a speech, as the son of an Irish farmer, on behalf of the tenants, demanding the legalization of tenant right throughout Ireland.⁹²

For ardent tenant righters such as Rev. David Bell, the only antidote to landlord coercion of tenant voting was a legalized tenant right which included fixity of tenure and a 'fair rent'. Rev. Rentoul echoed Bell's remarks at a meeting in Dungannon, arguing that the only just way to settle rents was through, 'valuators mutually appointed, having the sanction of law' and not valuers chosen by the landlords, as was the present case. The attack on landlord dominance included an assault on grand jury assessments, which the meeting resolved to be, 'a heavy taxation upon the country'.⁹³ It was evident that a more radical programme of tenant right was winning supporters over the more moderate aims of men like Henry Montgomery. The *Banner* described the custom as being composed of four essential parts; not merely compensation for

⁹⁰ Andrews to Londonderry, May 25 1848 D/Lo/C 512 (54)

⁹¹ *BU*, May 23 1848

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

improvements and the power of selling the occupancy of the farm, but also security of tenure and moderate rents.⁹⁴

In June 1848 two letters signed, 'Omega' appeared in the *Banner of Ulster*, emphasising the connection between electoral politics and tenant right. Referring to the recent meeting in Comber, the writer attacked Andrews, as Lord Londonderry's lackey, and his attempts to censure Rev. Rogers on tenant right and stifle public opinion on the matter. It was not only Rogers, but also the Presbyterian clergy in general, whom he praised for their staunch support of the Ulster tenants. Significantly, 'Omega', placed Presbyterian attitudes to landlordism in their wider anti-establishment context, commenting, 'It may not be altogether out of place to state that the landlord or aristocratic blood or leaning of the clergy of the Episcopal Church, which has been shown in some cases of late, may, when a little farther manifested, furnish one more appropriate lever to aid in reducing their towering and pampered establishment to its proper level.'⁹⁵

In 1848 James McKnight published a pamphlet entitled, *The Ulster Tenant's Claim of Right*, addressed to Lord John Russell, in which he explained and developed his ideas regarding the trusteeship of landlordism from the time of the Ulster plantation.⁹⁶ His arguments – 'that all proprietary right has its foundation in human labour';⁹⁷ that 'Aristocracy and landlordism, must be based upon realised, PUBLIC UTILITY',⁹⁸ and that, Ireland was the only country in the world where, 'the bulk of the population are treated as aliens on the soil of their birth'⁹⁹ – were certainly radical. In his ferocious attack on the whole supremacy of landlords and the absolute power they exercised, he described tenants as slaves, for whom, 'Constitutional freedom...is the theory...and feudal despotism is the practice'.¹⁰⁰ In his comprehensive attack on landlordism, McKnight explored both economic and political aspects. He emphasized the injustice that in Ireland, it was the tenant, not the landlord, who expended every penny on improvements which enriched the landlord's property: this was, 'the customary fate of Irish tenant industry, even in Ulster itself; while this barefaced, revolting robbery is openly perpetrated by men, who, in the British Parliament, are wont

⁹⁴ *BU*, June 2 1848

⁹⁵ *BU*, June 16 1848

⁹⁶ *The Ulster Tenants' Claim of Right; or, Landownership A State Trust; The Ulster Tenant-Right An Original Grant from the British Crown, and the Necessity of Extending its General Principle to the other Provinces of Ireland, Demonstrated; In a Letter to the Right Honourable the Lord John Russell. By James McKnight, Esq., LL.D* (Dublin, 1848)

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.8

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.13

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.46

to boast of their own superior landlordism, and who clutch at Coercion Bills, with a greedy avidity'.¹⁰¹

McKnight painted a vivid picture of the effects on the tenant of having no assured interest in the soil, describing how, ‘..when they see all their industry, and all their toil, beyond the bare means of the merest crawling subsistence, regularly going to the pampering and enrichment of a small privileged oligarchy, who have no sympathy with them beyond that which men usually bestow upon animals of an inferior species, they quickly lose the spirit of self-exertion’.¹⁰² His assurance that the aim of the tenant right campaigners was not the abolition of the landed aristocracy as a distinct order, must have rung somewhat hollow in landlords’ ears, given the bitterness of their attacks and their insistence that, ‘landlordism, as a public institution, created by state, shall be regulated by law’.¹⁰³

The on-going feud between the land agent, John Andrews, and the Rev. John Rogers reached a new level of animosity in March 1849, at the meeting of the Presbytery of Comber, when Andrews accused Rogers of being the author of a series of anonymous letters recently published in the *Derry Standard*, attacking Lord Londonderry.¹⁰⁴ Andrews and Lord Londonderry clearly regarded Rogers as a malign influence, and Andrews accused him of attempting to, ‘alienate that reciprocal affection, confidence, and harmonious concert and co-operation which have hitherto distinguished the relation of landlord and tenant’.¹⁰⁵ Rogers’ withering sarcasm in response to the charges highlighted his fearless lack of deference to Lord Londonderry: ‘...I have been regretting this day that I am the minister of poor plebeians; for, oh! if I had a landlord or agent in my congregation, how the warm gushes of sympathy would flow through my heart – how I would sympathise with the aristocracy, and manifest certain tendencies, not on behalf of the poor trodden-down farmers of Ulster, but with another and a stronger party’. The Presbytery voted overwhelmingly to dismiss Andrews’ claims, largely on the grounds that the matter was wholly unsuitable for a church court.

The situation within Ulster was attracting attention from various outside commentators. In his reports to the *Times*, the Quaker John Lamb noted on his recent visit to Antrim and Down, that, ‘there is at present a great extent of poverty and pinching difficulty among the agricultural peasantry of Ulster’, and commenting on the

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.47

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.50

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.51

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.57

¹⁰⁴ *BU*, March 23 1849

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

need for landlords to initiate considerable rent reductions.¹⁰⁶ More ominously, the *Monaghan Standard* claimed that, 'Ulster is not prosperous. She is dreadfully destitute. Armagh in fact has changed places with Mayo, and Antrim and Down, with Clare and Galway...'.¹⁰⁷ Such opinions were echoed by the Rev. Dr. Brown at a meeting of the Synod of Ballymena and Coleraine, in which he implored the Synod to take up the tenant right mantle, referring to the alarming condition of the respectable farmers of Down and the vast numbers planning to emigrate to America.¹⁰⁸

The increasing frequency of incendiary fires across parts of Down made news in local and national newspapers.¹⁰⁹ The *Times* was horrified at the apparent disintegration of the landlord-tenant relationship, and moreover at the 'spread of the anti-rent campaign in the model county of Down'.¹¹⁰ But Down was not the only county clamouring for rent reductions. The *Banner* led a scathing attack on Lord Londonderry's refusal to accept a petition for rent abatements from his Derry and Donegal tenantry, and on the contrary, his demand that rent arrears be settled immediately.¹¹¹ The picture painted by the newspaper of tenants hurling shouts of abuse and rotten potatoes at the Marquis on his visit to the Derry estates, exemplified the increasing antagonism between landlord and tenant across parts of Ulster.

But it was with some of his County Down Presbyterian tenants that Lord Londonderry became embroiled in the most bitter and protracted dispute, in which local Presbyterian ministers such as Rogers, also became involved.¹¹² In December 1849 the Kilmoody tenantry had presented a petition begging Londonderry for a rent reduction in light of the hardships suffered since the potato blight, but Londonderry was emphatic in his refusal to hear any such demands. The Presbyterian press denounced his response as 'haughty balderdash'.¹¹³ Naturally, the *Banner* supported the efforts of the Kilmoody tenants, and it recalled the days of James Porter in the 1790s: 'In the days of "Billy Bluff and the Squire", when feudal serfdom and constitutional loyalty were convertible terms, this passive submission might have been expected, but happily the world is in a different age at present'.¹¹⁴ Even the *Belfast Newsletter* was critical of the Marquis'

¹⁰⁶ *Times*, April 16 1849

¹⁰⁷ Extracts reprinted in *Times*, July 4 1849

¹⁰⁸ *BU*, June 5 1849

¹⁰⁹ For instance, *Times*, October 16 1849

¹¹⁰ *Times*, October 29 1849

¹¹¹ *BU*, October 23 1849

¹¹² See *BU*, December 21 1849 or *BNL*, December 25 1849 for a publication of all the correspondence between Lord Londonderry and the Kilmoody tenantry.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

'heartless policy'.¹¹⁵ For Lord Londonderry and John Andrews, the Kilmood tenantry were being influenced in their landlord defiance by some other force, and that, they concluded, was John Rogers, the permanent thorn in the Marquis' side, and the 'landlord vilifier'.¹¹⁶ Rushing to the Comber minister's defence, the *Banner* noted that, 'Mr. Rogers dares to think for himself in Comber; and he has, we believe, taught his people to exercise a similar privilege'.¹¹⁷ In a letter from his agent Andrews, Londonderry was informed that, although, 'the rest of the tenantry have manifested no open sympathy with Kilmood,...there is no hope or chance of repudiation by any...'.¹¹⁸

For the landlord class in Ireland, the answer to the problem of the disparity between rents and prices of agricultural products in the 1840s was not to lower rents, but rather to ensure that prices rose, and in the aftermath of the repeal of the corn laws, the landlords saw a return to protection as the only means of achieving this.¹¹⁹ The concerted effort to rally support for protection by Ulster's landlord class towards the end of 1849, became another significant catalyst for the tenant right movement and emphasized the increasing polarization of landlord and tenant interests. The defiant opposition of the tenant right campaigners to the landlord cry for protection was displayed at a meeting in Garvagh in County Down, where Presbyterian ministers once again took the lead in advocating the tenant interest against that of the landlord, in increasingly strong language.¹²⁰ Commenting on the meeting, the *Banner* noted that, 'the movement of the landlord class...in support of a protective duty on the importation of foreign corn, has to some extent opened the eyes of the farmers to their real condition, and is likely to lead... to strong and energetic measures' to secure their tenant right.¹²¹

At the Garvagh meeting, the Rev. John Rutherford, Presbyterian minister of Ballydown, claimed that, 'in espousing the cause of the tillers of the soil, he was espousing that of an oppressed and poverty-stricken people, and endeavouring...to abolish... the white tenant slavery of the North of Ireland'.¹²² In a dramatic speech, Rutherford referred to the deplorable condition of the tenant farmers of Ulster because of the famine, which had, 'rendered it impossible for them to pay the high rents which arbitrary landlordism has imposed on them'. He attacked 'landlord oppression', and

¹¹⁵ *BNL*, December 25 1849

¹¹⁶ *BU*, December 25 1849

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Andrews to Londonderry, December 31 1849, DCRO, D/Lo/C 158 (56)

¹¹⁹ See Armstrong, *Economic History*, Chapter One

¹²⁰ *BU*, December 21 1849

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

their failure to reduce rents in such hard times, adding that he, 'would prove that the tenant farmers of Ulster have such a property in the soil that landlords have no power to eject them from it, or charge them what rents they please'.¹²³ In equally strong language, the Rev. Mr. Moorehead described how, 'the tenants are... left to starve, while the landlord's luxuries are safe...Such is the conduct of the great majority of the landlords in the present day...'.¹²⁴ The response of the landlord press to these speeches at Garvagh was one of abject horror. The *Dublin Evening Mail* argued that John Mitchel had been transported, 'for broaching doctrines less subversive of society', than those espoused by Rutherford and company.¹²⁵ The *Banner*, however, was unrepentant, attacking the *Mail* as, 'a sample of the style in which the tools of Irish landlordism presume to treat Irish Presbyterian ministers, when the latter only intimate the necessity of securing by law the hereditary property of their own people'.¹²⁶ The leading role played by individual Presbyterian ministers in attacking landlords was not lost on the *Times*, which echoed the *Mail* in noting that, in Ulster, tenant right, 'has been taken up with extreme ardour by certain of the Presbyterian clergy...who advocate the cause with an "earnestness" somewhat objectionable, as savouring too much of the school wherein Mr. John Mitchell [*sic*] learnt and inculcated doctrines so subversive of social order as to lead ultimately to his expatriation from his native land'.¹²⁷

It is not surprising that Lord Londonderry was perturbed by the tone of these speeches and his own dispute with his Kilmood tenants. This explains his fear at the prospect of Lord Downshire's wish to call a great protectionist meeting in County Down against free trade, and his belief that any such gathering would merely inflame the tenants.¹²⁸ Lord Clarendon, the Lord Lieutenant, agreed that,

to call a meeting in the County Down at this moment seems to me very like madness with an attempt at suicide, for there is any uneasy spirit abroad which seeks a vent in schemes which are not the less mischievous for being impracticable, and the meetings which have already been held in the North, the language held about Tenant Rights, the firm stand which Mr. Andrews has been compelled to take against absurd pretensions and meddling agitators together with the articles in the *Banner of Ulster*, all might have convinced Lord Downshire that to stir up these

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Reprinted in *BU*, December 28 1849

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Times*, December 27 1849

¹²⁸ Londonderry to Clarendon, December 29 1849, Clar Dep. Ir. Box 18

jarring elements of contention was about the worse move he could make for the interest he particularly desires to serve, viz. that of the landlord.¹²⁹

The plans under way among the Ulster landlords for a protectionist meeting in early 1850 set the tone for a year which witnessed an increasingly bitter manifestation of anti-landlord sentiments among Presbyterians, and in particular, the confirmation of the leading role of certain Presbyterian clergy in articulating these sentiments. The *Banner* was scathing towards the landlords' claims that an end to free trade would restore agricultural prosperity, denouncing Andrews' advice to tenants to abandon free trade as self-serving landlord propaganda. In an editorial on the eve of the Down Protection meeting, it warned Presbyterian tenants, 'the farmers of Down may...feel very confident that if the scheme of "protection" was really one for their benefit, the noble Marquis and his band of county squires would not be so wonderfully zealous in its behalf [*sic*]'. More explicitly, the paper denounced the Protection agitation as a mere 'delusion, to put the County Down farmers upon a wrong scent, and thus to get rid of applications for a reduction of rent'.¹³⁰

As Lord Londonderry had predicted, the much anticipated meeting in Downpatrick in January 1850 proved disastrous to the landlord interest – the landlords were forced to retire from the venue, as protesting farmers rallied behind Crawford's rousing speech against protection.¹³¹ The *Banner* was euphoric at the response of the tenant farmers of Down in their defiance against their landlords, contrasting it with the glory days of the 1784 election in the county, 'when the Presbyterian farmers of Down completely broke the power of its whole aristocracy'. It concluded that it was clear that, 'the landlord interest of this country is now openly arrayed against all the rest of the community'.¹³² The deterioration in relations between Presbyterian farmers and their ministers and landlords, was starkly evident in the early months of 1850. Tenant right meetings continued to be held all over Ulster, at which landlords were denounced in the strongest terms. At Coleraine, for instance, the Rev. William Lyle of Dunboe referred to the misery of the tenant farmers due to extravagant rents whilst another minister attacked the 'gorged pockets', and the luxurious lifestyles of Irish landlords.¹³³

1850 brought no abatement in the dispute between Lord Londonderry and his Kilmoody tenantry, and the hostility between Rev. Rogers and Andrews continued to be played out publicly in the pages of the local press. Andrews maintained his allegation

¹²⁹ Clarendon to Londonderry, December 31 1849, DCRO, D/Lo/C 111 (48)

¹³⁰ *BU*, January 8 1850

¹³¹ *BU*, January 11 1850

¹³² *Ibid.*

that Rogers was the prime mover in inciting the Down tenantry to defy the Marquis, whilst Rogers laughed at Andrews' notion of the 'infallibility of landlords'.¹³⁴ Londonderry himself regarded Rogers as a dangerous menace, as seen in his comments to Lord Clarendon in their private correspondence. 'You will probably see my flare up with the tenants owing to the Demagogues Rogers and co. disseminating their poison from the district'.¹³⁵ Indeed, the Comber minister's total lack of respect for Lord Londonderry was revealed in his humorous comment regarding the grant of land made by Londonderry to Rogers' congregation: '...It was in 1838...that Lord Londonderry granted the site of my meeting house; and no little puffing has been kept about this free "liberal allowance" '.¹³⁶

The Presbyterian tenant right campaigners certainly grew in confidence at this time, as shown by the comments made at a meeting in Holywood, County Down. James McKnight, referring to the late Protection meeting, praised the tenant farmers of Down for being the first, 'to break the fetters of serfdom...in the face of the landlords'.¹³⁷ The spirit prevailing among Presbyterians at this time was displayed at a great Tenant Right and Free Trade Meeting held in January in the First Presbyterian Meeting House in Saintfield, where it was clear that the tone of some Presbyterian orators was growing more radical and violent.¹³⁸ The language of the Rev. Mr. Mecredy harked back to the days of 1798, and he charged landlord oppression with driving, 'the bravest and loyalest [*sic*] of Hibernia's sons', from their native land. He denounced protection as 'a landlord's cry' – 'the farmers of Down know right well it....means....tax the food of the community at large, that we may swell our gales of rent'. Mecredy concluded with the words of a poem,

When Erin arose from the dark rolling flood,
God blessed the green island and saw it was good;
In sun and in soil, and in station thrice blessed,
Her back to the Great Britain, her face to the west.

The Rev. J. Downes of Boardmills echoed Mecredy in blaming the effect of 'irresponsible landlordism over a defenceless tenantry' for evaporating 'the joyous

¹³³ *BU*, January 1 1850

¹³⁴ *BU*, January 1 and 4 1850

¹³⁵ Lord Londonderry to Lord Clarendon, January 6 1850, Clar.Dep. Ir. Box 18

¹³⁶ *BU*, January 15 1850

¹³⁷ *BU*, January 11 1850

¹³⁸ *BU*, January 18 1850

spirits of Erin' and he demanded that landlords in Ulster, 'make large abatements of rent'.¹³⁹

The Saintfield meeting caused alarm within landlord circles, and the *Newsletter* was horrified to see a political meeting being held in a Presbyterian Meeting House, denouncing the 'relish' of certain Presbyterians for 'an impotent war upon the landlords and the established institutions of the country'.¹⁴⁰ In a letter to Lord Londonderry, Andrews referred to the meeting, and noted, '..the attack is made upon Rents and in the present instance it is led in the most furious manner by all the Editors of the Newspapers whose main support is derived from the Tenant Class, and by a more formidable class still, the priests in the Roman Catholic districts, and the Presbyterian Ministers in the North'.¹⁴¹ But the Presbyterian tenants themselves were actively expressing their support for the tenant right-free trade campaign. 'A Tenant Farmer' writing in the *Banner* criticized Lord Londonderry's refusal to grant rent relief to his Kilmood tenantry, whilst a letter from 'Agricola' praised the *Banner's* 'untiring advocacy of the oppressed farmer' and attacked the 'landlord legislators' self-serving policies.¹⁴²

For Lord Londonderry, Presbyterian pressure to reduce rents was mounting but he stood firm and spoke of his 'regret' at any such requests. At a meeting of the Lord Londonderry tenantry in the Rev. Julius McCullough's First Presbyterian Meeting House in Newtownards, the local minister spoke of the growing economic distress of the farmers in the district and the need for rent abatements.¹⁴³ The Rev Hugh Moore, non-subscribing Presbyterian minister of the town, added a fierce denunciation of 'the agitation for a return to protective duties' as a 'most fatal delusion'. 'Be assured that the outcry for protection which has been raised in this country...is neither more nor less than an artful device on the part of the landlord interest to stifle the cry for a reduction of rents'.¹⁴⁴ It is not difficult to see why many landlords regarded the Presbyterian clergy as the chief inciters of hostility between landlord and tenant.

The Presbyterian ministers involved in the tenant right/free trade/rent reduction campaign, appeared in force at a large demonstration in Banbridge at the end of January. The *Banner* estimated that some seven thousand people attended, including

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *BNL*, January 18 1850

¹⁴¹ Andrews to Londonderry, January 20 1850, DCRO, D/Lo/C 158 (58)

¹⁴² Both letters in *BU*, January 18 1850

¹⁴³ *BU*, January 22 1850

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

the bulk of Lord Downshire's tenantry.¹⁴⁵ The local Presbyterian minister, Rev. William Dobbin referred to the meeting's resolution ascribing to landlordism, 'the great mass of pauperism which disgraces our country'. But it was the Rev. John Rutherford who caused the greatest furore among the landlord press, with his damning speech against landlords. They:

... expended neither their time, labour or capital in reducing the country out of a state of wilderness such as it was 300 years ago, into the cultivated condition in which you behold it at this day. While your landlords have been basking in the sunshine of power, reclining upon velvet couches, or squandering your hard-earned money in profligacy in foreign countries (hear hear) you, the resident cultivators of the soil – you, the industrious occupiers of the land...you, and you alone have...built the houses, fenced the fields, and constructed the roads by the sweat of your brows.... and after you have done all this exclusively at your own expense, will any one be so ignorant as not to perceive that you have a property in the soil...?¹⁴⁶

Rutherford's insistence that the land was the property of both landlord and tenant led him into a fierce attack on the 'rapacity of the lordly owner' and he denounced landlord attempts to destroy the tenant right indirectly through repeated increases in rent, detailing one such example on the estate of Lord Downshire. Most radically of all, Rutherford argued that, 'there should be no feudal proprietorship in land whatever', and ominously, 'that Ireland will never be a nation until the present feudal and irresponsible system of landlordism shall be completely reformed'.¹⁴⁷

Even the *Northern Whig* was horrified at Rutherford's 'communist exhortations'.¹⁴⁸ The ultra-conservative *Downpatrick Recorder* was equally aghast at the sight of ministers of religion assuming the lead in advocating 'socialist doctrines', and it was certainly accurate in noting that Dobbin and Rutherford had assumed, 'an attitude of open disrespect and daring hostility' to landlordism.¹⁴⁹ The *Times* noted that Rutherford's speech, 'would have cheered the heart of John Mitchel himself'.¹⁵⁰ There is no doubt that Rutherford's speech at Banbridge elevated Presbyterian antipathy to the landlord class to a new and more bitter level, and for some Presbyterians favourable to tenant right, his stance was simply too extreme. 'A Presbyterian Layman' wrote to the *Newsletter* regretting that 'socialism' had been so loudly applauded by the Presbyterian

¹⁴⁵ *BU*, January 29 1850

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *NW*, January 31 1850

¹⁴⁹ *Downpatrick Recorder*, February 2 1850

clergy present. He noted, 'the extermination of the landlords was their only cry; their utter destruction was their dearest wish'.¹⁵¹ Among the Presbyterian clergy themselves, moderate tenant right supporters such as Rev. Blakely, also censured the 'wild and unjust notions' of some of his brethren on landlord-tenant relations.¹⁵² Lord Londonderry wrote to Lord Clarendon, 'I own, I tremble at these Exhibitions and the language in Ireland, especially of those infernal Hypocrites the Presbyterian parsons'. Moreover, he was alarmed at the response of his own tenantry: '...to my great surprise and sorrow, they have caught and adopted the general mania....urged on by Rogers, McCullough and Moore, all our Dissenting Ministers.'¹⁵³

The *Banner of Ulster* continued its onslaught on the landlord class, attacking David Ker in Down for refusing a petition from his Ballynahinch tenants asking for a reduction in rents.¹⁵⁴ Another meeting in favour of tenant right and rent reductions (the two by now had become synonymous) took place in Dundonald in the Rev. E.T. Martin's Presbyterian meeting house.¹⁵⁵ Martin emphasized the effects of the famine and the poor law on the tenant's position, urging that landlords grant a reduction in rents to avoid the 'impending ruin' of many districts. Another meeting held in Comber in February 1850 reinforced the momentum of the tenant right campaign at this time.¹⁵⁶ That Alex Minnis, the spokesman of the Kilmood tenantry, took the Chair, was evidence that Lord Londonderry's unbending stance was fuelling the Presbyterian resentment against landlords in general. The Rev. Rogers led the resolution in demanding the necessity of immediate rent reductions, and he made a characteristically sarcastic attack on Londonderry and Andrew's refusals to hear the appeals of the Kilmood tenants. Rev. Killen added that tenant right in Down was currently enjoyed, 'at the sufferance of a landlord or his agent', comparing it to 'a right such as the Czar of Russia would give to his serfs'.¹⁵⁷ Andrews wrote to Lord Londonderry that, 'The Comber Meeting was beyond comparison the worst, and had no design but to afford its promoters, Rogers and Killen, an opportunity of venting their vindictive malice and of endeavouring to inspire the tenantry with disaffection'.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁰ *Times*, January 31 1850

¹⁵¹ *BNL*, February 1 1850

¹⁵² *NW*, February 2 1850

¹⁵³ Londonderry to Clarendon, February 4 1850, Clar. Dep. Ir. Box 18

¹⁵⁴ *BU*, February 1 1850

¹⁵⁵ *BU*, February 5 1850

¹⁵⁶ *BU*, February 8 1850

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Andrews to Londonderry, February 10 1850, DCRO, D/Lo/C 158 (60)

In February, Rev. Dobbin became engaged in a battle with Lord Downshire's estate, following a rent demand Dobbin had received (in relation to an I.O.U he had signed on behalf of a Downshire tenant).¹⁵⁹ The demand, as Dobbin himself recognized, followed his speech at Banbridge the previous month, and in a bitter letter to the *Banner of Ulster*, he criticized the practices on the Downshire estates and attacked what he called the, 'boobyism and absolute power in Scarva and Banbridge' exercised over tenant farmers.¹⁶⁰ The *Derry Standard* was unrepentant at the charges of 'Mitchelism' levelled by the landlord press, in particular, the *Dublin Evening Mail*:

'[the Mail] is exceedingly anxious that John Mitchel should have more company, and...suggests....that the Rev. Messrs. Rogers, Killen and Rutherford should be sent after him. Why should they not? They are Northerners, and John Mitchel was a Northern. They are Presbyterians, and was not John Mitchel "a member of the same religious persuasion"? He spoke against the landlords, and so do they...'.¹⁶¹

It staunchly defended the ministers, and the right of all the Presbyterian clergy to highlight the evils of landlordism.

When in February 1850 in the House of Lords the Marquis of Londonderry denounced the activities of certain Presbyterian clergy, the dispute between landlord and Presbyterians in Down assumed an even more bitter aspect.¹⁶² Rev. William Dobbin was one of those men mentioned individually in Londonderry's attack, yet it had done nothing to dampen his spirit, and in March he addressed a letter to Londonderry in which he stated, '...to feudal absolutism, I frankly avow I am not loyal. It oppresses and plunders my beloved Presbyterian people..'.¹⁶³ In another letter to the editor of the *Banner*, he contrasted the landlordship of Lord Downshire with that of William Sharman Crawford, the tenant right champion. Dobbin castigated the unyielding response of Downshire in refusing to grant any reduction in rent, noting that, 'mercy to a tenant is not a crime of which the Downshire office is often guilty..'. Alluding to the landlord dominance of the county's representation, Dobbin added, 'there is not a voter, to the best of my knowledge, on the Downshire estates'.¹⁶⁴ In another letter to the *Banner's* editor, the Rev. John Johnston of Tullylish recalled the Irish landlords' woeful response to the miseries of the potato rot.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁹ *BU*, February 12 1850

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *LS*, February 14 1850

¹⁶² See Chapter Five.

¹⁶³ *BU*, March 1 1850.

¹⁶⁴ *BU*, February 26 1850

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

The most vigorous defence of the Presbyterian clergy from Londonderry's attack came from the *Derry Standard*, whose editorials against landlordism were becoming increasingly radical.¹⁶⁶ The increasing defiance of Down Presbyterians towards their local landlords in 1850 was not simply confined to the radical ministers and editors. At a meeting called by Andrews at Lisbarnet, the local tenantry refused to sign a document offering a reward for information on the perpetrators of a recent incendiary fire in the area. They informed Andrews that, 'the refusal of justice and want of consideration on the part of the landlord had excited very general discontent, and that...had unhappily led to excesses over which they had no controul [*sic*]'.¹⁶⁷ The *Northern Whig*, commenting on the spate of incendiary fires across Antrim and Down, laid the blame squarely with, 'the discreditable conduct of three or four Presbyterian clergymen', who, 'inspire hatred, exasperate discontent, and inculcate doctrines of plunder and robbery'.¹⁶⁸ It reserved particular hostility for Rogers, whom the paper dubbed, 'the Rev. viper of Comber'.¹⁶⁹

As a consequence of the Lisbarnet meeting, Londonderry issued an address to his Down tenants lamenting that, 'my hitherto peaceable and Excellent Farmers have unhappily caught the insidious mania of the discontented and designing disturbers of...Down'. He warned them that he would never yield to such remonstrances, and they must pay up their rents and arrears. On the issue of tenant right itself he informed them that the custom was never likely to be legalized by any Parliament, and they must receive it as a 'boon'. His final comment that, 'God forbid that any circumstances should ever arise between us to make me withhold it from any of you', was precisely the evidence the Presbyterian campaigners needed to prove the necessity of legalization.¹⁷⁰

In March the *Banner* led another assault on Lord Londonderry for an official letter he had written to Clarendon as Lord Lieutenant demanding that measures be taken to punish certain Presbyterian ministers, and mentioning Rutherford and Dobbin by name.¹⁷¹ Clarendon's obvious caution on the matter revealed a fear of antagonizing the General Assembly as a whole – a situation that he clearly wanted to avoid. The Presbyterian paper was at pains to emphasize that the Presbyterian agitation against landlords in Down was not merely the work of certain clergymen: 'the noble Marquis

¹⁶⁶ E.g. *LS*, February 1850.

¹⁶⁷ *BU*, February 22 and 26 1850

¹⁶⁸ *NW*, February 23 1850

¹⁶⁹ *NW*, February 28 1850

¹⁷⁰ *BU*, April 2 1850.

¹⁷¹ *BU*, March 8 1850

speaks about “ministers of the Gospel exciting a distressed population to discontent against their superiors”. Perhaps the actual truth is, that the “distressed population” in question have excited their own ministers to speak on their behalf.¹⁷² But there is no doubt that many Presbyterian clergy at this time offered their leadership and encouragement to channel tenant discontent. Indeed, it is difficult not to conclude that the tenant right movement offered the more radical ministers with an inviting opportunity to attack one of the bulwarks of the Anglican establishment in Ireland. In a defiant letter to the *Banner*, Rutherford attacked Lord Downshire, referring to, ‘the vassalage of those having the misfortune to live under the Downshire dynasty’,¹⁷³ whilst ‘A Small Farmer’ made an equally scathing attack on the Marquis of Hertford’s landlordship: ‘is it likely’, he asked, ‘that the farmers of the North, those of that body who are suffering from rental extortion, will tamely submit to fixity of oppression’?¹⁷⁴

For Cooke, whose policy remained the ‘Protestant Peace’ and unity between Presbyterians and the landlord class, the prominent activities of certain of his brethren in the tenant right movement, was disastrous. Following on from the events at the Synod of Belfast, the meeting of the Synod of Armagh and Monaghan proved another success for the tenant-righters. The Rev. Bell’s petition in favour of its legalization, seconded by Rev. D.G Brown, was passed unanimously; at the meeting the Rev. Richey of Clontribet commented that, ‘the oppressive powers of landlordism were destroying the Presbyterians of the country’.¹⁷⁵ In the same month, petitions in favour of legalizing tenant right were passed by both the Synod of Derry and Omagh,¹⁷⁶ and the Synod of Ballymena and Coleraine.¹⁷⁷ The *Banner* was euphoric that four out of the five Synods of the General Assembly had declared in favour of tenant right: ‘Dr. Cooke, as the people’s worthy friend, must be quite distressed to see the progress which this abhorred “Communism” called tenant right, is making in every quarter of the Presbyterian Church’.¹⁷⁸

The Rev. John Rutherford reinforced his anti-landlord stance in a letter to the *Banner*’s editor:¹⁷⁹ ‘I have just as good a right to single out a particular landlord, to show the evils of the system of landlordism, as an anti-slavery advocate has to single out a particular slave-master’. He added that, ‘landlordism is depopulating the country,

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *BU*, March 8 1850

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *BU*, May 24 1850

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *BU*, May 31 1850

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

emptying our pews', and he attacked the 'hereditary rank and extravagance' of the landed class. His comment that the life of the Marquis of Downshire was no more sacred than that of an O'Connell, or any other public figure, was also deliberately provocative. In the *Nation*, a letter appeared from 'a tenant farmer, and an elder of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland'.¹⁸⁰ The tone was strongly anti-landlord, and the author stated, '...I consider evicting, rack-renting Irish landlordism to be murder...', adding that, 'all the logic in the world could not make an Ulster farmer put trust in a landlord'.

The Rev. James Killen accused the Ulster landlords in both houses of Parliament of misleading public opinion on the real state of the north of Ireland; he said that in fact, Ulster was on the verge of pauperism. Moreover, he added, 'All those who had advocated the cause of the tenant farmers had been reviled by the landlords and their creatures, as levellers, Communists, Red Republicans, Socialists, confiscators of property and public robbers'. He warned the landlords that the Presbyterian clergy, 'were rather troublesome antagonists, and they would do well not to provoke them'.¹⁸¹ Rev. Rogers too made a strongly anti-landlord speech at the Belfast tenant right demonstration in June 1850. Taking a direct swipe at Cooke, he sarcastically noted that, 'at least four out of the five Synods of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland have perpetrated the un-heard of Communism and Red Republicanism of petitioning Parliament to protect...the poor Irish farmer'. Referring to Ireland as, 'the Emerald Isle', Rogers said that they had gathered in Belfast, 'to proclaim implacable hostility against our hereditary tormentors', and their, 'territorial tyranny'. After attacking absenteeism, he concluded, 'I consider that Irish landlordism has ever been a system of legalized oppression'. Rev. William Dobbin defended the right of the Presbyterian clergy to 'have the audacity to tell the truth, in reference to landlords, or landlordism, or rents', and he attacked Cooke and his allies in the General Assembly, calling them, 'mealy-mouthed brethren'.¹⁸² Other Presbyterians in attendance made similar speeches denouncing landlord indifference.

The reaction of the *Whig* to the meeting, especially since Presbyterian clergy had uttered some of the most radical sentiments, was one of horror, and it deplored, 'the spread of opinions which are utterly subversive of the security of property...'.¹⁸³ In particular, it remained opposed to the Belfast meeting's demands for setting rents by

¹⁸⁰ *Nation*, June 1 1850

¹⁸¹ *BU*, June 14 1850.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *NW*, June 18 1850

impartial jury, calling the plan 'slavish' and 'absurd'. The newspaper was quick to note the split amongst Presbyterian ministers on the tenant right agitation that had been emphasized by the attacks made on Henry Cooke.¹⁸⁴ A letter to the *Nation* signed, 'T.C.D, and a Presbyterian', praised the efforts of the Presbyterian clergy, and rejoiced that the General Assembly had voted in favour of the legalization of tenant right, 'in spite of the exertions of two or three members, who worship marquises and earls'.¹⁸⁵ At a tenant right meeting in Louth in the same month, Rev.s Dobbin, Bell and Rutherford, joined Roman Catholic priests on the tenant right platform to denounce 'landlord tyranny' and 'oppression'.¹⁸⁶ However, some Presbyterians were clearly uneasy with such violent denunciations of landlordism and the schemes proposed to limit landlord power. 'A Tenant Farmer' writing to the *Whig* commented that, 'it is not the way to prevent such injustice on the part of landlords, to attempt to rob them of their property..'.¹⁸⁷

In their private correspondence, Lord Clarendon commented to Lord Londonderry,

...I don't like the spirit which is at work in the North and which is as antisocial as even Louis Blanc could desire. Some of the *Dei Minores* of the Presbyterian Church have lately earned for themselves an unenviable notoriety in Dublin by the violence of their language and opinions, and the *Dei Superi* of the General Assembly although disapproving of their conduct are powerless to control them.¹⁸⁸

Similarly, Andrews wrote to Londonderry that, 'the virulence of Rogers and Killen knows no bounds. Their addresses and harangues do not stop short of exhortation to organized resistance to the rights of property'.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, the resolutions of the new Tenant League advocated the restriction of the power of the landlord, both in the rents he could charge for his land, and its insistence on the tenant's right to undisturbed possession, if he fulfilled his rent obligations. The League believed that, 'an equitable valuation of land for rent should divide between the landlord and tenant the net profits of cultivation, in the same way as profits should be divided between two partners in any business'.¹⁹⁰ Lord Dungannon, in a letter to the *Belfast Chronicle* in defence of the

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Nation*, July 20 1850

¹⁸⁶ *Nation*, July 6 1850

¹⁸⁷ *NW*, July 9 1850

¹⁸⁸ Clarendon to Londonderry, August 16 1850, DCRO, D/Lo/C 111 (37)

¹⁸⁹ *BU*, August 20 1850

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

landlord interest, attacked those ministers of religion for whom it was, 'a labour of love to depict all the landlords in Ulster as oppressors and grinders of their tenantry'.¹⁹¹

In August 1850 the *Banner* reported on a meeting which had taken place between Lord Londonderry and his Newtownards tenants, at which the Marquis denounced the activities of the Presbyterian clergy responsible for vilifying him. He attacked the *Banner* as a 'revolutionary paper'; and described his Newtownards tenants as 'ungrateful' for supporting the 'revolutionary movement at Kilmood', which he maintained was the work of Rev. Rogers.¹⁹² According to the *Banner*, '...the great body of people present, alluding to the attacks upon Presbyterian ministers, cried out at the top of their voices, that they were all Presbyterians – that they would stand by the men who had stood by them in their difficulties, and that neither Marquis or Duke should be permitted to abuse them'.¹⁹³ There was certainly support amongst the tenant farmers for the Presbyterian clergy involved in the League, as shown, for instance, in the supper held in Donaghadee for the Rev. Robert Black on his return from the Dublin Conference.¹⁹⁴

The deterioration in landlord-tenant relations on Lord Londonderry's Down estates was intensified with the publication of an address from the Marquis, 'To the Commissioners for Lighting and Watching the Town of Newtownards', attacking them for requesting the legalization of tenant right in their recent address to Clarendon on his visit to the North.¹⁹⁵ Londonderry lamented the change that had occurred in his tenantry of late, and blamed their agitation for rent reductions, on the Presbyterian ministers, 'who should know better and direct their sessions to other objects than fomenting discord and disorder'.¹⁹⁶ The *Freeman's Journal* mocked Londonderry's 'amusing assumption of feudal authority', and it defended the tenants' position:

...the inhabitants of Newtownards were very moderate, indeed, in their demands. They did not hint at either valuation or fixity of tenure, they only asked a law to secure the tenants payment in full for bona fide improvements made by themselves. This demand – this modified and most moderate demand – was too great an infringement of feudal rights, and to adopt the interpretation of Lord

¹⁹¹ *Times*, September 10 1850

¹⁹² *BU*, August 20; 30 1850

¹⁹³ *BU*, August 23 1850

¹⁹⁴ *BU*, September 3 1850

¹⁹⁵ Copies of the address in *Times*, September 21; *NW*, September 29; *Freeman's Journal*, September 20 1850

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Londonderry called forth a dignified rebuke from the champion of Irish landlordism.¹⁹⁷

The Newtownards Presbyterian ministers, Moore and McCullough, responded with a defiant letter stating that the Marquis' indignation would not prevent them from campaigning for lower rents and an act to legalize tenant right.¹⁹⁸ 'A Small Farmer', writing to the *Banner*, was equally dismissive of Londonderry's manifesto, and sarcastically commented that they had, 'after all the wonderful favours flung before them... the audacity, like *Oliver Twist*, to "ask for more" '.¹⁹⁹ Londonderry's reaction to the letter of Revs. Moore and McCullough was to demand that each give up their holdings on his estate.²⁰⁰

The *Northern Whig* noted that, 'There is scarcely any place where the feeling about tenant-right is stronger than in Newtownards and its neighbourhood'. It deplored Rogers' support for the Tenant League's latest motion stating that, 'any law, merely giving compensation for improvements, would be utterly unavailing for the protection of the tenants'.²⁰¹ What Rogers and the other more radical tenant-righters advocated was not merely securing the tenant interest, but also curtailing the power of the landlords on their own property.

The attendance of Presbyterians at yet another tenant right meeting in the south of the country, this time at Kilkenny, provided an opportunity to attack Lord Londonderry on his recent address to the Newtownards Commissioners.²⁰² Rogers mocked Londonderry's fearful indignation at his 'serfs' for daring to challenge his authority, and was equally scathing about Lord Clarendon for failing to hear their tenant right claims. Also speaking at Kilkenny, McKnight denounced 'landlord absolutism' which had, 'kept Irishmen slaves in the land of their birth', and, 'deprived them of the enjoyment of property created by their industry'.²⁰³ The *Newsletter* accused the Presbyterian speakers at Kilkenny of endeavouring, 'to inspire a bitter hatred against the class' of landlords, and of advocating theories, 'calculated to stir up animosities between the landlord and the tenant classes', 'infinitely more bitter', than any previously.²⁰⁴ As ever, the *Banner* defended Presbyterian involvement in the League,

¹⁹⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, September 20 1850

¹⁹⁸ *NW*, September 21 1850

¹⁹⁹ *BU*, September 24 1850

²⁰⁰ *BU*, October 11 1850

²⁰¹ *NW*, September 26 1850

²⁰² *BU*, October 1 1850

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *BNL*, October 1 1850

particularly the clergy, and it denounced, 'one landlord rag' which had dubbed Rev. Rogers, 'SATAN'.²⁰⁵

The increasing polarization between the Presbyterians involved in the Tenant League and the landlords was emphasized by the *Newsletter* in its plea to tenant farmers to, 'consider the alternative...They have, on the one hand, the Tenant League, with its cry of "Down with the landlords!" – with its communist theories...[and]...on the otherside, they have the invitation of their natural protectors, the landlords'.²⁰⁶ The attendance of Presbyterians at meetings where landlordism was violently denounced undoubtedly increased these divisions. At Ballybay, the Rev. Bell claimed that landlords' agents and bailiffs in the Monaghan area had been intimidating the people not to attend tenant right demonstrations, and he painted a vivid image of Irishmen rotting in graves as a consequence of landlord oppression.²⁰⁷ Commenting on the 'communistic' proposals of certain elements of the Presbyterian clergy and press, *The Economist* perhaps summed up the situation most accurately, noting that, 'wild as the scheme is, such is the bad odour into which landlordism has fallen in Ireland...that this movement is popular'.²⁰⁸

Lord Londonderry's conflict with his own Presbyterian tenants and their clergymen escalated in late 1850, and the Marquis wrote to Lord Clarendon describing the continuing incendiary fires and agitation on his estate in Down. He accused the Presbyterian clergy of endeavouring to raise, 'the standard of positive rebellion'²⁰⁹, and Clarendon agreed with him that the tenant right movement was in fact, 'the most injurious system ever contrived for robbing landlords...'.²¹⁰ Londonderry's recent address had clearly not deterred his Down tenants, and in October 1850 he was presented with a petition requesting a reduction in rents and the legalization of tenant right.²¹¹ But the ultimate power which Londonderry wielded over his tenants was emphasized in the comments of Lord Clarendon: 'I was rejoiced to learn', he wrote to the Marquis on October 19, 'that such a lapse of lease had taken place and that so large a proportion of your Down tenants had come under your own control. Your tenants will I trust see that they have somewhat more to hope for from you than from Rogers'.²¹²

²⁰⁵ *BU*, October 1 1850

²⁰⁶ *BNL*, October 1 1850

²⁰⁷ *NW*, October 3; *BU*, October 4 1850

²⁰⁸ Reprinted in *NW*, October 8 1850

²⁰⁹ Londonderry to Clarendon, October 10 1850, Clar. Dep. Ir. Box 18

²¹⁰ Clarendon to Londonderry, October 6 1850, DCRO, D/Lo/C 111 (45)

²¹¹ Letter and petition enclosed in Londonderry to Clarendon, October 25 1850, Clar. Dep. Ir. Box 18

²¹² Clarendon to Londonderry, October 19 1850, DCRO, D/Lo/C 111 (56)

But such optimism was short-lived and less than one week later, Londonderry reported to Clarendon:

I was in hopes on returning from Derry and Donegal, I should have had Peace & Plenty here, the former I grieve to say seems still far off...the infernal spouting of the Revd Ministers McCullough and Moore and the insidious proceedings of Rogers keep up an agitating and discontented Spirit through my people and strange as it is to see how 2 or 3 of these clergymen then by their religious power keep in subjection 14 or 1500 of the really most intellectual and well conditioned Tenantry in Ireland....²¹³

The situation prompted the Marquis to issue a stark warning in the form of an address 'to the Tenantry of the Newtownards and Comber Estates' in which he denounced the League and its 'mad doctrines' and warned the tenantry that government would never legalise what was simply a 'boon'. Moreover he accused the Presbyterian ministers of acting to undermine the confidence that had once existed between landlord and tenant.²¹⁴ Lord Clancarty clearly shared Londonderry's anxieties, commenting in a private correspondence to him,

'I have read with interest what has passed between you and your Irish tenantry on the subject of tenant-right... The concessions demanded cannot be made without a tame surrender of the Rights of property and the grieving... interference of the Presbyterian clergy in secular concerns are alarming symptoms which prognosticate coming evils, and which require very careful treatment'.²¹⁵

Indeed, it was not only the most prominent ministers such as Bell and Rogers who supported the Tenant League's 'crude and impracticable project for converting the whole tenantry of Ireland into *quasi* proprietors'.²¹⁶ A large number of lesser-known Presbyterian ministers attended a League meeting in Omagh, County Tyrone in early November.²¹⁷ For instance, the Rev. Moses Chambers of Leckpatrick made an aggressive speech:

He said that, taking their stand there, they hurled defiance against the landlords and against the powers of hell.... he could tell them there were 9 or 10 Presbyterian ministers on the platform behind him. There might...be some Presbyterian ministers, perhaps they had some in their own town, who could not come forward. They were in dread of some petty upstart landlord, who resembled

²¹³ Londonderry to Clarendon, October 25 1850, Clar. Dep. Ir. Box 18

²¹⁴ *Address of the Marquis of Londonderry to the Tenantry on the Newtownards and Comber Estates* (Newtownards, 1850), pp.3-5

²¹⁵ Lord Clancarty to Londonderry, October 30 1850, PRONI, D/3030/CC/107

²¹⁶ *NW*, October 19 1850 (editorial).

²¹⁷ *BU* and *BNL*, October 29 1850

the peacock when he cocked his tail, seeming to say "Oh, how proud I am!" Notwithstanding this, however, the Presbyterian ministers were coming forward gradually, and swelling the movement.²¹⁸

Not all tenant-right Presbyterians, however, concurred with the activities of the League, including the Rev. Goudy of Strabane, who, whilst an avowed liberal and fervent critic of the landed class, found the co-operation with Roman Catholic priests unpalatable.²¹⁹ 'A Tenant Farmer' writing to the *Whig* encapsulated the feelings of the more moderate tenant farmers who believed that in asking for too much from the landed class and Parliament, they would receive nothing at all.²²⁰

The prospect of an inaugural Tenant League meeting in Down reinforced the antagonisms between its Presbyterian supporters, and the county's landlords. The *Banner* described how,

the proposed county meeting has struck terror into the landocracy of Down, and they are determined to defeat it if they can. Mr. Maxwell of Finnebrogue, we are informed, has called a meeting of his own tenantry...in order that he may settle the tenant right question for them, and the agents of my Lord Vane Londonderry are also busy... to deceive the tenant farmers, and to prevent them, by delusive promises, from joining the Tenant League'.²²¹

Whilst panic induced some Down landlords to offer rent reductions, for instance Maxwell and David Ker,²²² Londonderry made no such gesture. On the contrary, the authoritarian tone of his latest address to the Newtownards and Comber tenantry served merely to encourage tenant hostility, as Clarendon warned him:

I thought they smacked too much of feudal times....and were calculated to make your people look upon themselves rather as serfs than as the free and independent men that I am sure you like to consider them. Addressed to Presbyterians in whose veins there is always more or less of republican blood, I thought it would wound their pride and enable their evil...agitators to take advantage of their irritation.²²³

The ultimate act of Presbyterian defiance against Lord Londonderry came at a meeting of the Newtownards tenantry, attended by the Marquis himself, at which an address was presented to him signed, it was claimed, by seven hundred tenants.²²⁴ The direct challenge of the Revs. Moore, McCullough and Rogers, in claiming that the

²¹⁸ *BNL*, October 29 1850

²¹⁹ Goudy, *Right versus Might*, p.23. See Chapter 4.

²²⁰ *NW*, October 29 1850

²²¹ *BU*, November 1 1850

²²² *BU*, November 5 1850

²²³ Clarendon to Londonderry, November 2 1850, DCRO, D/Lo/C 111 (41) (My underlining)

tenants wanted lower rents and tenant right, resulted in Londonderry abandoning the meeting in fury. In an official response to the meeting, he expressed his anger at the clamour now raised against him, and denounced the local Presbyterian ministers for making him the target of the League's venom.²²⁵ In a letter to Disraeli, Lady Londonderry commented, 'I hope the tenantry are coming to their senses....at least separating from their blessed Presbyterian mischievous Tenant League advisers'.²²⁶ The *Banner*, unsurprisingly, had no sympathy whatsoever for the Londonderry family, and stirred feeling against them by reminding their readers of Lord Castlereagh's betrayal of the Presbyterians in the 1790s: when 'the reward of ... Presbyterian patriotism was political treachery'.²²⁷

Writing to Lord Londonderry concerning county Down, Sir Robert Bateson commented on, 'the bad...spirit and feeling among the people in general – especially among the Presbyterians and many of their ministers....Down is now one of the worst counties in Ireland in bad feelings to the landlords'.²²⁸ Across in the west of the province, however, Presbyterian anti-landlord sentiments were just as strong. 'We make little or no account of the antagonism of Irish landlordism', wrote the *Derry Standard*. 'It was to be expected. No monopoly ever just died easy. In other countries a bloody revolution was required to destroy feudalism....The League must be content to bear the scorn, hatred, and vituperation of that power from whose iron grasp it would wrest the liberties and rights of the people'.²²⁹ The year 1850 ended on a triumphant note for the Tenant Leaguers in Down, as shown by the great demonstration held in Newtownards and attended by all the leading Presbyterian ministers involved in the campaign.²³⁰

Meetings of the Tenant League took place at Downpatrick and Broughshane. The Rev. Dr. Coulter described how, 'Irish landlordism had plundered the people' and 'driven multitudes of the best of Irishmen into exile', whilst Rev. McCullough emphasized the need for mobilising their electoral strength to, 'secure tenant right representatives'.²³¹ The landlord organ, the *Downpatrick Recorder*, deplored the meeting at Downpatrick where, 'a most bitter and hostile spirit was manifested towards

²²⁴ *BU*, November 12 1850

²²⁵ *BU*, November 15 1850

²²⁶ Copy of Lady Londonderry to Disraeli, November 2 1850, DCRO, D/Lo/C 530 (95)

²²⁷ *BU*, November 15 1850.

²²⁸ Sir Robert Bateson to Londonderry, December 25 1850, DCRO, D/Lo/C 159 (17)

²²⁹ *LS*, December 12 1850

²³⁰ *BU*, December 31 1850. Presbyterians who attended included McKnight and Revs. Rogers, McCullough, Coulter, Black, Mecredy, Killen, Dobbin and Martin.

²³¹ Meeting at Downpatrick, *BU*, January 7 1851

landlords'.²³² The comments of certain Presbyterian ministers assisted in fuelling Lord Londonderry's own personal paranoia at the League's increasing influence in Down. The attendance of many Presbyterian ministers at a general meeting of the Tenant League in Dublin in January 1851 suggested that anti-landlord sentiments were, if anything, increasing and not diminishing amongst the leading tenant-righters.²³³ Significantly, an allusion to the executed Rev. Porter of Greyabbey, was received with enthusiasm.²³⁴

Northwards, the Presbyterian attendance at a significant Tenant League meeting in Armagh in January 1851 provided an opportunity to denounce both the economic and political power of the landlord class.²³⁵ In a lengthy speech, the meeting's chairman, Rev. D.G Brown of Newtownhamilton lamented that in Ireland, 'tenants at will have neither houses nor lands except at the pleasure of their landlords'. It was Rogers, however, who sounded the most defiant note, warning that the *regium donum*, 'would not act as a padlock on the mouths of Presbyterian ministers', and he launched a scathing attack on Lord Downshire's electioneering practices.²³⁶ At another meeting in Banbridge, Rev. Rutherford described landlordism as prejudicial to the public interest, whilst Rev. Reid of Scarva gave details of acts of landlord oppression in his own neighbourhood.²³⁷

The Presbyterian meeting house in Greyabbey provided the setting for a Tenant League fund-raising evening in February 1851.²³⁸ Rev. Hall of Ballyclare dismissed the differences of opinion entertained by those present: 'some differed in details with the Tenant League', he admitted, 'but all were agreed that the time was come for united exertions'. The Rev. Black called on all Irishmen to unite, and labelled, 'the curse of landlordism....worse than all the rabid dogs that ever existed'.²³⁹ The campaign's momentum was evident from the relentless round of meetings and dinners held across the north at this time.

In Down, the continuing agrarian outrage was causing alarm within landlord circles, and in referring to a recent shooting in the county, the *Times* pointed to an article in the *Mail* blaming those, 'miscalled ministers of the Gospel, the demagogues of the Presbyterian ministry, who, deserting the paths of Christian duty and their vocation

²³² *DR*, January 4 1851

²³³ *BU*, January 28 1851

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *BU*, January 31 1851

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ *BU*, February 4 1851

²³⁸ *NW*, February 13 1851

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

as ministers of Christ, stimulate their people to a total disregard of the rights of property and to an armed resistance of the law they are bound to uphold'.²⁴⁰ Lord Londonderry's patience with his tenants was quickly dissolving and he underlined his firm stand in April 1851, by issuing letters to a number of tenants in arrears on his Newtownards estate, informing them that proceedings would commence against them. His comments to Lord Clarendon certainly suggested that the League was gaining substantial ground in the county: 'as to Ireland', he wrote from France, 'I have by no means pleasant accounts from Down. They write me [*sic*] the County is still more organised as to Tenant League, than in '98!! My rents by ejectments only have been got'.²⁴¹ In a reply, Clarendon confirmed the 'very uncomfortable state of Down', and expressed hope that a better spirit might yet prevail: 'but I doubt it', he wrote, 'for the people there are thoroughly contaminated by the League'.²⁴² Londonderry despaired that his tenants had been 'entirely bedevilled' by the speeches of the 'c___d Presbyterian Ministers'.²⁴³ Both the *Mail* and Lord Londonderry were certainly correct in regarding Presbyterian ministers as some of the leading agitators in the Tenant right campaign; they were deeply and actively involved in the organisation of the Tenant League both at national level and in their own local areas. The Rev. John L. Rentoul, for instance, in his apology of absence to the monthly meeting of the League in Dublin in April, revealed his role in mobilising tenants and raising funds in county Antrim, whilst several other ministers made personal subscriptions to the movement.²⁴⁴

The Rev. Rogers attained his greatest notoriety thus far, with a bitter anti-landlord speech at a dinner given for McKnight, Girdwood and himself by the Balibay Tenant Right Association in May 1851.²⁴⁵ In a denunciation of landlord oppression in Ireland, Rogers commented that, 'Landlordism, like the thieves in the parable, has stripped her, and wounded her, and left her half dead. He concluded that, 'Landlordism, if not checked by law, will expel Christ from our coasts'. The *Belfast Newsletter* responded in horror to these comments, noting how, 'not merely have the Leaguers advanced beyond the early and moderate demand for a legalized tenant right, and the later and simply unjust requirements of fixity of tenure and compulsory valuation of rents, but that they have begun to preach the actual extermination of landlords and

²⁴⁰ *Times*, March 26 1851

²⁴¹ Lord Londonderry to Lord Clarendon, April 4 1851, Clar. Papers, box 18

²⁴² Clarendon to Londonderry, April 15 1851, DCRO, D/Lo/C 111 (73)

²⁴³ Londonderry to Clarendon, May 19 1851, Clar. Dep. Ir. Box 18

²⁴⁴ *Nation*, April 5 1851.

²⁴⁵ *BU*, May 9 1851

landlordism'.²⁴⁶ Not all Presbyterians however condoned Rogers' violent language, and 'A Presbyterian Layman' writing to the editor of the *Newsletter* accused Rogers of neglecting his ministerial duties through his League activities.²⁴⁷ In another letter referring to Rogers' claim of landlordism expelling Christ from Ireland, he accused the Comber minister and his League colleagues of inciting insurrection and exciting 'discontent and rebellion'.²⁴⁸ Even the Lord Lieutenant was forced to admit that, 'the preachings of the Presbyterian ministers have done, and are doing infinite mischief'. The *Times* dubbed Rogers 'the roving missionary of the Tenant League'²⁴⁹ and in a letter to Londonderry, Cassidy referred to Rogers as 'one of the head men' in the League.²⁵⁰

The selection of Rev. David Bell – one of the most outspoken Presbyterian ministers against landlords – as Moderator of the Synod of Armagh in May 1851 seemed to confirm that even those ministers who kept a distance from the extremes of the League, still maintained strong sympathies with its overall position.²⁵¹ The *Nation* rejoiced that, 'Every lay elder in the court voted for him. This is truly a most significant intimation of the deep hold which the principles of the League have taken upon the minds of the...farmers of Ulster'.²⁵² The ultimate proof of the ascendancy of tenant right principles within the Presbyterian clergy came in July, when Rev. Dr Coulter was elected to the seat of Moderator of the General Assembly, to the horror of the landlord interest.²⁵³ The election of a minister so actively involved with the League reaffirmed Cooke's waning influence amongst the Presbyterian clergy, and offered a potent reminder that the *regium donum* had failed in its aim to create a submissive and obedient Presbyterian Church.

At a Tenant Right soirée at Carnomey in County Antrim in July, Rogers told his audience that, 'A good landlord in the part of Down with which I am connected is a *rara avis*'.²⁵⁴ Within Down, the breach between the Presbyterian tenant righters and Lord Londonderry was growing ever wider. At a meeting of the Baronial Tenant Right Committee of Ards and Castlereagh held at the end of September 1851, Revs. McCullough, Rogers and Bell launched scathing attacks on the Marquis, accusing him

²⁴⁶ *BNL*, May 12 1851

²⁴⁷ *BNL*, May 21 1851

²⁴⁸ *BNL*, May 10 1851.

²⁴⁹ *Times*, May 19 1851

²⁵⁰ Robert Cassidy to Londonderry, Belfast, October 6 1851, DCRO, D/Lo/C 160 (101).

²⁵¹ *Times*, May 26 1851; *Nation*, May 24 1851

²⁵² *Nation*, May 24 1851

²⁵³ *BNL*, July 4 1851; *Times*, July 4 1851

²⁵⁴ *BU*, July 22 1851

of treating his tenants like Russian serfs.²⁵⁵ In October Londonderry issued a statement to his Down tenants warning them that if they chose to attend a forthcoming League meeting in Newtownards, they would no longer enjoy their tenant right.²⁵⁶ The *Banner* naturally used the incident as proof of both the mentality of Irish landlords, and of the necessity of securing tenant right by law; 'if his tenants shall presume to exercise their undoubted constitutional privilege....the noble Marquis will strip them of their realized property!'²⁵⁷ The *Whig* rightly interpreted Londonderry's actions as guaranteed to strengthen the League in Down, and it warned that, 'his tenants possess enough of the old sturdy Presbyterian spirit to resist whatever savours of tyranny'.²⁵⁸

The Tenant League meeting which had so concerned the Marquis did take place, and was attended by all the familiar Presbyterian names, including McCullough, Rogers, Bell, Mecredy, Black, McKnight, Greenfield and Minnis.²⁵⁹ The fact that the Marquis's Down tenants attended the meeting in large numbers was doubtless partly due to his feudal ultimatum.²⁶⁰ Robert Kelly, a Belfast solicitor, wrote to Lord Londonderry informing him that he would 'endeavour to get the names of any of the tenantry who are foolish enough to attend', with the intention of demanding, 'immediate payment of the arrears' they owed. 'It is most absurd', wrote Kelly, 'for them to stand up and declaim against their landlord after getting every possible indulgence'.²⁶¹ The Strabane Tenant Right Society expressed its disapprobation at Londonderry's threat to his Newtownards tenants, describing it as, 'a gross abuse of landlord power [which] should excite universal indignation against the system that generates it and the laws by which it is maintained'.²⁶² The reality was indeed much as Kelly noted, for both Lords Downshire and Londonderry were widely regarded, both within and outside Ireland, as examples of "good" landlords. The scale of the Presbyterian backlash against the landlords in Down at this time was, therefore, all the more significant, tapping into a deeper Presbyterian resentment which ran deeper than the current furore over rents, arrears and tenant right.

The divisions that the Tenant League had caused within Presbyterian circles were vividly displayed at a demonstration at Hillsborough in November 1851, at which the long-time theological and political rivals, Revs. Cooke and Montgomery, united

²⁵⁵ *BU*, October 3 1851.

²⁵⁶ *BNL*, October 20 1851

²⁵⁷ *BU*, October 17 1851

²⁵⁸ *NW*, October 18 1851

²⁵⁹ *BU*, October 24 1851

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ Robert Kelly to Lord Londonderry, October 20 1851, DCRO, D/Lo/C 164 (111)

²⁶² *Times*, November 4 1851

together to denounce those ministers involved in the League.²⁶³ Cooke's attendance was, of course, completely consistent with his life-long political and social stance, but Montgomery's attendance is rather more difficult to square, and suggests that the agrarian radicalism of the younger generation of ministers attached to the League was too extreme even for Montgomery. The liberal minister had led the charge against landlord domination of politics in the 1820s and 1830s, yet the allegations of 'socialism' surrounding the Tenant League were clearly sufficient to drive Montgomery – who had always been a moderate on the subject of tenant right – towards the landlord camp, on the land issue at least. Lord Londonderry rejoiced that, 'Dr. Montgomery's and Cooke's speech...must castigate the miserable spouters of their sect'.²⁶⁴ The two ministers accused those involved in the League of endeavouring to sever, 'the ties which ought to bind landlord and tenant together', and Montgomery attacked those 'men of my own profession', those, 'profane spouters called clergymen' who had incited the tenants to act against their landlords.²⁶⁵

The response of Rogers and his fellow tenant right colleagues was emphatic: at a dinner organized in Anaghlonge by the Banbridge Tenant Right Association on December 9 in William Dobbin's meeting house, Rogers led the denunciation of Cooke and Montgomery, and on the latter he stated, 'I have no language in which to express my contempt of a man who, after years of a profession of tenant-right devotion...in the cause of the people, can turn round and tell them they have no property'.²⁶⁶ On his own local landlord, Londonderry, Rogers' language was strong and disrespectful:

...he tells his tenants that, if they dare attend a tenant right meeting, to utter a complaint respecting the sharp practice they have been subjected to by his lordship's underlings...if they dare claim and exercise the rights of British subjects, he will not allow them their tenant right; he will, in fact, legally plunder them of every stiver of their property.²⁶⁷

On the landlord class in general, Rogers launched a bitter tirade:

Tenant farmers are oppressed and terrified. Landlordism, like a highwayman, has first taken their purse, and threatens next, not to blow their brains out... but to turn them out of house and home if they dare call for assistance! And the man, he is not a man – he is a human abuse, an excrescence on humanity; he

²⁶³ BU, November 18 1851

²⁶⁴ Lord Londonderry to Lord Clarendon, November 19 1851, Clar. Dep. Ir. Box 18

²⁶⁵ Extracts of Cooke and Montgomery's speeches included in a pamphlet entitled, *The Speech of the Rev. John Rogers, Comber, at the Tenant Right Soiree at Anaghlonge, on the 9th December last, in reply to the attack of the Rev. Drs. Cooke and Montgomery, at the Hillsborough Dinner, on the Tenant Farmers of Ireland* (Belfast, 1851)

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.11

has neither the heart of a man, nor the pulse of a patriot, nor the soul of a brother – who would not stand forward in this extremity of the agricultural population and defend them.

Rogers' anti-landlord rhetoric reached its strongest pitch thus far at the Anaghlonge meeting, and he deplored Cooke and Montgomery for vowing a new friendship, 'over the one indiscriminate grave of 2,000,000 of their fallen countrymen, whom landlordism first robbed, then starved, and lastly, consigned to the shroudless and coffinless pit, called....the grave of union workhouses'.²⁶⁸

The activities of the Presbyterian clergy in endorsing extreme opinions on the subject of tenant right came under discussion in both Houses of Parliament in February. Lord Londonderry blamed them for deluding his once loyal and attached tenantry, whilst the Earl of Desart encapsulated the fears of the landed class when he described the 'extermination of the landlords' in Ireland as the natural consequence of the tenant right agitation.²⁶⁹ Speaking in defence of his latest Tenant Right Bill, Sharman Crawford defended the involvement of Presbyterian clergymen in the League, since they were, 'men well qualified from their position and calling' to articulate tenant grievances.²⁷⁰ But not all M.Ps agreed and Bernal Osborne argued that, 'If encouragement were given to these Presbyterian agitators to neglect their duties in the north, to carry the flame of agitation over the country, the most mischievous results would ensue. Nothing would content these gentlemen but to make the landlord a copyholder'. He added that, 'the disturbed state of the north of Ireland, disgraced as it was by crime and agrarian outrage, arose very much from the language and conduct of these Presbyterian agitators'.²⁷¹

At a meeting of the League in Dublin in February 1851, attended by Rev. Rogers, Osborne was branded a calumniator, and the League's Catholic members rallied to the defence of the Presbyterian clergymen.²⁷² The *Times* contemptuously dismissed Crawford's Bill as his 'annual craze', calling it 'a bill to perpetuate the race of tenants...[and] to reduce the landowners to pensioners for a limited term'.²⁷³ Speaking at a Saintfield meeting, Rev. Mecredy commented that, 'In so far as they were able to form an opinion, both the landlord nominees for that great and intelligent county – Lord Edwin Hill and Mr. Ker – were utterly opposed to the just claims of the tenant

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.5-6

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.9-10

²⁶⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.119, 328-331, February 10 1852

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.350.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp.356-357

²⁷² *Nation*, February 21 1852

farmers'.²⁷⁴ He predicted that, 'the death-knell of irresponsible landlordism has rung' on the 'Emerald Isle' and he blamed it for forcing so many of Ireland's sons to emigrate. In language reminiscent of the spirit of 1798 he declared,

Erin, an exile bequeaths thee his blessing,
Land of my forefathers, Erin go bragh!²⁷⁵

Electioneering in Castleblaney in June, Revs. Bell and Rogers launched more scathing attacks on the landlords of Ulster: 'if there is a just God over all....sooner or later the present system of landlordism must fall down. (Cheers.) If we see the land so encumbered that it must very soon be carried into ruin, and sold in the Encumbered Estates Court, at least we must look to get new proprietors'.²⁷⁶ Unsurprisingly, the *Newsletter* furiously attacked these comments by 'the leaders of the anti-landlord League'.²⁷⁷

Sam Greer urged the legalization of tenant right, arguing that landlords continued to oppose this because, 'they are anxious that the law should still confide to them the unjust and irresponsible power of seizing upon the tenant's interest at their pleasure, that they may be able to control and over-influence the tenants at elections, and on other suitable occasions, and thus may augment their own power and authority'.²⁷⁸ Thus, he told the tenants, 'you cannot suppose that your present so-called representatives, who were prepared a few years ago to lay the whole burthen [*sic*] of the poor-rate upon the shoulders of the tenantry, will labour very strenuously for the interests of the tenantry upon the present occasion'.²⁷⁹

As Chapter Five discusses, the general election of 1852 marked the defeat of almost all the tenant right candidates across the north of Ireland, including Crawford in Down. The ambitious electoral challenge to landlord power may have ended largely in failure, but for the Presbyterian ministers most deeply involved in the campaign, the events of July 1852 did not signal the end of the agitation, especially in county Down. In March 1853 James McKnight and John Rogers travelled to London as a Tenant Right deputation from the north of Ireland, to report on the progress of the two tenant right bills being considered by a Parliamentary Select Committee. In their report to the Tenant Right Associations across Ulster, Rogers and McKnight warned that from 'the

²⁷³ *Times*, February 12 1852

²⁷⁴ In the light of Castlereagh's retirement, Lord Londonderry turned to his cousin, David Ker to assume the Stewart family seat in the forthcoming Down election.

²⁷⁵ *BU*, March 16 1852

²⁷⁶ *BNL*, June 21 1852

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.13

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.24

landlord influences at work' in the Committee, nothing satisfactory could be expected in its recommendations and they attacked the failure of Ulster's current representatives in forwarding the wishes of the tenant farmers.²⁸⁰ Certainly, the *Times* encapsulated the conservative landlord position when it commented in an editorial in June 1853, that, 'the only person with any *rights* in the land is the landlord; all beyond this is a question of private bargain'.²⁸¹ Reporting on the second visit to London by McKnight and Rogers in July, the *Banner's* correspondent noted that 'the prejudices of Irish landlordism and its representation in the House of Commons are unreasonably violent' in opposing a tenant right bill. The measure being proposed was, 'entirely a landlord measure'.²⁸² The bill ultimately accepted by the campaigners fell short of Crawford's proposals, but, as the *Banner* argued it was, 'the first occasion on which the tenant right principle has ever been conclusively affirmed by the House of Commons'²⁸³ and as Rev. Julius McCullough noted, it at least represented, 'an instalment of justice'.²⁸⁴

But despite the anti-landlord rhetoric, the campaign for tenant right had begun to lose considerable momentum by the end of 1853. Increasing agricultural prosperity, the collapse of the Irish Tenant League amid bitter recriminations between its northern and southern contingents, and the continuing power of the landlord class, as demonstrated at the 1852 election, assisted in burning out the land question for the foreseeable future. Moreover, as Hoppen has noted, tenant right agitation 'had no appeal for landless men',²⁸⁵ and the League's complete ignorance of Ireland's labouring class ensured that the movement was never destined to be a truly national one. In describing the political and social vision of the Presbyterian radical John Mitchel, Steven Knowlton has argued that, 'the strain of radical dissent from which Mitchel sprang, was far more interested in lopping off the tiny point at the top of the social pyramid than in raising up its broad bottom'.²⁸⁶ This is clearly demonstrated more generally in the preoccupations of the Presbyterian tenant-righters of the 1840s and 1850s. But the collapse of the tenant right movement, in which Presbyterians had played such a leading and spirited role in demanding reform of the economic and political dominance of Irish landlords, did not mean that traditional antipathy to landlords disappeared. In April 1855, a Great Tenant Right Demonstration was held in Newtownards in honour of the Rev. John Rogers of

²⁸⁰ *BU*, March 22 1853

²⁸¹ *Times*, June 25 1853

²⁸² *BU*, July 5 1853

²⁸³ *BU*, August 5 1853

²⁸⁴ *BU*, September 16 1853

²⁸⁵ Hoppen, 'Landlords, Society and Electoral Politics in mid-nineteenth century Ireland', *Past and Present* 75, (1977), p.64

²⁸⁶ Steven R. Knowlton, 'The Politics of John Mitchel: A Reappraisal', *Éire-Ireland*, 22:2 (1987), p. 42.

Comber, for all his efforts, 'to obtain justice for the tenant farmers of Ireland'. John Greenfield attacked the formation of a new North East Agricultural Association involving Lord Downshire as unlikely to bring any benefit to the farmers. He expressed thanks 'to those noble spirits, like Mr. Rogers, who would scorn to propose a McCartney, a Hill or a Ker for Parliamentary Honours to trample on the just rights of the farmers'.²⁸⁷ The bitter attacks on Revs. Cooke and Montgomery emphasized that many other Presbyterians had not forgotten the 'pro-landlord' stance of these two major figures in 1852.

What this chapter has sought to demonstrate, is that the traditional Presbyterian hostility towards the Anglican landlord class in Ireland – such an important element of their radicalism in 1798 – was not snuffed out in the aftermath of the rebellion, but continued to smoulder beneath the surface throughout the succeeding years, erupting at times of political and economic uncertainty and upheaval. The culmination of Presbyterian alienation towards Irish landlords manifested itself most dramatically and most powerfully in the tenant right movement of the 1840s, culminating in the 1852 election, where Presbyterians, led by their ministers, organized a large-scale challenge to the political and economic power of the landed elites.²⁸⁸ The ferocious abuse levelled at landlords by Presbyterian orators and writers was indeed proof that many continued to regard the power of the Anglican establishment – both in its church and its landed families – as an enemy and an oppressor. Once again, Henry Cooke's vision of 'Protestant peace' and unity was shown to be seriously out-of-step with the opinion of many Presbyterians in mid-nineteenth century Ulster.

²⁸⁷ *NW*, April 12 1855

²⁸⁸ See Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 4
‘CATHOLIC ASCENDANCY: IT IS A GHOST THAT FRIGHTENS’¹:
PRESBYTERIANS AND IRISH CATHOLICS

Catholic Emancipation

Within the circle of Presbyterian radical activity in the vicinity of Belfast in the years after the Act of Union, the goal of Catholic Emancipation – promised but never delivered in 1800 – provided a unity of purpose in the greatly altered world of politics since 1798. As ever, it was William Drennan and Robert Tennent, from the 1790s vanguard, who spearheaded the most articulate and emphatic demand for equal rights for Roman Catholic countrymen. These sentiments found their most determined voice on the pages of their *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, from its foundation in 1808. In 1810 they optimistically predicted that ‘it is probable that Catholic Emancipation will at no very distant period be conceded’.² An editorial of 1812 emphasized that, ‘Emancipation to be of real service to the Catholic, should be immediate, complete and unconditioned, unclogged with reservations’.³

Yet, the over-riding theme of the *Magazine* was one which was to recur throughout the period, underlining the inherent sense of fear within the Presbyterian psyche regarding their Catholic countrymen – a fear which was exactly echoed in the famous anti-Repeal speech of the Rev. Henry Cooke in Belfast in 1841.⁴ Referring to the recent usage of the term ‘ROMAN CATHOLIC IRELAND’ in 1808, the *Magazine* commented, ‘we.... deprecate the use of the compound terms here noted, as.....savouring too much of Catholic in place of Protestant dominancy, and political exclusion’. It warned their Catholic countrymen, ‘against the use of expressions which may alarm the partiality of their friends, and confirm the prejudices of their enemies’⁵. Indeed, Drennan and Tennent’s magazine was more explicit the following year, stating that, ‘As friends to the equal rights of all, and disapproving of Protestant Ascendancy or Catholic Ascendancy, we are advocates for their complete emancipation, and the abandonment of all disqualifications on account of religion’.⁶ In 1811 the journal again offered its support for, ‘every thing that would *include* Irishmen of all persuasions in the

¹ Comment of Francis Meagher to the Presbyterians of Ulster, in a pro-repeal speech given at a meeting of the Young Ireland deputation to Belfast in November 1847, as quoted in Frank Wright, *Two Lands on One Soil*, p.145-6.

² *BMM*, November 1810, p.387.

³ *BMM*, January 1812, p.65.

⁴ See p.36 of this chapter.

⁵ *BMM*, December 1808, pp.394-5.

⁶ *BMM*, November 1809, p.398.

constitution', but warned against anything, 'of an *exclusive*, and *excluding* nature'.⁷ The problem which Presbyterians had to face in succeeding years was precisely the development of such a distinctly Catholic political vision and movement under the leadership of Daniel O'Connell.

Intriguingly, the 'union of all Irishmen' ideal which had foundered so spectacularly in the rebellion of '98, continued to be idealized by many of the Presbyterian radicals who had emerged from the tumult of the 1790s. 'May our Irish brethren of all denominations forget their former animosities',⁸ the *Magazine* wished. In 1812 Drennan re-ran a copy of the declaration from the old Newry Volunteers entitled, *A Seed of Catholic and Protestant Union, Sown in 1784*, reminding the reader of the sentiment of over twenty years earlier that, 'We wish to create that union of power, and to cultivate that brotherhood of affection among all the inhabitants of the Island....We are all Irishmen'.⁹

It was not only through the written word that those Presbyterian radicals endorsed the Emancipation cause. The active involvement of prominent figures such as Drennan, Tennent and James Munfod at meetings of the 'Friends of Civil and Religious Liberty' reinforced their support for equality of political rights for all religious persuasions and for a union of all Irishmen. In 1811 Tennent was invited by the Catholics of Dublin to attend a meeting of the organisation.¹⁰ And in 1813 Tennent and Munfod's names appeared on the list of resolutions of one such meeting in Belfast, which Drennan had chaired.¹¹ The aim of the resolutions was to deprecate Orange activity and petition Parliament on the suppression of Orange Societies. Presbyterian names adorned a parliamentary petition from the Belfast district in favour of Catholic Emancipation, including, William Simms, Robert Simms, John Templeton, Joseph Stevenson, Francis McCracken, Henry Joy, James Orr, William Tennent, Robert Tennent, Robert James Tennent, Samuel Tennent, John Haslett, William Neilson, James McDonnell, John McCance, James Munfod, William Drennan and Thomas McCabe.¹²

Presbyterian radical support for Catholic Emancipation was bedded in the belief not only in principles of religious liberty, but also for its place in wider political goals:

⁷ *BMM*, March 1811, pp.233-4.

⁸ *BMM*, May 1809, p.396.

⁹ *BMM*, July 1812, p.35.

¹⁰ Letter and invitation card from Arthur James Plunkett, the 8th Earl of Fingall to Dr. Robert Tennent, December 7 1811, PRONI, D/1748/C/1/73/1-2.

¹¹ Printed report of resolutions and petition of a *Meeting of Friends of Civil and Religious Liberty, and of Internal Peace and Concord, held in the Centre Room of the White Linen-Hall, in Belfast, August 1813*, PRONI, T/965/2-5.

¹² Petition printed in *BMM*, March 1812, pp.237-9.

critically, a belief that, 'Emancipation will prove the Pioneer for reform'.¹³ At a meeting of the Friends of Civil and Religious Liberty in Belfast in September 1814, chaired by Robert Tennent and Archibald Hamilton Rowan, their petitions against the evils of the Orange system were renewed.¹⁴ Throughout this period, the *Magazine* supported these efforts and in an editorial the following month, it stated that, 'the true friends to liberty advocate the cause of Catholic emancipation, and the suppression of the Orange system, on the broad comprehensive principles of religious freedom, and of the right of all sects to be placed on an equal footing'. In 1821 Rowan described Orangeism and its religious bigotry as a 'cancer in the state'.¹⁵

One Presbyterian who had consistently proven himself to be committed to Catholic Emancipation was the Rev. William Steel Dickson, and this continued long after 1800. His frequent attendance at Roman Catholic meetings, such as that at Newry in October 1812,¹⁶ marked him out as a figure of suspicion within even the conservative ranks of his own colleagues in the Synod of Ulster. Robert Black's determination to exclude Dickson from a share of the newly augmented *regium donum*, was doubtless confirmed by his more recent political prominence in the Catholic cause.¹⁷ Politically active in 1811, Dickson took part, 'in the speeches at a Catholic Dinner in Dublin on 9 May...probably becoming the first Irish Presbyterian ministers ever to address a wholly Catholic gathering', reassuring his audience of Presbyterian Ulster's commitment to 'Catholic claims'.¹⁸ In 1813 Rev. Dickson addressed a Catholic meeting in County Down. He recalled the resolution of support for Catholic emancipation passed in 1793 in the Synod of Ulster, under the Moderatership of Dickson himself and vouched that despite claims to the contrary, the Presbyterians of Ulster were still just as committed to the plight of their Catholic countrymen.¹⁹ At a similar meeting in November 1813 in County Antrim, Drennan encapsulated the mood of the Presbyterian radicals in clinging to the cause of Catholic Emancipation: '...all that remains of Ireland, politically speaking, is, I think, comprised and concentrated in the Catholic question. In the shipwreck of our national Sovereignty, this is a plank to which, with all the powers of life we should cling....let us tie ourselves to the main mast of Catholic emancipation, as our forlorn hope in this sea of difficulties and dangers, as our ultimate refuge after the

¹³ *BMM*, October 1812, p.320.

¹⁴ *BMM*, September 1814, pp.251-2.

¹⁵ Archibald Hamilton Rowan to John Carr, [3 February?] 1823, PRONI, D/2930/8/21.

¹⁶ *BNL*, October 6 1812.

¹⁷ *Substance of Two Speeches, Delivered By Robert Black*.

¹⁸ W.D. Bailie, 'William Steel Dickson', in Liam Swords (ed.), *Protestant, catholic and dissenter: the clergy of 1798* (Dublin, 1997), p.70.

loss of our political existence'.²⁰ Dickson was not deterred in his efforts despite being assaulted on his way home from a Catholic meeting in Armagh by an Orange mob in 1811, and it was his network of Catholic friends in Dublin who assisted him in publishing his *Narrative* in 1812, in spite of Black. The continuity of his belief stretched from 1778, when, as he describes in his *Narrative*, he came to realise the necessity of 'Catholic Emancipation, without which reform was only an empty name'.²¹

In 1813 the Synod of Ulster passed an expression of support for Catholic Emancipation, although in somewhat more cautious terms than it had done in 1793 – couched this time as, 'a declaration respecting civil and religious liberty'.²² But, as in the 1780s and 1790s, not all Presbyterians supported involvement with Catholic issues. This was dramatically demonstrated in 1812, when a meeting of the Presbytery of Armagh was convened to hear the complaint of the Clare congregation against their minister, Rev. Robert Adams for his signing of a petition in favour of Catholic Emancipation.²³ When the Synod of Ulster refused to intervene, one correspondent to the *Belfast Monthly Magazine* delighted that the ruling body had, '...expressed unequivocally its sense of the rights of conscience, and of private judgement, in the case of Mr. Adams of Clare....They *dismissed the memorial* of his low-minded persecutors'.²⁴ Moreover, the author praised the many ministers of the Synod who had refused to bow to pressure from 'the establishment...[and] the threats of the agents and underlings of those exalted at the right hand of power, when they either insisted or requested they should read from their pulpits the Anti-Catholic petition, and procure signatures'.²⁵

The correspondent, 'H', noted that of the one hundred and ninety ministers composing the Synod of Ulster, 'I have not heard of one of that number, who either signed, or excited others to sign the Anti-Catholic petition!'.²⁶ 'A Presbyterian' in Ballymena, writing to the *Monthly Magazine* in December 1812 echoed these

¹⁹ *BMM*, November 1813, p.400-3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.411. Here, Drennan demonstrates a largely pragmatic motivation in supporting Catholic Emancipation. Arguably, the decision to bring Catholics on board in the 1780s and 1790s was one similarly borne out of the practical realities of achieving broader political goals.

²¹ William Steel Dickson, *D.D., A Narrative of the Confinement and Exile of William Steel Dickson, D.D., formerly Minister of the Presbyterian Congregation of Ballyhalbert and Portaferry, in the County of Down, and now of Keady, in the County of Armagh. To which is annexed, An Account of an Assault committed on the Author, September 9th 1811, on his return from the Catholic Meeting in the City of Armagh; with a sketch of proceedings consequent thereon* (Dublin, 1812), p.24.

²² Proceedings of the Synod of Ulster reported in *BMM*, July 1813, p.56-60.

²³ *BMM*, March 1812, pp.227-8; September 1812, p.232; January 1813, pp.79-80.

²⁴ *BMM* March 1813, p.217.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.215-7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.217.

sentiments, attacking the anti-Emancipation petition in circulation in county Antrim as the work of ‘ministerial influence’ and ‘dignitaries of the establishment’. Landlords and agents were reported to have sent letters to individual congregations and ministers ‘requesting’ the people to sign petitions against their Roman Catholic countrymen.²⁷ Another letter denounced similar influences at work in County Down. A correspondent signing himself ‘D.’ attacked, ‘the tag rag [*sic*] and bobtail of a wretched administration being busily employed... in getting signatures to an Anti-Catholic petition’. He reported that a local farmer had objected to signing on the grounds that, ‘he had been a United Irishman, and that he considered the obligation still binding on him to promote a brotherhood of affection among Irishmen of every religious persuasion, and to procure an equal representation of all the Irish people in parliament’.²⁸

There was clearly considerable effort among certain anti-Emancipation landlords and local figures of influence in Presbyterian Antrim and Down to procure a show of support for their opposition campaign. Speaking in relation to the proposed Roman Catholic Relief Bill in the Commons, Castlereagh commented that, the Presbyterian Church system, ‘was infinitely more republican, and therefore tending more to political inconvenience than a church purely monarchical like that of Rome’.²⁹ Presbyterian ministers, signing their names to Emancipation petitions and commenting in favour of the measure, undoubtedly constituted the sort of ‘political inconvenience’ and political involvement which Castlereagh had hoped his newly arranged *regium donum* of 1803 would have snuffed out. Expressing a radical Presbyterian stance in 1813, the writer ‘X.’, attacking Castlereagh and his efforts to bind the Presbyterian ministers to the state after 1798, commented, ‘He is perfectly sensible of their individual liberality, and their desire to restore to their Catholic countrymen a natural and unalienable birth-right’.³⁰

In September 1813 a letter to the *Magazine* proprietors from ‘An Observer’ warned that, ‘the Synod of Ulster’s declaration respecting civil and religious liberty, is likely to do them much injury with their people’.³¹ Speaking in the House of Commons, the arch-loyalist Patrick Duigenan referred to this matter and censured certain Presbyterian clergy who had signed their names to pro-Emancipation petitions, stating that such ministers had done so to the anger of their congregations.³² Certainly, Presbyterian feelings on the subject of Catholic rights were typically divided. Writing

²⁷ *BMM*, December 1812, pp.496-7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.498.

²⁹ *Hansard*, 1st series, vol. 26, 156.

³⁰ *BMM*, September 1813, p.200.

³¹ *BMM*, September 1813, p.257.

³² *Hansard*, 1st series, vol.22, 752.

to William Steele Nicholson in Bangor in March 1812, the liberal Down activist Eldred Pottinger informed him that he had in his possession ‘a petition in favor [*sic*] of the Catholics in my hands and it will be very generally signed’, adding, ‘I fear your opinion is adverse – I wish you would get over your prejudices on this question. Ireland will never be safe or happy until its [*sic*] done’.³³

The foundation of Belfast Academical Institute by many of the town’s United Irish members and sympathisers, provided an outlet to re-direct specifically political energies into the sphere of education. Although the broader political implications of the formation of ‘Inst’ is dealt with in detail in Chapter One, it is essential to note here that the school and college had a distinctly non-sectarian vision.³⁴ Unlike the other universities of the time, ‘Inst’ required no religious tests to be taken. This was maintained, at least in theory, for as Peter Brooke has emphasized, B.A.I. became essentially a ‘Presbyterian seminary founded and to a large extent run by former United Irishmen and their sympathisers’.³⁵ However, as J.M. Barkley has noted, ‘both Presbyterian and Roman Catholic co-operated’ within the college. He cites this as one of the main reasons why the British Government attempted to curtail the involvement of the Synod of Ulster with the institution in 1817, and later why Henry Cooke led the campaign against it from the 1820s.³⁶ In a speech delivered to the proprietors of Inst as late as April 1841, the Rev. Henry Montgomery defended the right of Catholics to be involved and to be appointed to Chairs in the college following a characteristic attack by Cooke: ‘those Catholics, who have so liberally and honourably contributed to the support of a Seminary where they have no sectarian interest, are as much entitled to protection and privileges as either Calvinists or Unitarians’.³⁷ He denounced Cooke for sneering at, ‘the possibility of our latitudinarian principles opening a door for the admission of a “Roman Catholic Professor of Mathematics or Jurisprudence, who should sign the certificates of our Presbyterian youth with his *Papal digits!*” ’.³⁸ Indeed, James McKnight and Charles Gavan Duffy, the two moving forces behind the formation of the presbyterian-catholic Tenant League in Dublin in 1850 were, as Holmes has quite rightly highlighted, both products of Inst. He notes that, ‘It was

³³ Eldred Pottinger, Belfast to William Steele Nicholson, Balloo, Bangor, March 12 1812, PRONI, D/1405/36.

³⁴ Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, pp.139-140

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.141.

³⁶ Barkley, ‘The Arian Schism’, p.328.

³⁷ Henry Montgomery, *Speech delivered at a meeting on the Proprietors of the Royal Belfast Academical Institute on April 13 1841*. (Belfast, 1841) p.16.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

beginning to look as though the seeds sown by William Drennan were, at last, going to bear fruit'.³⁹

Despite his preoccupation with the new 'Inst' project, Drennan found time to reinforce his commitment to political equality for Irish Catholics. In December 1816 he made a significant speech at a meeting to support Emancipation, in which he denounced the 'Protestant ascendancy' for 'monopolizing the British Constitution', and called for 'a total repeal of the penal laws'. 'I am not accustomed to modify principles by times or seasons', Drennan declared, '...My idea is short. The Catholics must either be in the Constitution or out of it. There is no medium...'.⁴⁰ At a similar meeting in Belfast in 1818, Drennan and fellow Presbyterians John Barnett and James Munfod spoke out in favour of Catholic liberty.⁴¹ The debates in Parliament during these years on proposed Catholic Relief measures, certainly preoccupied the political agenda among Presbyterians. Robert James Tennent, son of Robert and nephew of the imprisoned United Irishman, William Tennent, discussed the matter in his correspondence with friends during his school and student days. The comment of his BAI compatriot, William Mitchell to young Tennent that, 'Catholic Emancipation looks well for the other branches of Reform',⁴² emphasizes that emancipation remained a crucial part of the radical reform package demanded by radical Presbyterians in Belfast in the 1820s. Moreover, the notion that the ruling elite in Ireland deliberately fostered religious divisions in a policy of 'divide and govern', continued to be an abiding theme in old United Irish circles.⁴³

In 1824, ten years after the closure of the *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, radical Presbyterians in Belfast once again had a new medium to articulate their sentiments, with the establishment of the *Northern Whig* newspaper. As J. S. Crone wrote in 1907, the collapse of Drennan's *Magazine*, 'left the "old guard" – the remnant of the volunteers – together with those who supported liberal views in politics and religion without an organ in the Press'.⁴⁴ The *Whig's* founder and proprietor was Francis Dalzell Finlay, an Ards man and Presbyterian born in 1793. Finlay was a close friend of Drennan and Tennent and sympathized strongly with the activities of the United Irishmen in the 1790s. Aged only sixteen, it is recorded that Finlay was a frequent guest at Drennan's home, Cabin Hill, and later undertook much of the printing of the

³⁹ Holmes, *Cooke*, p.179.

⁴⁰ Drennan's speech in unidentified newspaper extract dated December 7 1816, PRONI, T/965/1.

⁴¹ PRONI, T/965/2-5.

⁴² William Mitchell to Robert James Tennent, March 12 1821, PRONI, D/1748/G/457/16.

⁴³ Archibald Hamilton Rowan to John Carr, October 22 1821, PRONI, D/2930/8/16.

⁴⁴ *NW*, March 18 1907.

Monthly Magazine.⁴⁵ With the assistance of Rowan he published the first *Whig* on January 1 1824. Given such radical associations, it is not surprising that the paper staunchly and consistently advocated full Catholic relief: 'We are now, and have long been, steady friends to Roman Catholic Emancipation'.⁴⁶ But in the 1820s seismic changes were happening within the Catholic population itself, which were to impact on even the most liberal-minded Presbyterians.

The mobilisation of Catholic Ireland in the political arena under the leadership of the ambitious Catholic barrister, Daniel O'Connell is of course well known. Not only were Irish Catholics organising themselves politically, but that organisation was on an unprecedented scale. In the late eighteenth century Catholic political organisation had been more conservative, elitist and cautious. The establishment of O'Connell's Catholic Association and the subsequent 'Catholic Rent', involved all levels of Catholic society and dramatically altered the balance of power in Ireland. To radical Presbyterians, the Catholics, who had accepted leadership from them in the 1790s, now appeared politically self-sufficient. Moreover, the overtly 'Catholic' tone of O'Connell's activities smacked of sectarian interests, thus alarming and alienating many Presbyterians. As the *Whig* stated in 1824, 'The Presbyterians here are not favourable either to the Association, or the system of raising funds under the name of Rentes [*sic*]. They are staunch advocates for the most extensive enjoyment of civil and religious freedom, by all men; and as such, favourable to Catholic Emancipation, to be obtained in a legal and constitutional manner'.⁴⁷ The conservative *Belfast Newsletter* accused the Catholic Association of offering, 'reiterated menace and studied insult' to the Protestant community.⁴⁸ It certainly made the position of pro-Emancipation Presbyterians more awkward, and this was undoubtedly assisted by O'Connell's attack on Belfast in 1824 for its 'illiberality' in failing to support the Catholic Association and Rent.⁴⁹ Historians have criticized O'Connell for his Catholic-centric vision and recognized his failure to comprehend or address what D. George Boyce has described as, 'the deep-seated fears' among Presbyterians in the north, 'that, at bottom, Catholic triumph meant Protestant overthrow'.⁵⁰ O'Connell's highly publicized visit to Belfast did not occur until 1841, after he had resurrected his repeal campaign.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *NW*, August 12 1824.

⁴⁷ Reported in the *BNL*, August 3 1824.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *NW*, December 23 1824.

⁵⁰ D. George Boyce, *Ireland, 1828-1923. From Ascendancy to Democracy* (Oxford, 1992), p.12.

Moreover, in December 1824 O'Connell launched a bitter attack on the Presbyterian treatment of Catholics during the 1790s, recalling how, 'the Presbyterians allured the Roman Catholics from the path of duty; and when they made offenders of some of them, were the first to abandon the dupes of their own artifice'.⁵¹ The response of the *Whig* was one of anger, accusing O'Connell and the Association of utter ignorance of the events of 1798. The newspaper also articulated the damage that O'Connell was causing to Catholic-Presbyterian relationships. Its editorial continued, 'If, as Mr.O'Connell affirms, the Roman Catholic Association has latterly been left without the co-operation of the Presbyterians of Ulster – if doubts and fears, distractions and jealousies have been excited – if a spirit of neutrality, if sentiments of alienation, have crept over many members of that body, the causes are too palpable to be mistaken. Let him thank his own pernicious counsels, and the blind devotion of his partizans [*sic*], for such a change of sentiment'.⁵² Above all, the *Whig* pinpointed the two crucial causes of Presbyterian disquiet with the Associations' activities: 'we deprecate these appeals to numerical strength', and the strongly Catholic theological flavour. 'It is enough that we advocate the measure of emancipation – we are not bound to believe in the tenets of Catholicism. What stronger proof of liberality could be given, than to advocate the civil emancipation of our countrymen, from whose religious belief we are compelled to differ?'.⁵³

At the meeting of the Catholic Association discussed above, Richard Lalor Shiel sounded a slightly more optimistic note: 'He was sure that it must be in the interests of the Catholics to coalesce with the Presbyterians; and that care ought to be taken that there should be no alienation of their friendship....there was a convergence of common interest....they too were harassed to sustain the monstrous opulence of the Church Establishment..', and he envisaged their mutual co-operation, 'in one vigorous exertion' against such abuses.⁵⁴ But far from promoting a sense of potential unity, the tone and attitude of the Catholic Association tended only to delineate sectarian distinctions. Writing to the old United Irishman Robert Simms in Belfast, John Chambers, one of the political exiles of the 1790s in New York, commented, 'we have seen quite enough to make us despair of the sincere amalgamation of Catholic and Protestant among you',⁵⁵

⁵¹ *NW*, December 23 1824.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.* (my underlining)

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ John Chambers, New York to Robert Simms, Belfast, January 1 1822, PRONI, D/1759/3B/6.

and he later expressed his disapproval of the activities of O'Connell and the Catholic Association.⁵⁶

One wonders what these exiled radicals in America must have made of the religious revival under way in Ireland at this time. In the Catholic Church a revival had begun across Europe in the aftermath of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic upheavals, and in Ireland, laxity among the clergy, poor chapel attendance and inadequate religious instruction were just some of the areas which began to be improved. Ian McBride has noted that the 'age of O'Connell' was 'characterized by the reinvigoration of confessional loyalties', commenting that, 'it is hard not to feel that the old United Irishman, with his anticlerical brand of radicalism, had become little more than a curious anachronism'.⁵⁷ But the political impact of evangelicalism should not be overplayed.⁵⁸ Indeed, in 1820 the Synod of Ulster had passed a resolution not to include Roman Catholics in their missionary efforts,⁵⁹ and whilst this policy was gradually overturned by the 1830s, Peter Brooke has argued that the Presbyterian Church was never overly-determined to, 'take responsibility for the souls of the Roman Catholics'. Moreover, he argues that evangelicalism never became so important for the Presbyterian Church, as it did for either the Church of Ireland or the Roman Catholic Church.⁶⁰

During the famine years when Presbyterian missionaries such as the Rev. John Edgar in Connaught, were accused of 'souperism', Presbyterian Ulster did in fact contribute substantial physical help through the efforts of organisations such as the Belfast Ladies' Relief Association.⁶¹ But in terms of 'spiritual help' and converting Catholics in these areas, Home Mission reports suggest that, as Desmond Bowen has argued, 'Presbyterianism held little appeal to Irishmen outside Ulster' and was not particularly successful. An important factor in this must surely be the simple fact that, 'although the Presbyterians of Ulster were willing to help Roman Catholics during the Famine years, they were not urgently concerned about converting their traditional foes'. More telling, perhaps, Bowen has argued that, 'wherever the Presbyterians founded churches they were more apt to compete with the local parson for the allegiance of the local Protestant population than they were to preach to papists'.⁶² In his study of Irish Presbyterians, the famine, and missionary activity, David Miller noted that one

⁵⁶ Chambers to Simms, October 15 1824, PRONI, D/1759/3B/6.

⁵⁷ McBride, *Scripture Politics*, p.214.

⁵⁸ S.J.Connolly, 'Mass politics and sectarian conflict, 1823-30', pp.77-78.

⁵⁹ Miller, 'Presbyterianism and "modernization"', p.86.

⁶⁰ Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, pp.151-3.

⁶¹ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant Crusade in Ireland, 1800-70* (Dublin, 1978), p.33.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp.33-34.

Presbyterian missionary's claim that 'a large share of the Irish-speaking population were virtually unchurched, 'though exaggerated, were not preposterous'. Miller's ultimate conclusion is that, 'In targeting the poorest of the poor in Catholic Ireland for conversion in the famine years, the Presbyterians were seeking to win from the Catholic community the very stratum that they had already lost within their own community.'⁶³

Did the religious revivals affect Presbyterian attitudes to their Catholic countrymen, and in particular to the issue which dominated Irish politics in the 1820s – Emancipation? In 1825 Cooke caused a storm of outrage by stating in his evidence before a Parliamentary Committee on Irish affairs that most of the Presbyterians in the north were opposed to Catholic Emancipation.⁶⁴ Certainly, just as in the 1780s and 1790s, there were many Presbyterians opposed to the measure, but it was certainly controversial to claim that the opposition was universal. In response to Cooke's comments, the *Whig* denounced them as, 'an absolute libel on the Presbyterians of Ulster'.⁶⁵ In a letter signed 'Presbyter', the author was similarly dismissive of Cooke's statement, arguing that, the 'menacing prophecies of the destruction of the Protestant Church, could have no effect upon such independent thinkers as Presbyterians...'.⁶⁶

This was followed up by the publication of a *Presbyterian Declaration of Ministers and Elders in Belfast and its Vicinity, Upon the subject of Roman Catholic Emancipation*, repudiating 'unequivocally' Cooke's recent evidence, 'as to the feelings of Presbyterians on the subject of Emancipation.....we do aver, that he labours under the greatest misconception with regard to the feelings and views of the Presbyterians of Ulster'.⁶⁷ They recalled the declaration of the Synod in 1813, and alluded to the impact of evangelicalism thus: 'the spirit of religious animosity has undoubtedly been excited during the last year, by the public contests at Bible Associations; and a few weak or over zealous men, may have mixed up the question of *civil rights* with that of *religious opinions*; but we are convinced that there has been a great increase of feeling among the thinking part of the community, in favour of the measure'. The signatures on the declaration included, Rev. Henry Montgomery of Dunmurry; Rev. W.D.H. McEwen, of

⁶³ Miller argues that during the famine period the process whereby Ulster Presbyterianism turned from 'a communal religion whose constituency was the whole community of Scottish settlers' into a 'class-based religion' was completed. In the process, lower class Presbyterians fell away from the church's influence, and it was these Presbyterians which Miller argues were worst hit by the famine. See David Miller, 'Irish Presbyterians and the great famine' in *Luxury and Austerity* edited by Jacqueline Hill and Colm Lennon. *Historical Studies XXI. Papers read before the 23rd Irish Conference of Historians, held at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, 16-18 May 1997.* (Dublin, 1999), pp.165-181.

⁶⁴ Handwritten copy of the Minutes of Cooke's evidence to the House of Lords Committee, PRONI, T/3447/1.

⁶⁵ *NW*, April 14 1825.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Second Congregation, Belfast; Rev. William Bruce jnr., Belfast; Rev. Fletcher Blakely, Moneyrea; Rev. William Finlay, Dundonald; Rev. James Johnson, Holywood; and a series of church elders including, John McCance, Adam McClean and William Tennent.⁶⁸

Cooke responded to this declaration with a lengthy defence of his comments, most emphatically defending his belief that among his own orthodox Presbyterian population, opposition to Emancipation was strong.⁶⁹ A correspondent to the *Whig* denounced Cooke's claim that support for Catholic Emancipation was confined to the Arians, noting that, '...The worthy and intelligent men, who have *always* been most active in promoting liberal petitions, in this town, are distinguished members of *orthodox* communions. I have only to name Munfoad, Barnett, Tennent... in proof of my assertion'.⁷⁰ Cooke's determination to associate religious orthodoxy with political conservatism (there was certainly a connection, but it was far from absolute), and thereby associate Arian religious beliefs with political radicalism, had been exhibited by commentators on various sides immediately after the rebellion, in order to isolate those involved from the main body of Presbyterianism. Thereby, the church could emerge from the events of that year without the blanket accusation of disloyalty and rebellion. It was certainly a view of events that many Catholics themselves shared. Speaking at a Catholic Association meeting in 1824, Shiel referred to 'two classes' of Presbyterians, Old Light and New; 'one was favourable to the principles of civil and religious liberty, whilst the other was said to be deeply tinged with the hue of Orangeism'.⁷¹ Shiel was indeed accurate in seeing the Presbyterians of the north of Ireland as divided in matters of politics, as they had been since long before 1798, but mistaken in the simplistic correlation between theology and politics.

In 1822 the Seceding minister, Rev. Samuel Edgar published his sermon entitled, the *Improvement of Irish Catholics*, showing how the distinction between *civil rights* and *religious opinions* could be reconciled.⁷² Whilst asking Catholics, '*to inquire whether their religion be not clouded with superstition, and corrupted by a multiplicity of ceremonies*', Edgar admitted that, 'non-emancipation has operated and continues to operate, as a strong barrier in the way of improving the Catholic, either in religious

⁶⁷ *NW*, April 21 1825.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *BNL*, April 26 1825.

⁷⁰ *NW*, May 12 1825.

⁷¹ *NW*, December 23 1824

⁷² *Improvement of Irish Catholics. A Sermon by Samuel Edgar D.D., Professor of Theology for the Seceders of Ireland* (Belfast, 1822)

principles, or in morals'. Hence, emancipation would provide the opportunity for the Irish Catholic to 'prove to the world that he understands liberty'. Edgar described the remnants of the penal code as, 'the remains of persecution... a thick cloud resting long on the mental horizon of the Catholic'. Simultaneously he denounced Orangeism, commenting that, 'Old prejudices and hatreds, that should have been left to perish by the lapse of time, are kept alive and in vigour by Orange Lodges, and by Orange cabal'. He criticized Orange lodges as places 'where inveterate prejudices spew their venom in fabulous legends against Catholics'. But Edgar's deprecation of Orangeism was based on the belief that their behaviour was likely to do nothing 'to recommend the Protestant religion to Catholics', rather than because of its religious bigotry.⁷³

The divisions and mixture of motivations among Presbyterians concerning Catholic Emancipation were in many ways little different to those of the preceding century. In May 1825 a petition from several ministers and lay Presbyterians concurring with Cooke's evidence on Emancipation⁷⁴ was met with a petition from the Bangor Presbytery firmly in favour of the measure.⁷⁵ But even within the Bangor Presbytery, there were voices of dissent and five elders attended a 'Protestant meeting' in the town later that month, which concluded that, 'the experience of former times has shown that Roman Catholics cannot be *safely* trusted with *political power*'.⁷⁶ A subsequent anti-Emancipation petition which emanated from the Bangor area stimulated excited debate for several months in the local press. In a letter to a fellow Down landlord, J. Maxwell, James Cleland (the chief organiser of Bangor's anti-Emancipation petition) reported on the coercion he believed had been used to procure signatures for the town's pro-Emancipation petition. He alleged that a number of individuals, 'went to men that had formerly taken the Oath of the United Irishmen, and told them that they were bound by their Oath to sign the Petition in favour of Catholic Emancipation, and if they signed against it, they would be perjured; by such means they got many to sign for them, and deterred others from signing ours. On being asked what was the object of their petition, they answered to keep up the principles of 1798'.⁷⁷

In May 1825, in a show of defiance against Cooke, Rev. Henry Montgomery addressed a Protestant Dinner given in honour of the Catholic bishop, Right Rev. Dr. Crolley. On the position of the Presbyterian clergy, Montgomery stated that 'to deny that

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.14; 28-33.

⁷⁴ *BNL*, May 31 and June 7 1825.

⁷⁵ *BNL*, May 20 1825.

⁷⁶ *Public Dinner in Bangor*, PRONI, D/3244/G/1/54

⁷⁷ J. Cleland to J.W. Maxwell, March 12 1827, PRONI, D/3244/G/1/49.

the members of the Synod of Ulster are friendly to this great national act of common justice, is a libel on their professions and on their principles'.⁷⁸ Speaking in the Commons in April 1825, Cecil Spring Rice presented a petition he had been entrusted with, in favour of Catholic Emancipation, from 'ministers and elders of the Presbyterian profession in the county of Down and Belfast'.⁷⁹ The *Whig* expressed its delight at an article which appeared in the *Dublin Evening Post* in late 1825, commenting on the commitment of Ulster Presbyterians to the Catholic cause: 'It was at a meeting principally composed of Presbyterians, in the time of the Volunteers, that the first declaration in favour of the Roman Catholics was made by any public body in Ireland. This should never be forgotten. It is well known that in the great bulk of that body, the same sentiments still subsist', although it candidly admitted that many, 'have been estranged, and some perhaps disgusted at some of the proceedings of the Catholic body'.⁸⁰

The view of the *Dublin Evening Post* was certainly confirmed at a dinner given to the radical Catholic newspaper editor, John Lawless, in Belfast. Prominent Presbyterian radicals in the town, including William and Robert Tennent, John Barnett and James Munfoad attended. Robert Tennent toasted 'Roman Catholic Emancipation – unqualified and unconditional', whilst Munfoad recalled his enrolment in the Volunteers 48 years earlier, noting that the movement had, 'changed the minds of many Protestants, who had previously looked on their Roman Catholic brethren with a jaundiced eye; that association taught the people, that no good could be done for Ireland till equal rights and equal laws were extended to all'. But even Munfoad admitted that not all Presbyterians shared his sentiments: 'He regretted to find the young men of the present period, not thoroughly possessed of those sterling principles of political justice, which he had witnessed...at an earlier period'.⁸¹ The division amongst the Presbyterian community on the subject of Catholic Emancipation was again clear in November 1826. The Seceding minister, Samuel Edgar (who had previously written in favour of Emancipation in 1822) and the Rev. Hogg of the Synod of Ulster, attended a Protestant meeting in Omagh, County Tyrone to oppose Emancipation, distinguishing between *religious liberty*, which they supported for Catholics, and *political power*.⁸² But at the

⁷⁸ *BNL*, May 20 1825.

⁷⁹ *Hansard*, 2nd series, vol.13, pp.10-11.

⁸⁰ Cited in *NW*, November 3 1825.

⁸¹ *NW*, April 6 1826.

⁸² *BNL*, November 10 1826.

other extreme, the Catholic Association was able to celebrate that a Presbyterian from Ballymoney, Robert Rowan, had made a subscription to their movement.⁸³

One of the Catholic speakers at the Association's meeting commented that, 'while...the conduct of some Presbyterians had afforded ground for censure, and that the backwardness of many deserved to be condemned – he trusted that the Catholics would not forget what had been achieved by the Presbyterians, and he begged to assure them that when the necessity arrives, the Presbyterian body shall be forthcoming'. Adding his own opinion, Lawless expressed his hope to the meeting that, 'it was from such men the Catholics would judge of the Presbyterians, and not from such samples as Hogg and Edgar'. O'Connell himself expressed his delight at admitting the Presbyterian Rowan into the Association, whilst another Catholic speaker at the Association's meeting added that he had recently made acquaintance with the Rev. Henry Montgomery, who had utterly condemned the bigotry demonstrated by certain Presbyterians at the late Omagh meeting.⁸⁴

In December 1826 the Rev. William Porter, clerk of the Synod of Ulster and father-in-law of the *Whig* proprietor Finlay, made a very public declaration of his unqualified support for Catholic Emancipation.⁸⁵ Moreover, Porter claimed that he was reflecting the feelings of the majority of the Synod of Ulster. This received a swift rebuke in a letter to the *Belfast Newsletter* from 'A Member of the Presbyterian Body' who claimed that he himself had once advocated Catholic Emancipation, but that the Catholic Association had altered that: '...they have in good times shown to the world how their ambition rules them, by forming a Catholic Parliament, at the head of which is Sir Dan and his Liberators, backed up by their Clergy'.⁸⁶ The open admission by the Revs. William Porter and Henry Montgomery that they were both Arians, to a committee inquiring into the Belfast Academical Institute in 1827,⁸⁷ provided Cooke with the ammunition he required. Commenting on the need for Catholic-Protestant unity, Archibald Hamilton Rowan made a scathing attack on the influence of the anti-Emancipationists in the Synod, and in a private letter he noted that Ireland, 'must be united; which Messrs Cooke and his flock of fools and knaves will prevent as much as possible'.⁸⁸

⁸³ *BNL*, November 17 1826.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *BNL*, January 9 1827.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Holmes, *The Presbyterian Church: A Popular History*, p.92.

⁸⁸ Archibald Hamilton Rowan to John Carr, November 23 1827, PRONI, D/2930/8/30.

Political fears aside, the inherent ‘anti-Popery’ which remained an important element of Presbyterian radicalism in the 1790s was still just as strong in the 1820s, even among the most enlightened Presbyterians. In a letter to the editor of the *Newsletter*, Robert Tennent expressed his regret that some Protestant and Presbyterian ministers in Belfast were organising a ‘Theological Debate’ on the merits or otherwise of the Reformed and Catholic Churches. Tennent was clearly aware that such public controversy was likely to do little to ‘promote good will amongst men’, and moreover, he argued that such a measure was likely to meet the opposition of the men’s own congregations, since most of the inhabitants of Belfast were in favour of equal political rights to Catholics. Tennent himself insisted that, ‘the Catholic should have his political rights, before he is challenged to defend his religious principles’. Ultimately, Tennent was clearly not opposed to attempts to convert Irish Catholics, so long as they had been granted full political and civil equality: ‘Let justice be first done to our Catholic countrymen, and then let all who are solicitous for truth and consider them still blind, endeavour by all means to open their eyes’.⁸⁹

For radical Presbyterians, granting Catholics equal political rights as fellow countrymen was not considered incompatible with efforts to draw them away from the ‘superstitions’ of their religious doctrines. But achieving a unity of purpose even on the former was not an easy task in the changing circumstances of Ireland by the late 1820s; as Lord Rossmore commented in a private letter to Tennent, ‘For the present I abandon the hope of uniting Ireland in one sentiment, as in the days of the Volunteers.....O’Connell’s arrogance has disgusted Gentlemen’.⁹⁰ Many leading Catholics themselves appreciated the damage O’Connell’s activities were having on Presbyterian-Catholic harmony in Ireland. In a letter to William Brownlow, Robert Tennent urged his attendance at a multi-denominational meeting in favour of Catholic Emancipation. Tennent commented, ‘I could mention a great many who are exceedingly anxious for this Meeting – the R.C Primate, Dr.Curtis, Dr.Crolly, and many other eminent Catholics are extremely desirous of getting out of the beaten track of exclusive Catholic meetings..... and what we want is to overcome the apathy of the Protestant community’.⁹¹ The geographical shift of ‘Catholic’ issues which O’Connell had created, no doubt added to the sense of alienation of Presbyterians from their

⁸⁹ *BNL*, March 30 1827.

⁹⁰ Lord Rossmore to Dr. Robert Tennent, November 15 1827, PRONI, D/1748/C/1/177/4.

⁹¹ Letter of Dr. Robert Tennent, according to an annotation of his son Robert James Tennent, ‘nominally to Hancock, but really to William Brownlow, urging the latter to take part in the proposed meeting’, December 8 1827, PRONI, D/1748/C/1/80/2.

Catholic countrymen. In the 1790s Belfast had led the way in declaring in favour of Catholic interests, but in the 1820s, the hub of activity on Catholic matters had shifted firmly southward.⁹² In the same letter, Tennent himself acknowledged the damage that this had done to Presbyterian-Catholic relations in the 1820s.

As this chapter has demonstrated, there remained many Presbyterians committed to the ideal of 1791, despite the increasingly altered political and religious climate of Ireland in the 1820s. In 1825 Archibald Hamilton Rowan still envisaged the ideals of 1791, and in a private letter to John Carr in Killyleagh he wrote, ‘So much am I convinced of the necessity of affecting the old United Irishman’s declaration, to procure (as the chief good of Ireland) – “A brotherhood of affection, An identity of interests, A Communion of rights, And Union of power, among Irishmen of all Religious Persuasions”, that I would concede much for its acquisition’.⁹³ Indeed, the legacy of 1798 was not forgotten in the protracted political debates which dominated Parliament on the subject of Emancipation. Whilst many speakers defended Irish Catholics by recalling the fact that it was primarily Presbyterians who had in fact led the country into rebellion thirty years earlier,⁹⁴ other speakers used memories of the sectarian atrocities in Wexford as proof that Catholics simply could not be trusted. Admiral Evans’ tapped into the doubts which many anti-Emancipation Presbyterians harboured – prophecies which O’Connell’s movement seemed to be realising: ‘the moment the Roman Catholics got power in their hands, in consequence of the greatness of their numbers....all idea of liberty was forgotten, and nothing filled their minds but the hope of securing the ascendancy of the Catholic religion.’⁹⁵ For the young radical, Robert James Tennent, O’Connell’s movement was simply stirring old prejudices and he noted in a letter to his father, ‘it is, I conscientiously believe, in a great degree the fault of the Roman Catholic Association, that the Catholic share of that harvest is rather behind’.⁹⁶

In March 1829 the conservative *Guardian and Constitutional Advocate* in Belfast published a letter rallying opposition to the measure of Catholic Emancipation: ‘Petition then ye Presbyterians of Ulster – for let me tell you there is not a day to loose)... Can you endure the idea of resigning generations yet unborn to that wretchedness which inevitably awaits them, should ever POPERY become *predominant*

⁹² See Lord Rossmore to Dr. Tennent, July 27 1827, PRONI, D/1748/C/177/1. Rossmore emphasizes to Tennent the necessity of organising Ulster as the ‘rallying point’ for Catholic Emancipation.

⁹³ Rowan to Carr, April 2 1825, PRONI, D/2930/8/26 (Rowan’s emphasis).

⁹⁴ For instance, Lord F.L. Gower’s speech in the Commons, *Hansard*, 2nd series, vol.19, 466-7.

⁹⁵ *Hansard*, 2nd series, vol.19, pp.637-8.

⁹⁶ Robert James Tennent to Dr. Robert Tennent, May 12 1828, PRONI, D/1748/C/1/215/52 (Tennent’s emphasis).

*in this land?...'*⁹⁷ In 1829 the measure of Catholic Emancipation did finally become law, but the 'resistance' urged above never materialized on any significant scale, and stayed concentrated among those conservatives such as Cooke, Stewart and Magill who had consistently opposed the measure. Indeed, the Presbyterian community in the north of Ireland remained relatively passive on the matter.

In the House of Lords, the Marquis of Londonderry declared that, 'in the province of Ulster there was a general feeling in favour of Catholic Emancipation, accompanied by proper securities'.⁹⁸ However, there was clearly still division on the matter (as there had always been). The Rev. Robert Magill claimed that most opposed the measure, arguing that the famous 1813 declaration had been passed by a very small number of predominantly Arian ministers without the knowledge or concurrence of the majority.⁹⁹ However, as Finlay Holmes has emphasized, only the Ballymena Presbytery pronounced against Parliament's decision in 1829. Despite Cooke's efforts to pressurise the Synod it, 'refused to bow to conservative and ultra-Protestant pressure to join in last ditch resistance to the imminent concession of Catholic Emancipation. It remained faithful to its liberal resolutions of 1793 and 1813 in favour of Emancipation, in spite of the fact that Cooke and Stewart, leaders of the party of orthodoxy, wanted some agitation for greater safeguards to preserve the Protestant character of the British state'.¹⁰⁰ Such a stance is all the more remarkable for two reasons. Firstly, in 1829 Cooke was at the height of his power and influence in the Synod, on the back of his triumph in ousting the Arians. Yet he clearly could not impose his will on matters of politics. Secondly, the failure of the anti-Emancipation Presbyterians to rouse any substantial public feeling on the matter is extremely significant, given the new, self-confident and powerful force into which O'Connell had helped to harness the political potential of the Irish Catholic population. Despite the opposition of many to the Catholic Association, a substantial degree of Presbyterian support for Emancipation remained intact.

Among the Arians, support for Catholic political equality remained especially strong, and in 1829, at the dinner given to celebrate the installation of the Rev. John Porter to the Second Presbyterian Congregation of Belfast, one of the toasts proposed was, '*The Right Rev. Dr. Crolly, and our brethren of the Roman Catholic*

⁹⁷ *Guardian*, March 27 1829.

⁹⁸ *Hansard*, 2nd series, vol.20, p.471.

⁹⁹ *Guardian*, March 31 1829.

¹⁰⁰ Holmes, *Irish Presbyterian Heritage*, p.105.

persuasion'.¹⁰¹ Similarly, the Rev. John Mitchel attended a dinner of all religious denominations in Newry in September 1829.¹⁰² Nor did the *Belfast Newsletter* succeed in rallying opposition across the wider Presbyterian community, despite its last ditch plea to Ulster Presbyterians to flood the Commons with petitions against Emancipation. One of the congregations which did petition against the measure was that of Broughshane, whose minister, significantly, was Robert Stewart, Cooke's close ally.¹⁰³ In January 1829 Belfast's leading Presbyterian radicals had underlined their own commitment to Catholic Emancipation, attending a dinner of the Friends of Civil and Religious Liberty in the town. John McCance, John Sinclair, Adam McClean, Robert Grimshaw, James Barnett, F.D Finlay and Rev. Henry Montgomery toasted, 'Our Native Land; and may her sons of every denomination be speedily united in the bonds of amity and good will'.¹⁰⁴

Echoing these sentiments, Finlay attended a Roman Catholic meeting in County Down the following month, and in his speech he declared, '...when we shall next assemble in this great country, I anticipate that it will not be as the bound and the free – but as reconciled and happy Irishmen'.¹⁰⁵ In December 1830 in his speech at the Great Reform Meeting in Belfast, Henry Montgomery rejoiced that Catholic Emancipation had finally been passed, describing it as, 'that great measure of National and Christian justice', but he was quick to add that, 'I equally abhor all ascendancy, Catholic, Protestant, or Presbyterian, amongst countrymen and fellow subjects'.¹⁰⁶ As late as 1848, Montgomery proudly recalled how he had, 'stood upon a Catholic altar, to assist in striking the galling chains of an unmerited inferiority from the limbs of my Catholic brethren'.¹⁰⁷ Montgomery's wholehearted and concerted effort for Catholic Emancipation may not have been shared by all Presbyterians – many quietly accepted the measure rather than campaigning for it vigorously by 1829 – but it is proof that despite the increasing marginalization of their efforts and support, under O'Connell's very 'Catholic' campaign, some liberal Protestants were still prepared to offer their support for Catholic political rights.

It is also important to consider that during these years of debate among Presbyterians on the subject of Catholic Emancipation, at a local level, Presbyterian and

¹⁰¹ S. Shannon Millin, *History of the Second Congregation of Protestant Dissenters in Belfast, 1708-1900* (Belfast, 1900), p.53.

¹⁰² *NW*, September 3 1829.

¹⁰³ *Guardian*, April 3 1829.

¹⁰⁴ *NW*, January 29 1829.

¹⁰⁵ *NW*, February 26 1829.

¹⁰⁶ *NW*, December 6 1830.

Catholic could enjoy harmonious relations. In County Down, for instance, where, crucially, the new Roman Catholic self-confidence was slower to express itself, S.M. Stewart has noted that a chapel was built in the staunchly Presbyterian town of Newtownards in 1813, and replaced by a larger building in 1846. Similarly, a chapel was erected in nearby Donaghadee in 1842, in Bangor in 1851, and Saintfield in 1853.¹⁰⁸ Of course, as in the 1790s, Presbyterians in these areas could afford to be more conciliatory towards Catholics, safe in their own numerical predominance. However, the fact that the year Emancipation became law, an interdenominational celebration took place in Holywood at the opening of a new chapel, (the land for which, incidentally, having been obtained from a Presbyterian),¹⁰⁹ must remind us that beyond national issues and debates, Catholics and Presbyterians, certainly in Down, could enjoy sound relations. Indeed, as Elliott has noted, among the Catholics of Ulster, support for O'Connell and payment of the Rent was lower than elsewhere.¹¹⁰ It is also perhaps a typical example of the mentality described by Buckland as one in which, although, 'collectively...Catholics represented a serious threat',¹¹¹ on an individual or local level, Protestants and Catholics were not necessarily so intolerant of each other.

National Education

The Whig government's ambitious reforms for Ireland included the establishment of a system of National Education in 1832, to promote the co-operation of all religions at local school level. It was envisaged that the Bible would be kept firmly out of the classroom.¹¹² Presbyterian opinion on the subject was, typically, divided on the merits of the scheme. Many shades of political opinion genuinely condemned the new system as 'unscriptural', Mr. Lefroy had warned in the Commons as early as September 1831: 'The Presbyterians would not consent to the exclusion of the Scriptures from their system of education'.¹¹³ It was an argument reiterated by the Presbyterian opponents of the Board throughout the 1830s, until the compromise between Synod and government in 1840. But anti-Catholicism clearly played its part, in

¹⁰⁷ NW, March 4 1848.

¹⁰⁸ S.M. Stewart, 'Presbyterian Radicalism, Landlord Influence and Electoral Politics in County Down in the mid-nineteenth century', MA thesis (unpublished), St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, 1981. p.155.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster: a history* (London, 2000), p.272.

¹¹¹ Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism: Two: Ulster Unionism and the origins of Northern Ireland 1886-1922* (Dublin, 1972), p.xxi

¹¹² See D.H. Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment, the National System of Education in the nineteenth century* (Studies in Irish History, 2nd ser., 7) (London, 1970) ; Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*; pp.163-8; Wright, *Two Lands*, pp.61-69; and Holmes, *Cooke*, pp.93-120.

¹¹³ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.6, September 9 1831,1272.

both the religious and political sense. For instance, in a religious sense, in the freedom which opponents saw the system granting to the Catholic priest to enter schools where Protestants were taught, and in the political sense as embodied by conservatives and ultra-Protestants (both Presbyterian and Anglican) such as Cooke. These men regarded the system as the ultimate betrayal of the Protestant State.

In November 1831 the journal of the Synod of Ulster, the *Orthodox Presbyterian*, heavily under Cooke's influence, denounced the proposed scheme as the 'attempted Establishment of Popery by Act of Parliament'. Above all, the age-old fear of Catholic ascendancy was expressed: 'the Roman Catholics form a body united in one sentiment and object – the absolute attainment of religious supremacy'.¹¹⁴ But the *Northern Whig* did not share the journal's sentiments, and, representing largely the voice of the Remonstrants, it condemned these comments as, 'virulent, unchristian', and 'partizan'.¹¹⁵ Above all, it declared its support for the scheme. The Rev. James Carlile of the Synod of Ulster accepted the position of Presbyterian representative on the new Board of Education, the interdenominational character of which horrified Cooke and his allies: 'Here we have the Roman Catholic Priest not only permitted but encouraged by a PROTESTANT ARCHBISHOP and PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER to teach the dogmas of the Church of Rome'.¹¹⁶ Carlile remained firmly convinced of the merits of the new system and throughout the 1830s was locked in frequent conflict with Cooke on the subject. By supporting the new system, Carlile's opponents accused him of sanctioning the scheme's fundamental principle that, 'all systems of religion are equally good'.¹¹⁷ In an address to the Synod of Ulster, Carlile stated his belief that, 'the Government cannot act as the religious instructors of the people... To expect that a Government, which embodies within itself all parties, shall adopt the peculiar principles of any, is visionary'.¹¹⁸ Cooke and his allies clearly did not regard the maintenance of the 'Protestant State' as visionary, but as absolutely essential.

They had powerful support for their campaign against National Education from the *Belfast Newsletter*. One correspondent to the newspaper called on the Synod of Ulster to unanimously oppose the system. Referring to, 'the wanton acts of barbarous

¹¹⁴ *Orthodox Presbyterian*, vol.3, no.26, November 1831, p.37 and pp.43-4.

¹¹⁵ *NW*, December 1 1831. The *Whig* stated, 'This periodical, it is well-known, is the medium by which the ascendancy men of the General Synod of Ulster communicate with the public'.

¹¹⁶ *Orthodox Presbyterian*, vol.3, no.27, December 1831, p.78.

¹¹⁷ *The Bible versus The Board – The Priest – And the Court of Chancery; Or, The Working of the New System of National Education, as exemplified in the History of the Ballyholey School, in the Parish of Raphoe, County of Donegall. By the Rev. W.D. Killen, Minister of the Presbyterian Church, Raphoe.* (Belfast, 1835), p.46.

¹¹⁸ Carlile, *To the Ministers and Elders*, p.7.

outrage that have been committed by the Catholics of the south and west', he denounced the plans as, 'the attempt to lay the foundation of Papal supremacy in Ireland'. The Protestants, 'may be numerically inferior to the Roman Catholics, but they are morally superior'.¹¹⁹ This of course, was in essence the crux of the matter: accepting the National Education System meant accepting that the Roman Catholic faith was equal to the various Protestant denominations. For a Presbyterian body inspired by the evangelical revival and the desire to ultimately convert Catholics, this was an problematic concept. Indeed, as Wright emphasized the Government hoped that the new system of education would remove the Catholics' permanent suspicion of Protestant proselytising intent.¹²⁰

Although Cooke did manage to persuade the Synod of Ulster to adopt a series of resolutions and a petition opposing the plans in January 1832,¹²¹ crucially, as Holmes emphasizes, the meeting of Synod was very poorly attended. Only seventy ministers out of two hundred and sixteen – and thus Cooke's 'victory' must be seen in this context.¹²² In a sermon to his May Street Congregation that month Cooke stated unequivocally that, 'a sincere Protestant Minister and a sincere Roman Catholic Priest, can never unite about scriptural education'.¹²³ The rhetoric of the terrible consequences of 'the daily frightful encroachments of the Church of Rome' were, as Chapter One noted, rejected by the *Whig*, which saw political factors as the main motivation behind much of the opposition to the system. It attacked, the 'tribe of Tory lords, and canting Tory Clergy, [who] now dare to come forward and stigmatize such measures as the vile schemes of Papists and infidels to take away the Bible, and destroy Protestantism'.¹²⁴ Indeed, it was Tory M.Ps such as Sir Robert Bateson (Londonderry) who most frequently claimed in the House of Commons that, 'the Presbyterians, as well as the Members of the Established Church, were equally and most decidedly opposed' to the system.¹²⁵ In the House of Lords in February 1832, Lord Roden made similar claims, referring to Cooke's comments in the recent Synod meeting as proof that the 'Presbyterians of Ulster' disapproved of the scheme.¹²⁶

But there was clearly not the blanket opposition among Presbyterians to the scheme, which some attempted to portray. The Rev. Carlile, for instance, argued that

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Wright, *Two Lands*, pp.61-65.

¹²¹ See *BNL*, January 17 1832, for a report of the proceedings of the Synod.

¹²² Holmes, *Henry Cooke*, p.97.

¹²³ [Henry Cooke, D.D.], *National Education: A Sermon...Sunday 15 January 1832*, pp.38-9.

¹²⁴ *NW*, January 26 1832.

¹²⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.10,1111-2.

Protestants had long enjoyed 'their full share of the public funds. The Establishment has its splendid revenues; the Presbyterians bodies have their royal bounty; and if a small portion of the common stock should be appropriated chiefly to the ameliorating and elevating the condition of Roman Catholics, they should be the last to complain'.¹²⁷ Carlile, too, saw more malign political motivations masquerading as religious scruples: 'If you deduct political opposition to the present ministry, Orange antipathy to Roman Catholics and high church jealousy both of dissenters and Roman Catholics, I am fully persuaded you would withdraw five-sixths, more probably nine-tenths of the hostility'.¹²⁸ Of course, there was more than just politics at work, for even the conservative Robert Stewart noted that opposition could not be largely political given that nine-tenths of the Synod of Ulster were in fact Whigs¹²⁹ – an interesting admission.

Presbyterian ministers like Carlile were not infected with the same bitter anti-Catholicism of others such as Cooke and Stewart, although as an evangelical he ultimately supported the desire to help Catholics to 'see the light'. Even among politically liberal Presbyterians, an inherent level of anti-Catholicism always existed. In a letter published in the *Newsletter*, Carlile condemned, 'most of the Protestant education institutions [who] attempt to compel Roman Catholic children to read the Bible, under the penalty of forfeiting the whole education afforded by them. Now this appears to me a most pernicious system.... no healing influence has flowed from them..... The Bible is thus converted into a party book and the reading of it into a party symbol'.¹³⁰

Outside of the Synod of Ulster, other Presbyterians supported the new Education System on the principles of religious toleration. At a Belfast Reform Society meeting a Presbyterian speaker denounced the activities of Cooke, declaring that, 'They should make a stand at the present moment: and show that they were not afraid to let their children meet together on neutral ground', and he prayed for an 'impartial system of education for Ireland'.¹³¹ Another speaker at the meeting stated that many supported the system and that, 'Such men as Cooke and Edgar were only deserving of being left to their own insignificance; for they were only a drop in the vast ocean, among the enlightened and liberal men of the country'.¹³² Amongst the other Presbyterian

¹²⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.10,857.

¹²⁷ *NW*, January 26 1832.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Holmes, *Cooke*, p.100.

¹²⁹ [Stewart], *National Education: Address to the Religious Public*, p.3.

¹³⁰ *BNL*, March 20 1832.

¹³¹ *NW*, February 27 1832.

¹³² *Ibid.*

denominations, many opposed Cooke's vehement opposition to the new system of education. The Remonstrant Synod's *Bible Christian*, implored the necessity, 'for giving the means of education to the lower classes....If Roman Catholics willingly yield a little of their prejudices, surely, if anything is to be effected, Protestants must act in a similar manner?'¹³³ Expressing its sympathy with the new system and its attempts to conciliate Irish Catholics, it noted, 'Just suppose, for an instant, the case be reversed: suppose that your Catholic brethren had all the power, and all the influence, and that you were seeking the means of Education at their hands: how would you act, were they to offer books of their own, and teachers of their own selection, as means of instruction..... Why then wonder at the conduct of your Roman Catholic brethren? And why insult them with an offer of Education, when you too well know that the offer is coupled with a proviso, that converts the favour into an insult?'¹³⁴

In May 1832 the Seceding Presbytery of Belfast declared that it would support the plans with some small alterations, commenting in a statement on the education of Catholics, '...if they will not consent to receive the Bible at our hands, we are still willing to assist in giving them an education good in itself, to the extent that we can persuade them to receive it'.¹³⁵ Like the Remonstrants, they saw little benefit from, 'forcing the Bible on Roman Catholics'.¹³⁶ The sympathy of the Seceders for the non-sectarian education scheme was cynically denounced by Stewart, as reflecting more about their desire to win government favour in their recent *regium donum* requests – an allegation fervently denied by their spokesman, Rev. John Coulter.¹³⁷ It is certainly clear that the Seceders, who were as fervently anti-Prelacy as anti-Popery, were among those many Presbyterians who broadly favoured a plan of education which would destroy the monopoly hitherto enjoyed by the Established Church in this sphere. So concessions to Catholic education, within limits, could prove worth the ultimate gain of eroding the gross privileges of the Church of Ireland. In its statement on the education system, the Belfast Secession Presbytery attacked those who had opposed the system as desirous of, 'overturning the present Ministry, and *perpetuating Church and State slaves*'.¹³⁸ As this thesis emphasizes, by the end of the 1830s, despite the threat from

¹³³ *Bible Christian*, vol.3, no.1, February 1832, p.6.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.7-8.

¹³⁵ Reprinted in *Orthodox Presbyterian*, May/June 1832, pp.289-91.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p291.

¹³⁷ See Stewart's allegation, in his pamphlet, *Address to the Religious Public*, p.10, and Rev. Coulter's defence of the Secession Presbytery, entitled, 'Reply to the charges preferred by the Orthodox Presbyterian against the Belfast Secession Presbytery on the question on National Education', in *BNL*, June 8 1832.

¹³⁸ *Orthodox Presbyterian*, May/June 1832, p.289.

O'Connell and his alliance with the British Whig government, only a small minority of Presbyterians ultimately desired to ally more closely with the Established Church in 'Protestant Union' against the threat of Popery.

Cooke's bitter response to the resolutions of the Belfast Seceding Presbytery prompted Coulter to denounce his opposition to the system as, 'merely an attempt, and a very clumsy one, to get up the "No Popery" cry, for the purpose of rousing a spirit of persecution and religious hate, in order to put down opponents'.¹³⁹ Above all, Coulter claimed that the activities of Cooke and his clique regarding National Education were a serious misrepresentation of the sentiments of Presbyterians: 'There is difference of opinion among the various Presbyterian congregations in Belfast. An intelligent individual of a religious community, with which the Orthodox Presbyterian ought to be well acquainted, stated to a member of our Committee, his approval of the resolutions of the Belfast Presbytery [of Seceders]; and when it was hinted that they presented a different view from that given by a conspicuous leader, he replied, "I am aware of *that*, but many of his arguments were merely *ad captandum*"'.¹⁴⁰ In direct contradiction to Cooke, the Education Committee of the Secession Presbytery of Belfast concluded that, 'some common ground of education can be discovered, where all may meet without a sacrifice of principle on the part of any'.¹⁴¹

Within Parliament, petitions read from various Presbyterian congregations and groups both favouring and opposing National Education¹⁴² reflected the division of opinion on the subject in 1832-3. Even among the Seceders not all agreed with the Belfast Presbytery's stance, and in May 1832 Sir Robert Bateson presented a petition against the scheme from a Seceding congregation in County Down.¹⁴³ Naturally, O'Connell himself was eager to emphasize to the Commons that, 'a large body of the Presbyterians of the north of Ireland are favourable to the Government plan of education'.¹⁴⁴ More significantly, Cooke failed to mobilise support for his opposition among Scottish Presbyterians, with even the respected evangelical, Rev. Thomas Chalmers, opposing a motion in the presbytery of Edinburgh to petition government against the system in April 1832. Chalmers too, questioned the motives of those who denounced National Education in Ireland: 'The fact is too glaring that a great deal more

¹³⁹ *BNL*, June 8 1832.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Reply of the Education Committee of the Secession Presbytery of Belfast, to the Orthodox Presbyterian*, (Belfast, 1832), p.4.

¹⁴² *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.10, 1162-3.

¹⁴³ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.13, 228-9.

¹⁴⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.12, 1142.

of politics than of religion, is mixed up with the opposition made to the scheme of education in Ireland...in the hope that it may eventually prove the overthrow of the MINISTRY'.¹⁴⁵

At the meetings of the Synod of Ulster in 1833 more confrontations occurred between Cooke and Carlile over National Education, with the latter telling the meeting, 'The Government knows that the whole agitation is kept up by three or four individuals. And until the Synod breaks its leading strings, and takes upon itself the direction of its own affairs, it matters not what resolutions may be published in the name of the body on this subject'.¹⁴⁶ But by 1834, events at a higher level were being superseded by the increasing involvement of many Presbyterian ministers with the Board in local schools. So much so that James Carlile felt secure in informing the Prime Minister in a private letter that Cooke was struggling to maintain support for his opposition, 'finding the agitation dying away'. Above all, '...the Synod are becoming tired of his dictation'.¹⁴⁷ O'Connell's claim certainly came to bear credence as the decade progressed and, despite Cooke's efforts to the contrary, more and more Presbyterian ministers were becoming reconciled to the new system. For many, the proof of the pudding came with the eating, and those who placed their schools under the new system claimed that ultimately the scheme was successful in providing a better standard of education. At the 1834 Synod meeting, Rev. Dill of Carrmoney testified that whatever resolutions were passed by the Synod, 'their decision should not induce him to give up his connexion with the Board, so satisfied was he with its utility'.¹⁴⁸

Many other ministers defied Cooke and Stewart and spoke out in favour of the system, including Rev. Barnett and the Rev. Grey of Burt. Referring to the history of education in Ireland, Grey argued that, 'all attempts to establish it on exclusively Protestant principles had totally failed, whereas the moment that sectarian principles were laid aside, the R. Catholics were gradually brought to read the sacred volume'. Moreover, he concluded, 'by deprecating the idea that the Board was a planned attack on Protestantism, when it was, in reality, only a mixed system adopted to the common wants of subjects of the same equal Government, and consequently must, in the nature of things, be so framed, as not to infringe upon the religious peculiarities of any one denomination'.¹⁴⁹ These words were in clear opposition to Cooke's growing political

¹⁴⁵ Referred to in Rev. John Coulter's letter in, *BNL*, June 8 1832.

¹⁴⁶ Report of Synod's proceedings, *BNL*, July 5 1833.

¹⁴⁷ Rev. James Carlile to Earl Grey, May 31 1833, Durham University Library Archives and Special Collections, Papers of the 2nd Earl Grey, GRE/B65/1/4.

¹⁴⁸ Proceedings of Synod reported in *BNL*, July 1 1834.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

anti-Catholicism, demonstrated so visibly by his appearance at Hillsborough in 1834. More and more evangelical orthodox ministers were coming to the conclusion that, ‘the narrowed principles which have been adapted and acted upon by the Protestants of this country, in reference to Roman Catholics, have prevented the spread of the doctrines of the Reformation’.¹⁵⁰ That the Synod of 1834 ultimately resolved in favour of Cooke was due *only* to a tenuous victory secured by the votes of six elders.¹⁵¹ Unsurprisingly, protest dissenting from this was drawn up by several ministers and elders.¹⁵² Therefore, Sir Robert Bateson’s claim in the Commons in May 1835 that Presbyterians opposed the system, regarding it as, ‘established only for the exclusive education of the Roman Catholics’,¹⁵³ is clearly not borne out by the evidence above.

It was fear of the advances of Popery – as epitomized by the apparent undermining of the Protestant state – which led Cooke into such a concerted campaign to form a united Protestant bloc. It reflected what one writer in February 1872’s *Orthodox Presbyterian* recalled as Cooke’s ‘utter distrust’¹⁵⁴ of the union of all Irishmen in the 1790s. O’Connell’s Repeal of the Union rhetoric in the 1830s, (and which will be discussed later) doubtless added fuel to Cooke’s growing anti-Catholicism, and his determination to fight the threat at all costs. Significantly, Cooke’s efforts, certainly in his own life time, were largely rejected, receiving the condemnation of even the most orthodox Presbyterians. Political conservatives such as Cooke and Stewart clearly did not share the liberals’ belief that equality and enlightenment would encourage Catholics to abandon their religion. Recalling Carlile’s support for Catholic Emancipation, Stewart argued that, ‘Roman Catholics are more bigoted than ever before. They rise in their demand with every concession – and every advance they make in the political scale, rivets, and will rivet deeper and deeper, their religious fetters’.¹⁵⁵

So National Education was used by many Tory ultra-Protestants, including some Presbyterians, as a vehicle for rallying opposition to wider concessions to Popery. In October 1834 the *Times* expressed its disgust at, ‘the opponents of the Board of Education in Armagh and the adjacent Orange districts’, including a Presbyterian minister, Rev. George McClelland, Moderator of the Presbytery of Ballymena, leading

¹⁵⁰ Mr. Molyneux at the Synod of Ulster annual meeting, *BNL*, July 1 1834.

¹⁵¹ Proceedings of the Synod, in *BNL*, July 1 1834.

¹⁵² *BNL*, July 8 1834.

¹⁵³ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.27, 1232-3.

¹⁵⁴ *Orthodox Presbyterian. New Series*, vol.4, February 1872.

¹⁵⁵ Stewart, *National Education: In Three Letters to the Rev. James Carlile*, p.7.

'political processions'.¹⁵⁶ Noted the *Times*, 'The day began and ended with furious political sermons against the sinful efforts of the reforming ministry in Ireland'.¹⁵⁷ But far from all Presbyterians regarded the Whig Government's reforms in Ireland in this way, and many supported its efforts to remove established Protestantism from its privileged pedestal within society. The expressions of Presbyterians of all hues following Cooke's appearance on the Protestant Orange platform at Hillsborough must also reveal something about Presbyterian attitudes to Irish Catholics, as well as about their opposition to increasing co-operation with the Established Church.

In July 1835 at a joint meeting in Dublin of the three non-subscribing Presbyterian bodies (the Remonstrant Synod, the Presbytery of Antrim and the Synod of Munster), an address was framed stating that, 'we rejoice in... the beneficial tendency of the national system of Irish education... and when the political feelings at present arrayed against it under the guise of religion shall have passed away, we confidently anticipate its universal...reception'.¹⁵⁸ Even those evangelicals convinced of the righteousness of converting Catholics, opposed Cooke's sectarianism. In his pamphlet, *Against the Monstrous Union of Presbytery and Prelacy* the Rev. Daniel G. Brown of the Synod of Ulster stated that, 'Too long have our Roman Catholic countrymen been confirmed in their superstitions, either by open persecution, or by the slight and contumely of intolerance'.¹⁵⁹ Brown, like many Presbyterian ministers, argued that all hopes of converting Catholics were hampered by, 'the crimes that have been too often perpetrated in the sacred name of Protestantism', and for this he blamed the Church Establishment.¹⁶⁰ This sentiment was echoed in the Eastern Presbytery's pamphlet which argued that Roman Catholics had been 'long groaning under great oppression', not only from their own priests, but also from the Established Church and absentee landlords: 'the condition of African slaves is, in some respects, enviable, compared with theirs'.¹⁶¹ The pamphlet attacked Episcopalians and other so-called, 'Protestant watchmen': 'By your oppressive exactions, you have rivetted [*sic*] the prejudices of your Catholic fellow-subjects'.¹⁶² In essence, 'No people, while oppressed or persecuted ever were converted, or ever will be'.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁶ Ballymena had been the only Presbytery in the Synod of Ulster who had supported Cooke in declaring against Catholic Emancipation.

¹⁵⁷ *Times*, October 1 1834.

¹⁵⁸ *Minutes and Records of the Presbytery of Antrim*, vol.4, p.58, PRONI, T/1053/2.

¹⁵⁹ *The First and Second Blast of The Trumpet*, p.16.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.17.

¹⁶¹ Eastern Presbytery, *The Sign of the Times*, pp.22-3.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p.24.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.8.

Cooke, however, remained undeterred and in 1837 he and Stewart conducted a tour of Scotland in an attempt to rally support for their opposition to National Education and to all such concessions to Popery, and to raise funds for their counter-plans for a 'Scriptural scheme of education'. Addressing a meeting in Perth, Stewart lamented that Roman Catholics, 'now..... are patronized and encouraged; and if things go on as at present, in thirty years more, Popery', he warned his audience, 'will be established in Perth'.¹⁶⁴ The *Morning Chronicle* reported that, 'the Presbyterians of Perth....received it with general hissing'.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, Cooke was widely criticized for his activities and the *Londonderry Journal* noted how, 'He and his adherents have acquired a hold of the minds of the worst educated and most unreasoning of the presbyterian laity..... and their whole endeavours have been directed of late to create as wild and fanatical a spirit as ever appeared in any age'.¹⁶⁶

Speaking at a conservative dinner in Belfast in 1837, Cooke insisted that, 'the education of Ireland, so far as the public funds are concerned, is plainly delivered over to the hands of the Romish priesthood'.¹⁶⁷ In a letter to the *Northern Whig*, 'Amicus Justitiae' denounced Cooke's exertions, 'to excite opposition to Reform', by using the cry of a Catholic threat to Protestantism: 'Obsolete tenets and dogmas are ascribed to the Roman Catholics, which they have, long since, solemnly abjured.' He asked, 'Presbyterians of Ulster – is it with your approbation, that the Dictator, so called, of the Synod of Ulster, is become an itinerant knight, the champion of bigotry, intolerance, religious monopoly and tithes'.¹⁶⁸ At a dinner held in Belfast in honour of the Rev. Dr. Paul and the Eastern Presbytery for their, 'spirited resistance to intolerance in their own Synodical body, and to religious persecution in general', Dr. Cairns attacked those who (like Cooke) were eager to portray the advancement of civil and religious liberty as the end of Protestantism.¹⁶⁹

The Rev. John Dill of Carnmoney, who had praised his school's connexion with the Board in defiance of Cooke in the Synod in 1834, lamented the 'bigoted sectarianism' demonstrated by some and made a swipe at Cooke's desire to tie the Presbyterian Church to that of the Establishment.¹⁷⁰ The Rev. Clarke Houston asked how anyone could believe, 'that religion is promoted by civil and political

¹⁶⁴ Extracts from the *Morning Chronicle*, in *NW*, January 24 1837.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Londonderry Journal*, October 4 1837.

¹⁶⁷ *Speech of the Rev. Henry Cooke at the Conservative Dinner...October, 1837.*, p.18.

¹⁶⁸ *NW*, February 1837.

¹⁶⁹ *NW*, September 29 1838.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

disqualifications? that penal statutes and military authority will cause Protestantism to flourish in Ireland? that six millions of Roman Catholics will be converted, by excluding them from the privileges of the Constitution, and defaming the character of their Pastors?’ Houston concluded his speech by calling for, ‘A speedy union, and hearty co-operation of good men of all parties, and of different religious denominations in the promotion of knowledge, virtue and truth’.¹⁷¹ Peter Brooke has argued that the Covenanter Rev. John Paul ‘was the nineteenth century figure who came closest to the spirit of the United Irishmen’, referring to the tone of ‘revolutionary optimism’ in his *Causes of Fasting and Thanksgiving* pamphlet, which argued, ‘in terms strongly reminiscent of the United Irish period that Catholics fighting the oppressions of a Protestant church would necessarily become liberals’.¹⁷²

As noted in Chapter One, government conceded to some of the Synod of Ulster’s chief demands in 1840, namely, that Catholic priests would no longer be allowed *ex officio* rights of visitation, and the restrictions on the use of the Bible during normal school hours were reduced. Wright emphasized how anxious many Presbyterian liberals were for a settlement, disliking the very political way the opposition to the system had developed in the hands of Cooke and the established church.¹⁷³ In 1843 William Sharman Crawford told the House of Commons that in the north of Ireland the national education system was, ‘decidedly successful.... so far as respected the children of Presbyterians and Roman Catholics. Both these classes went in common to the schools, and were educated together; but he regretted to say that the clergy of the Established Church still thought themselves called upon to oppose the system’.¹⁷⁴ In 1852, at the height of the tenant right agitation, at a Free Trade Banquet held in Belfast and attended by many prominent Presbyterian ministers, the Presbyterian William Kirk toasted the National Education system, referring to his desire for union amongst Irishmen. ‘It was hopeless’, he said, ‘to abate prejudices amongst the old, they should therefore, educate the young together, to promote union amongst all’.¹⁷⁵

Repeal

But there was one subject upon which even the most liberal Presbyterians and Cooke were agreed, and that was the maintenance of the British connection. As Chapter

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, pp.159-61.

¹⁷³ Wright, *Two Lands*, p.66.

¹⁷⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 68, 717.

¹⁷⁵ *BU*, October 5 1852.

One emphasized, when the Act of Union came into effect in 1801, many Presbyterians, like most Catholics themselves, had remained strangely silent – few indeed shed many tears at the loss of the unreformed Irish parliament which had treated them as second class citizens.¹⁷⁶ Ian McBride has recently described this aptly as ‘Presbyterian acquiescence’¹⁷⁷ – more often than not the Union was greeted with neither opposition nor enthusiasm.

Yet by the 1830s, the Union was not merely accepted by the majority of Presbyterians in the north, but fiercely defended. This shift in position should not, argued Wright, and more recently, Holmes, be seen as a change in Presbyterian sentiment, but rather a pragmatic reaction to the changes within Ireland which had occurred since the turn of the century – chiefly the mobilisation and politicization of the country’s Catholic majority. As Wright commented, ‘The rise of O’Connell had changed the meaning of being Irish’.¹⁷⁸ It is not surprising, therefore, that Ulster’s Presbyterians found themselves seeking security in the British connection, underwritten, moreover, by the definite economic benefits to the north’s economy which the Union had eventually produced. Catholic Ireland’s political awakening compounded by O’Connell’s close association with the country’s Catholic Church hierarchy, left Presbyterians of the mid-nineteenth century facing the prospect of an independent Ireland in which they would constitute a small and relatively isolated minority in a Catholic-dominated state. It was only the acquiescence and submissiveness of Catholics in the later decades of the eighteenth century, which had made the prospect of ‘Ierne free’ a palatable theory for radical northern Presbyterians. The underlying principle in Presbyterians’ fervent opposition to O’Connell’s Repeal of the Union campaign was quite simply, ‘that Irish Presbyterians had suffered under and rebelled against an Irish Protestant ascendancy in the eighteenth century, [hence] they were determined not to be subjected to an Irish Roman Catholic ascendancy a century later’.¹⁷⁹

Just as Drennan’s *Belfast Monthly Magazine* had warned against the sectarian notion of ‘Catholic Ireland’ and ‘Catholic ascendancy’ as early as 1808, so Presbyterian writings after 1830 remained fixated with similar fears. Indeed, by the 1830s, the threat

¹⁷⁶ Holmes, *Presbyterian Heritage*, p.95.

¹⁷⁷ McBride, ‘Ulster Presbyterians and the Passing of the Act of Union’, p.83.

¹⁷⁸ Wright, *Two Lands*, pp.47-50.

¹⁷⁹ R.F.G. Holmes, ‘United Irishmen and Unionists: Irish Presbyterians, 1791 and 1886’, in W.J. Shiels and D. Wood (eds.), *The Churches, Ireland and the Irish: papers read at the 1987 Summer Meeting and the 1988 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society (Studies in Church History 25)*, (Oxford, 1989), p.189.

was far more real and immediate. O'Connell's repeal campaign had begun in the aftermath of the triumph of Catholic Emancipation, but it waxed and waned somewhat in its early days as O'Connell co-operated with the British Whig government in achieving reforms which would answer real Catholic grievances. In 1830 O'Connell had launched his campaign with a plea for Presbyterian support, predicting that, 'before THREE YEARS THE UNION WILL BE REPEALED'.¹⁸⁰ Sir Robert Bateson had been quick to respond to O'Connell, reassuring the Commons that, '99 out of every 100 persons in Ulster were opposed to the very agitation of the question of the repeal of the Union'.¹⁸¹ But it was not merely deeply conservative commentators of Presbyterian Ulster who concurred with that opinion.

At a meeting in Belfast in November 1830, some of the town's leading Presbyterian radicals, including Robert and William Tennent, convened to discuss this new repeal agitation.¹⁸² Whilst there was clear division on the issue, no one present expressed any enthusiasm for repeal. Indeed, the language used by some – that it was a Dublin agitation and O'Connell led – suggested that many Belfast radicals were unmoved. Robert Tennent noted carefully and cautiously his belief that, 'we [Belfast] are not dissatisfied with the Union'. Robert Grimshaw, however, affirmed that he had no wish to even discuss the idea of repeal, adding, 'that he conceived they derived great benefits from a close connexion with England'.¹⁸³ Bateson referred to this meeting the following week in Parliament, as proof of his assertion that repeal was generally unpopular in the north.¹⁸⁴

However, it is perhaps the private note of Robert James Tennent, which reveals most about the meeting. On a document entitled, 'Address of the Late Reform Dinner, of Belfast to their Fellow-Countrymen', Tennent has subsequently annotated it in his own hand: 'Written by R. Grimshaw – but objected to by the "repealers" – and replaced by an address drawn up by myself – see Whig of 20 Jan 31, RJT'.¹⁸⁵ Significantly, the original address by Grimshaw was quite *explicit* in its hostility to repeal: having listed the matters deserving reform, it asked, 'Would a Repeal of the Union do more? We think not.....We desire to see the Union modified, but not Repealed'.¹⁸⁶ Tennent's apparently more acceptable version was less dogmatic. Although placing the same

¹⁸⁰ *NW*, October 11 1830.

¹⁸¹ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.1, 321-2.

¹⁸² *BNL*, November 1830.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.1, 586.

¹⁸⁵ *Address of the Committee of the Late Reform Dinner of Belfast, to their Fellow-Countrymen*, with annotations by Robert James Tennent, PRONI, D/1748/G/779/5.

emphasis on the need for radical reform of Ireland's 'misgovernment', it added, 'You, who believe that the national will is in favour of a Repeal of the Union, join us first in procuring Reform', for, 'if the Repeal of the Union be a good measure, and if public opinion be really in favour of it, Reform would greatly strengthen the hands of its advocates'.¹⁸⁷

At the great Belfast Reform Meeting in December 1830, Grimshaw denounced O'Connell's activities, and asked Irishmen to unite in procuring reform, not repeal. He commented that, 'it is to be regretted, that the colossal champion of Irish liberty...should unite his great talents in agitating a question, which many patriotic men think calculated to divide our country once more'.¹⁸⁸ Grimshaw was of course correct in regarding O'Connell's repeal demands as likely to split the country along religious lines. Similarly, Rev. Henry Montgomery, speaking at the same meeting called for, 'a Society of United Irishmen – not such as had formerly borne that designation; but one consisting of men of all creeds and denominations...'.¹⁸⁹ Montgomery was equally opposed to O'Connell's mission to push repeal in Ireland – regarding it as detrimental to the unity of Catholic and Protestant. Above all, Montgomery touched on the real fears of northern Presbyterians, when he commented, 'I equally abhor all ascendancy, Catholic, Protestant, or Presbyterian'.¹⁹⁰

It was indeed Montgomery who articulated a vigorous and bitter rebuff to O'Connell in 1831 in a public letter to the 'Liberator'.¹⁹¹ It demonstrated how far the repeal campaign had driven a wedge between liberal Protestant and Catholic opinions, for it had only been a few years earlier that O'Connell had offered to represent the Presbyterian minister free of charge, in the latter's dispute with the Marquis of Hertford. Now, O'Connell denounced him as a 'sycophant' for his 'loyal' address to the Lord Lieutenant, whilst Montgomery spoke of O'Connell with, 'contempt' as a 'second-rate barrister'. Montgomery reminded O'Connell of the strength of support he had received from many liberal Presbyterians in support of his campaign for Catholic Emancipation, and defended their right to disagree with him on the subject of repeal.¹⁹² Coming from

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ New draft version by Tennent, PRONI, D/1748/G/778/7A, and final version published in *NW*, January 20 1831.

¹⁸⁸ Report of Belfast Reform Meeting, December 2 1830, PRONI, D/2922/C/1/1.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Speech at Belfast Reform Meeting, December 2 1830, PRONI, D/2922/C/1/1.

¹⁹¹ *Letter to Daniel O'Connell, Esq. M.P. by the Rev. Henry Montgomery. To which is added, The Address of the Synod of Munster, Presbytery of Antrim, and Remonstrant Synod of Ulster, to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, with His Excellency's Reply* (Belfast, 1831)

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

the pen of a liberal Presbyterian such as Montgomery, this letter publicly denounced repeal in unqualified terms, long before even Cooke had done so.

For staunch conservatives like Cooke, the repeal agitation provided the perfect medium for promoting his 'Protestant Union'. At a Protestant meeting near Downpatrick in January 1832, an establishment clergyman called on 'his Presbyterian brethren' to make common cause with Anglicans in opposing O'Connell, 'the abettor of Popery'. 'Dan's interest and ours can never agree'.¹⁹³ And whilst most Presbyterians did not share in the political conservatism voiced at the meeting, they were certainly in agreement on the dangers of repeal. The consistent failure of Robert James Tennent to get elected for Belfast was in no small part due to the efforts of his conservative rivals who represented him as friendly to O'Connell and repeal, compounded by Tennent's own ambiguity on the matter. Writing to Tennent in 1835, on his failure to win a Belfast seat for the liberals in 1832, the Presbyterian John Workman noted that, 'the only fault I could learn that you had was that you were a repealer'.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, Tennent was eventually forced to produce an official statement clearing himself of such a charge.¹⁹⁵ But as late as 1836, the conservative *Ulster Times* was still able to use the repeal ticket to discredit their liberal opponent, referring to Tennent's 'accession to the tail of the Agitator'.¹⁹⁶

As mentioned already, the Union was lauded in the north of Ireland for the prosperity it had brought, and many Presbyterian merchants and businessmen had been direct beneficiaries of, 'Irish commercial advancement, as promoted by the Union'.¹⁹⁷ Undoubtedly, as Emerson Tennent, conservative M.P for Belfast emphasized when discussing the north, 'The source of her prosperity has been British connexion, and the participation of British resources',¹⁹⁸ – claims apparently borne out by sizeable increases in foreign trade and a flourishing cotton industry in Belfast.¹⁹⁹ But he struck at the over-riding preoccupation of Presbyterians which rendered even the most liberal, an unqualified unionist, when he foretold that, 'to repeal the Union now, would be to hand over Ireland to the control of men.....whose ambition we have every reason to dread'.

¹⁹³ *A Voice from Inch. Great Protestant Meeting at Inch.* J.W. Maxwell has endorsed this copy of the pamphlet, "To all good Protestants".

¹⁹⁴ John Workman, Belfast to Robert James Tennent, August 18 1835, PRONI, D/1748/G/732/1. See Chapter Five.

¹⁹⁵ Indeed, in 1832 Tennent had declared to an election meeting in Belfast that, 'I will give no public pledge or expression of opinion on the question of Repeal', but by 1835 he denied that he was a Repealer. PRONI, D/1748/G/781/1 and *Ulster Times*, August 29 1835.

¹⁹⁶ *Ulster Times*, September 20 1836.

¹⁹⁷ Speech of Emerson Tennent M.P, in Commons on the Repeal of the Union, *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.22, 1316.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.1317.

Tennent also recalled the prophecy of a Roman Catholic at the time of the Union debates, that, 'if many Catholics get into Parliament, they will form a Catholic opposed to a Protestant faction'. 'Such then...', he argued, 'would be the result of restoring the Irish Parliament, constituted, as it would be now, of a large proportion of Roman Catholics'.²⁰⁰ Emancipation had made this a mathematical certainty.

By 1840, when O'Connell's agitation was once again under way, Presbyterian opinion seemed unanimous in its total opposition to repeal of the union, demonstrated significantly, by the unqualified commitment of even the *Whig* to the British connexion. In 1827, the newspaper had felt bold enough to comment that, 'the promises and advantages held out at the Union have never been made good',²⁰¹ but thirteen years later, its editorial was emphatic that Ulster had prospered under the Union, and therefore, it must not be repealed.²⁰² When a new liberal Ulster Constitutional Association was established in Belfast in 1840, its members were careful to declare that they had no connexion whatsoever with O'Connell and Repeal.²⁰³ Instead, they continued to advocate, 'the happy union of Irishmen of every denomination, for the good of our common country'.²⁰⁴ As Robert James Tennent's electoral career had shown, any such association was a Protestant vote killer in the environs of Belfast. Offering, by their own admission, a middle ground for liberal Protestants who repudiated both Protestant Ascendancy and Repeal, the Ulster Constitutional Association was described by the Rev. Henry Montgomery, one of its members, as designed to show Britain that the label 'Ulster Protestant' was far from synonymous with 'Orange and High Tory' politics.²⁰⁵ Montgomery called for a union of all Irishmen, based on the one hand, on an end to Protestant desires for ascendancy and exclusive monopoly, and on the other, Catholic renunciation of desires for repeal. Thus, Montgomery was arguing the liberal Presbyterian line that the agitation for repeal was destroying hopes for a union of all Irishmen. He regretted that, 'there is still a desire on the one side to regain their former ascendancy, and on the other, a desire to ask more than the Constitution of the country would sanction'.²⁰⁶

¹⁹⁹ See Cormac O'Grada, *Ireland: A New Economic History 1780-1939* (1994; Oxford, 2001)

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.1323-30.

²⁰¹ *NW*, November 1 1827.

²⁰² *NW*, August 22 1840.

²⁰³ *Times*, July 27 1840.

²⁰⁴ Printed list of 'Toasts at Dinner of Ulster Constitutional Association, Belfast, 1 October 1840', PRONI, D/1748/G/775/1.

²⁰⁵ *NW*, August 15 1840.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

In 1841 O'Connell made a disastrous visit to the North of Ireland, to stir support for his repeal campaign, culminating in his sheepish departure from Belfast in the face of Henry Cooke's demand for a public debate between the two men on the subject of the Union.²⁰⁷ Cooke united Presbyterian opinion of all political hues in his rebuttal of O'Connell and in his famous address to the Catholic leader, 'the Cooke who dished Dan', emphasized this unity himself: 'I tell you, little for your comfort, Mr. O'Connell, there is not, to my knowledge, a Presbyterian Repealer in Ulster.....Minor political differences there may be amongst us; but in opposition to you and Repeal, we present a united and indissoluble front.'²⁰⁸ 'That Repeal is essentially a Roman Catholic interest, no one can doubt – its object and untended effect are to give Irish Roman Catholics an ascendant preponderance in the councils of state'.²⁰⁹ Cooke continued, 'It is then quite consistent with human nature in its selfish aspects, that Roman Catholics should seek for their own corporate elevation'. He described repeal as a measure which, '*must* have the effect of establishing in this country a Roman Catholic ascendancy'.²¹⁰ The term 'Catholic Ascendancy' was a frequent refrain in Cooke and others' anti-repeal addresses at this time, and his use of the term 'invasion'²¹¹ to describe O'Connell's visit northward was no less skilful in exciting Protestant fears. Somewhat ironically, like Montgomery in 1831, Cooke recalled the role of Protestants in supporting Catholic Emancipation.

Cooke read a letter signed by the Belfast radicals Robert James Tennent and Robert Grimshaw, denouncing O'Connell for his sectarian stance and his, 'unjustifiable attacks, directed against the Liberal Protestants of Belfast'.²¹² He was keen to emphasize the 'sectarian exclusiveness attempted by the Repeal clique'.²¹³ Rev. Robert Stewart echoed Cooke's words, declaring, 'I am here this day as the opponent of Popish ascendancy, which is unquestionably, the ultimate object of the Arch-Agitator in his Repeal and other movements, and Popery and liberty are the most perfect incompatibles in nature'.²¹⁴ Stewart reflected the fears of many Presbyterians when he referred to the influence of the priest over Catholic voters, and Cooke underlined the economic

²⁰⁷ See *The Repealer Repulsed! A Correct Narrative of the Rise and Progress of the Invasion of Ulster: Dr. Cooke's Challenge and Mr. O'Connell's Declinature, Tactics and Flight. With Appropriate Poetical and Pictorial Illustrations. Also, an Authentic Report of the Great Conservative Demonstrations, in Belfast, on the 21st and 23rd of January, 1841* (Belfast, 1841)

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.24.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.5.

²¹² *Ibid.*, pp.35-6.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p.36.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.82-3.

benefits which Union had created in his famous ‘Look at Belfast, and be a Repealer – if you can’²¹⁵ speech. O’Connell’s visit to Belfast had produced a frenzied response to the threat of repeal in the north, and the notion of ‘Presbyterian loyalty’ to the British connection had rarely been so enthusiastically expressed; the fear of Catholic ascendancy had certainly frightened northern Presbyterians. But in the years that followed, as Chapter One described, the relationship between northern Presbyterians and the British government was sorely tested, and whilst Presbyterians maintained their opposition to repeal, they became bolder at asserting their own strategic significance to Britain. Indeed, at these moments of high tension, the veiled threat of Presbyterian support for Repeal of the Union could be raised, *by Presbyterians themselves*, in an effort to exert pressure on the British government. Whilst repealers did attempt to use this discontent of the 1840s to rally Presbyterian interest in the agitation, the *Banner of Ulster* remained solidly dismissive of such overtures. Responding to the claims of a southern newspaper that Presbyterians from Down had recently attended a repeal meeting in Dundalk, the organ of the General Assembly, unsurprisingly, stated that the only Presbyterians involved were a handful of Unitarians, admitting that on the whole, ‘the members even of that body are generally opposed to Repeal, and all orthodox Presbyterians must regard it as a great calamity’.²¹⁶

However, beyond the mainstream there existed a small minority of Presbyterians for whom the notion of repeal was not an anathema. In July 1843 the *Nation* printed a letter from ‘A Presbyterian Repealer’, focusing on the injustice meted out to Presbyterians by the government over marriage rights.²¹⁷ ‘Seriously –’, the writer commented, ‘the Presbyterians are beginning to reflect upon this, and to ask themselves whether the reasonable wishes, the highest and dearest interests of so influential a body, *could* be so completely disregarded if our court of last resort were seated in Dublin’. Addressing the question of the changing nature of ‘Irish nationalism’ since the 1790s, ‘A Presbyterian Repealer’ added, ‘It needed not this decision of the English judges to make *me* a Repealer. In 1798 my father was an United Irishman. I have been a Repealer since 1832; and my children shall be brought up in such principles that whatever form Irish nationality shall take in their day to resist English domination...., their place shall be on the side of their country’.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.111.

²¹⁶ *BU*, July 4 1843.

²¹⁷ *Nation*, July 22 1843.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Clearly the 'Presbyterian Repealer' did not represent the majority of Presbyterian opinion, even within liberal ranks. But O'Connell's repealers continued to make much capital from any Presbyterian support, no matter how isolated. In July 1844 the *Banner* referred to donations made to the Repeal funds from northern Presbyterians and a tablecloth dispatched from a Presbyterian in Banbridge.²¹⁹ The paper was of course keen to claim that these subscribers were all Unitarians, although this must be set in the context of the bitterness at the recently passed Dissenters' Chapels Bill. The *Banner* quoted at length the details of a 'Presbyterian visit to O'Connell', recording that the Rev. Hugh Doherty, Presbyterian minister in Comber, and moderator of the Remonstrant Synod, had visited O'Connell in Richmond penitentiary,²²⁰ 'to thank him, and through him, all the Roman Catholics in Ireland, for their support' regarding the Dissenters' Chapels Bill.

Moreover, Doherty was quoted as having 'stated for himself, and all the Liberal Presbyterians of Ulster, that although they may differ from their fellow-countrymen, the R.Cs of Ireland, on the question of Repeal', they firmly believed that O'Connell had not received a fair trial.²²¹ So even Remonstrants, whilst they recognized and appreciated the Catholic assistance they had received in the House of Commons, made clear their opposition to repeal. The voice of Presbyterian conservative opinion, Henry Cooke, must surely have been frustrated that, despite the threat of repeal and the fears of a Catholic take-over, the majority of Presbyterians did not move towards his 'Protestant Union', and that his political conservatism remained, in general, highly unpopular. Yet on the issue of repeal, even the thoroughly orthodox Presbyterian James Gibson, elected liberal M.P for Belfast in 1837, and who had opposed Cooke over National Education and the policy of conciliation with the established church, was in agreement with him in his opposition to O'Connell.²²²

From 1842 however, the National Repeal Association began to fissure under the challenge offered to O'Connell's Catholic vision by a group of young, idealistic cultural nationalists, dubbed 'Young Ireland', through the medium of their newspaper, the *Nation*. This group of Catholics and Protestants, including a lapsed northern Presbyterian, John Mitchel, son of the remonstrance minister, Rev. John Mitchel of Newry, articulated a vision of 'Irishness' which harked back to the days of Tone and the

²¹⁹ *BU*, July 19 1844.

²²⁰ O'Connell was imprisoned after a successful government prosecution was brought against him for sedition following his climb down over the planned Clontarf Repeal meeting in 1843, Oliver MacDonagh, 'Politics, 1830-45' in *New History of Ireland*, 5, vol.1., p.185.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, p.182.

United Irishmen, in direct opposition to the Catholic-centric philosophy of O'Connell's brand of repeal.²²³ The fundamental divisions between O'Connell and Young Ireland became increasingly significant. In the aftermath of O'Connell's humiliating climb down in the face of government pressure, in cancelling the great repeal meeting at Clontarf in 1843, his influence steadily declined. Although O'Connell succeeded in ousting the 'Young Irelanders' from the Repeal Association in 1847 over the issue of the use of physical force to achieve repeal, his success was short-lived.

The death of O'Connell in May 1847 – for so many years the leader and embodiment of Presbyterian fears and paranoia of a Catholic dominated Ireland – was clearly significant. Furthermore, as Frank Wright emphasized, the non-sectarian brand of 'Irish nationalism' propounded by the Young Irelanders was considerably less threatening to northern Protestants, precisely because they opposed any form of Catholic ascendancy.²²⁴ Crucially, their minority position rendered these repealers much less of a practical threat, compared with O'Connell's mass numerical appeal to Roman Catholic Ireland. Finally, but far from least, the onset of famine which coincided with the changes within the ranks of the repealers in 1846-7, rendered the whole notion of repeal of the union as something of a dead letter in the short-term, in the face of economic and social catastrophe. Undoubtedly, it was the combination of these factors – removing the fundamentally divisive issue of repeal of the Union from centre stage – which helped to pave the way for the Presbyterian-Catholic co-operation which emerged during the years of the tenant right campaign.

Wright argued that with the eclipsing of O'Connell by Young Ireland, there was 'a substantial body of Protestant opinion favourable to repeal of the Union in 1847-48', 'precisely because the Confederation did not have the machinery of pan-Catholic power behind it'.²²⁵ In other words, the 'abstract' concept of repeal, stripped of its purely Catholic colours, was not repulsive to every Protestant. Wright has also highlighted the existence of several Young Ireland groups in Belfast, dubbed significantly, 'Drennan clubs',²²⁶ who were often on less than favourable terms with the town's old repealers. Speaking as part of a Young Ireland deputation to Belfast in November 1847, Francis Meagher commented, 'I know that many of you are the enemies of Repeal. I know full well that in the north, Repeal has been identified with Popery, whilst Union has been identified with Protestantism', and he admitted the Catholic nature of the movement,

²²³ J. C. Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland, 1603-1923*, new edn, pp.331-5.

²²⁴ Wright, *Two Lands*, pp.142-50.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.149.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.145.

and the significance of priests within it. ‘Catholic Ascendancy!’, Meagher warned, ‘...is a ghost that frightens you – and whilst you stand trembling before it the Union, which is no ghost, is playing the thief behind your back’.²²⁷

In October 1847, a letter in the *Nation* ‘Addressed to the Presbyterian and Protestant Laity of Ulster’, from ‘An Ulster Presbyterian’, invoked the idea of a union of all Irishmen, denouncing, ‘those feelings of religious rancour and party attachment, which are inimical to the gathering and growing principles of social and national independence’.²²⁸ The writer rejoiced for the day in Ireland, ‘when her patriot sons shall once more see her dear old parliament-house thrown open to receive the commissioned legislators of her free choice; and when a new impulse shall be given to her people’s energies by a free and native LEGISLATURE’.²²⁹ The Presbyterian John Rea joined William Smith O’Brien and John Mitchel in addressing the Young Ireland meeting in Belfast in 1847, Rea recalling with pride, ‘that he was a grandson of one who bore arms, and supported the principles of the Irish Volunteers, and who had fought noble for the cause at Ballinahinch [*sic*]’.²³⁰

However, mainstream Presbyterian opinion, as represented by its two leading newspapers, the *Whig* and the *Banner*, and by the Church’s leading Synods, remained soundly anti-repeal. In an editorial in the *Londonderry Standard*, James McKnight warned Presbyterians that, ‘such foolish pseudo-Protestant adventurers as O’Brien and Mitchel cannot, in the least appreciable degree, mitigate or qualify the real sectarianism, the intense Popery, of the Repeal Movement...and no enlightened Protestant can entertain a rational doubt that Repeal would sound the knell of Protestant safety’.²³¹ But equally, McKnight implored Presbyterians *not* to join Orange associations, irrespective of the threat of Popery, because its underlying principle was, ‘the maintenance of the Protestant institutions of this country’, and in particular the Established Church of Ireland. McKnight argued that, ‘no well informed and conscientious Presbyterian believes that the welfare of the country, or the interests of true religion, are identified with the maintenance of the secular rank and wealth of the Established Church’. Above all, and in direct opposition to Cooke’s vision, McKnight wrote, ‘We caution the Presbyterians of Ireland against allowing themselves to be ensnared into a solemn pledge, to maintain an adverse ecclesiastical system, under the specious plea of the

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.146.

²²⁸ *Nation*, October 30 1847.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *BU*, November 16 1847.

²³¹ *LS*, May 26 1848.

dangers to our common Protestantism'.²³² McKnight's opposition to Repeal of the Union was matched by an inherently anti-establishment outlook that opposed both the Anglican Church and landlords. This presents a stark contrast to the conservative Rev. Robert Stewart's plea in 1843 to Presbyterians, not to allow the marriages question to create bad feeling and division between themselves and Episcopalians, in the face of 'the apprehended.... ascendancy of error and superstition'.²³³

Peel and Maynooth

During the years 1844 and 1845, the relationship between Presbyterians and Roman Catholics was somewhat overshadowed by the bitterness caused by the Dissenters' Chapels Bill within the northern Presbyterian Church itself. In their struggle with the General Assembly, Rev. Henry Montgomery and the Remonstrants received support from, amongst others, many Roman Catholics.²³⁴ The unprecedented situation of Presbyterian and Catholic against Presbyterian was largely transposed into the debate which erupted in 1845 with the Government's proposed bill to increase the state grant to Maynooth, Ireland's Catholic seminary.

Particularly across England, protestant opinion reacted with horror. However, Irish Presbyterian opinion, was somewhat more divided. The position of the *Banner* was resolutely hostile to the increased endowment of Maynooth,²³⁵ whilst shrugging off accusations of hypocrisy in Presbyterian receipt of the *regium donum*.²³⁶ The paper's editorial dismissed the increase as, 'a preamble to the endowment of Romanism'.²³⁷ The Presbytery of Belfast and that of Carrickfergus, Banbridge, and Comber drew up resolutions against the measure,²³⁸ but by contrast, the Remonstrant Synod presented a petition to Parliament in support of the bill.²³⁹

Representing the Arians, the *Whig* attacked the *Banner*'s opposition to the grant, arguing for the justice that, 'the great body of Catholics....are regarded as fully entitled to impartial treatment, as British citizens'.²⁴⁰ The *Belfast Newsletter* accused the Remonstrants of being in league with their Roman Catholic 'allies', firstly, with

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *BNL*, November 28 1843.

²³⁴ See *NW* June 4 1844, letter from a 'Liberal Presbyterian' detailing extent of Catholic support in his area for the Dissenter's Chapels Bill; and *Nation*, May 25 1844.

²³⁵ *BU*, March 28 1845. The paper referred to the proposed endowment increase as a 'misappropriation of the national revenue'.

²³⁶ *NW*, April 17 1845.

²³⁷ *BU*, April 8 1845.

²³⁸ *Times*, April 8; *BU*, April 4 1845.

²³⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.79, 545. Peel controversially used this when addressing the Commons, as proof of the favourable stance of Irish Presbyterians in general.

Catholic support for the Dissenters' Chapel Bill, and now, with Unitarian support for Maynooth's endowment.²⁴¹ At the same time, O'Connell expressed his regret that orthodox Presbyterians should oppose the endowment, given the support they had offered the Presbyterians during the Marriages crisis. It was support which the *Banner* openly acknowledged, yet, it did not alter the newspaper's opinion on Maynooth.²⁴² It was clear however, that much of the debate stirred over the Maynooth Bill was being led more enthusiastically by ministers than laymen. A letter in the *Whig* from 'A Presbyterian', belonging to a Belfast church, described how his minister had informed his congregation of the resolutions drawn up by the Belfast Presbytery, 'praying the Legislature not to endow the Roman Catholic seminary of Maynooth'.²⁴³ Referring to the *regium donum*, he accused his minister of utter hypocrisy, adding, 'It appears to me... to be high time for the people to assert their own independence in this temporal matter'. Above all, 'not to permit these teaching Elders to assume to themselves the authority of rulers, and, under the cloak of religion, to dictate to their hearers what the course of conduct shall be, in cases involving the rights of their fellow-men; – it becomes everyone who sympathizes with the wrongs of his Catholic brethren, and wishes to see some little restitution made....to petition for the grant to Maynooth'.²⁴⁴ When the *Times* referred to an address from the Presbyterians of Derry against the bill, the address was in fact from four ministers, calling on the city's presbyterians to join them in deprecating the plans.²⁴⁵ Another petition presented in the Commons in opposition to the endowment in May 1845 came once again from a Presbytery, this time that of Armagh.²⁴⁶

During a debate on the Maynooth endowment in the General Assembly in July, where two petitions were presented from members of congregations in Belfast and Derry, the liberal elder, James Gibson stated his position on the matter:²⁴⁷ 'He had always felt, and always would feel, that Catholic emancipation had been a measure of tardy justice, too long delayed to be productive of all the good which it might once have effected – that pains and penalties were never calculated to counteract error or advance truth. (Hear, hear.) He was as ready now as in 1829 to defend the rights of his Roman

²⁴⁰ *NW*, April 10 1845.

²⁴¹ As quoted in *Times*, April 21 1845.

²⁴² O'Connell had been one of the first M.P.s in the Commons to condemn the purely retrospective nature of the proposed marriage law in 1842. *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 60, 1180-1, February 28 1842. See also *BU*, April 25 1845.

²⁴³ *NW*, May 13 1845.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *Times*, May 17 1845.

²⁴⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.80, 659-60.

Catholic countrymen to the full participation of every right, civil or religious, which he wished to claim for himself; but, that whilst he professed his willingness to promote the fullest equality, he was at the same time, determined to resist, in every shape, whatever might tend to any ascendancy. The views which he entertained were perfectly consistent with each other...'.²⁴⁸ Furthermore, the response of another speaker in the assembly reinforced the idea that, on the whole, the Presbyterian opposition to Maynooth was largely clerical. W. Todd praised the benefits of the Assembly undertaking such a discussion on the subject of Maynooth, 'for it would set the laity of the Church to work, and rouse them to examine this important subject'.²⁴⁹

Rev. Paul's Eastern Presbytery also opposed the increased endowment to Maynooth, not only because they fundamentally opposed the concept of any such state grants to religion, but also because of the dreaded spectre of catholic ascendancy. 'We protest against the Maynooth endowment', their resolution stated, 'because it is the insertion of the small end of the wedge. The first movement was an *annual* grant to Maynooth College; the second movement is a *permanent endowment* of Maynooth College; the third step will probably be a *pension to the Roman Catholic clergy*; the last step will be *the establishment of the Roman Catholic religion in Ireland*.²⁵⁰ In the House of Commons, the Belfast liberal M.P., David Ross referred to the injustice of endowing the Presbyterian Church with the *regium donum*, whilst refusing financial aid for the Catholic church, especially, 'considering that there was more difference between the Presbyterian religion and the religion of the Church of England, than there was between the latter and the Church of Rome'.²⁵¹

The ambiguous and splintered position of Presbyterian Ulster towards not only Irish Catholics and their rights, but also towards the British government, created the fluid conditions which in the years 1842 to 1845 enabled various groups of Presbyterians to receive support from, and in turn offer support to, Roman Catholics. All of this fluidity, was of course, ultimately bound by a tacit Presbyterian acceptance of the British connexion. But nonetheless, it is significant that during the marriages crisis, when Presbyterian Ulster found itself aligned against both the British government and the established church, Catholics had offered their support, (albeit in the hope that affairs would render the Presbyterians more amenable towards Irish independence).

²⁴⁷ *Report of a Discussion in the General Assembly ... on Monday July 7 1845.*

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.23.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.79, 756.

Moreover, during the Scottish Church disruption, the Rev. Dr. Edgar, the Moderator of the General Assembly, wrote a letter of thanks to the Protestant Young Irelander, William Smith O'Brien, for his vote in Parliament on behalf of the Church of Scotland.²⁵² During the 'Mathews' dispute it had been two Roman Catholic M.P.s, John Sadleir and Frank Scully who defended the Presbyterians in parliament. During the dissenters' meeting house dispute, Roman Catholic petitions had been numerous signed in support of Montgomery and the Remonstrants in their battle with the General Assembly,²⁵³ and finally, as noted, some Presbyterians had offered their support on the Maynooth endowment.

Tenant Right, the Tenant League and 'Papal Aggression'

As the subject of tenant right began to preoccupy the pages of the local press, a letter from 'A Northern Presbyterian' in April 1848 which appeared in the northern Catholic newspaper, the *Vindicator*, was hailed by the *Nation*, as the spirit which should infuse all Irishmen.²⁵⁴ The writer called on a union of all religions to banish, 'the foul and desolating curse of sectarian animosity'. Declaring himself, 'one who is neither a Catholic or a repealer', he called on all Irishmen to, 'Promise assistance or sympathy to no government that will not secure your tenant-right and equitable rents', and that should, 'substantial justice be refused you, then again, I say, let brother unite with brother in one common cause.....and if the just clamour of our farming interests – suffering under oppression and intolerable taxes, and threatened with the confiscation of whatever industrial benefit they have acquired by the improvement of their holdings – be unheeded and unrelieved, the sooner the flag of Ireland floats on the free winds of heaven the better, inscribed with the ominous words – *Ireland for the Irish! Down with tyrants!*'²⁵⁵ The land question and the issue of tenant right were indeed to unite radical Presbyterian and Roman Catholic in a union against Anglican landlord domination.

The relatively short-lived nature of this co-operation has been somewhat cynically regarded by some historians as far less significant than those involved at the time would claim. Thus, Roy Foster refers to it as, 'far from being a "League of North and South", as Duffy grandiosely christened it'.²⁵⁶ However, the unprecedented co-operation of the two religions, the re-emphasis by certain Presbyterians of their

²⁵² *BU*, March 31 1843.

²⁵³ See *NW*, June 4 1844; *Nation*, May 25 1844.

²⁵⁴ *Nation*, April 29 1848.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972* (1988; London, 1989), p.382.

'Irishness', and the references to 'Erin go bragh', 'Ireland free', and the 'Emerald Isle' undoubtedly evoked scenes reminiscent of the 1790s. David Miller emphasizes that, 'Presbyterian tenants had taken the lead in land reform agitation since the 1850s and had been quite willing to join forces with Catholic agitation for similar purposes in the south'. Crucially, he notes that, 'we should not underestimate the disposition on the part of Protestant, especially Presbyterian, tenants to agitate for reforms of benefit to Catholics as well as themselves in the period 1850-1880'.²⁵⁷ As S.M. Stewart has commented in his study of County Down politics, the involvement of northern Presbyterians ministers in the Dublin based Tenant League 'warrants at least as much attention as the involvement of presbyterian tenant farmers in the local outbreak of rebellion in 1798'.²⁵⁸

As mentioned previously, the demise of repeal from the centre stage in 1848 opened new possibilities for Ireland. Moreover, the events of the Famine itself had, as Peter Brooke emphasizes, created a limited degree of shared suffering and mutual support between northern and southern districts which may otherwise not have existed.²⁵⁹ It was, however, the efforts of two individuals in particular – Charles Gavan Duffy and James McKnight – which helped pioneer the possibility of fusing the tenant right agitation across north and south into concerted action. Whilst historians have noted that the meaning of 'tenant right' was fundamentally different to each community,²⁶⁰ Wright has stressed that such differences were, 'not necessarily politically fundamental in the long run'.²⁶¹ Indeed, he underlines the crucial role played by the radical McKnight in perpetuating a theory of the plantation which could reconcile all sides on the question of land origin. As Elliott has noted, it was, 'an intriguing interpretation of the Ulster Plantation', in which the original undertakers were simply trustees rather than outright owners.²⁶² In the publication of his ideas in 1848 McKnight was keen to emphasize that, 'the Ulster Custom [must] be the law of universal Ireland', adding that, 'the men of the North, without distinction of religious creed or political party, are firmly united together'.²⁶³ Indeed, long before the formation

²⁵⁷ David W. Miller, *Queen's Rebels: Ulster Loyalism in Historical Perspective* (Dublin and New York, 1978), pp.76-7.

²⁵⁸ S.M. Stewart, 'Presbyterian Radicalism', p.184.

²⁵⁹ Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, p.188: 'however much proselytism might have been practised, the fact remained that Protestant Ireland, including the Presbyterians, had put an enormous effort into famine relief'.

²⁶⁰ Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, pp.318-9; Miller, *Queen's Rebels*, pp.77-8. There was a contrast between, 'southern tenants' claims and northern tenants' claims based upon antithetical myths of origin'.²⁶⁰

²⁶¹ Wright, *Two Lands*, p.172.

²⁶² Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, p.319.

²⁶³ James McKnight, *The Ulster Tenants' Claim of Right*, p.62 and p.71.

of the League of North and South, Roman Catholic priests and Presbyterian clergymen had already appeared together on tenant right platforms around Ulster.

Wright has also emphasized the pivotal role which McKnight, as editor at various times of two leading Presbyterian journals, played in creating a sense of empathy with the south and west of the country, and in dispelling Presbyterian parochialism.²⁶⁴ In McKnight's crucial first editorial at the *Banner of Ulster*, he launched a massive attack on the conservative Anglican minister, the Rev. Dr. Drew, and on the Church Education Society.²⁶⁵ McKnight challenged Drew's comments on Popery, arguing, 'we doubt whether it is correct to allege that Popery is the "sole cause of all the poverty, wretchedness and insubordination and crime which affect this unhappy country". We apprehend that there are other causes in operation besides Popery, though it too has its pernicious influence; while as to "poverty" and "crime", we greatly suspect that bad landlordism has operated as a faithful and most efficient ally of Popery in this work of national disorganization'. In addition McKnight denounced the Church Education society as merely, 'an ill-disguised attempt on part of the Established Church, to regain its old monopoly over the educational institutions of this country'.²⁶⁶ He argued the typical radical Presbyterian line, that it was the 'persecuting' policy of the established church which had, 'made Irish Popery the proverbially inveterate evil that it is'.²⁶⁷ McKnight's comments and his wider efforts at this time in Ulster to create a sense of 'shared suffering' at the hands of bad landlords, was certainly a significant departure.

The sanction given to McKnight's efforts by the large number of Presbyterian ministers who endorsed the Tenant Right Associations across Ulster, is testimony to the willingness of some to put both religious and political differences aside in the face of the Anglican establishment. At a tenant right meeting in Dungannon in May 1848, Presbyterian ministers including, David Bell of Ballybay, James Rentoul of Garvagh, and Daniel G. Brown of Newtownhamilton, and Presbyterian laymen, including Sam Greer of Derry and McKnight himself, all stood alongside a number of parish priests.²⁶⁸ McKnight rejoiced that his local Derry Tenant Right Association was, 'based upon political and religious neutrality amongst its members inside the walls of the Association'.²⁶⁹ The Young Irelander, William Smith O'Brien warned the House of

²⁶⁴ Wright, *Two Lands*, pp.132-4; p.159-60; p.171-3.

²⁶⁵ *BU*, September 4 1849; see Wright, *Two Lands*, pp.180-1.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.* (my underlining)

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ *BU*, May 26 1848.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Commons that if government could offer nothing better than Sir William Somerville's Bill, then, 'there would be a general combination, which would include not only the peasantry of the south of Ireland, but the Presbyterian yeomanry of the north – a combination against the rights of property'.²⁷⁰ At a tenant right meeting in Banbridge to oppose Somerville's proposals, the interdenominational character of the meeting was celebrated by the Rev. Mr McAllister: 'for it would shew, to the Government, that the question of tenant-right was a neutral ground – a ground on which all Irishmen could meet'.²⁷¹

At a tenant right demonstration in Banbridge in January 1850, the Presbyterian minister, Rev. William Dobbin referred to the long policy of British administrations, conservatives, and landlord interests in perpetuating sectarian division in Ireland for their own selfish purposes.²⁷² This theme of 'divide and rule' was echoed by Presbyterian and Catholic speakers throughout the tenant right and League campaigns. Dobbin stated that, 'They know that if they can excite the Protestant against the Catholic – perpetual religious and political animosities – they can then rack-rent you with impunity..... let Irishmen consider they are all brethren – let each man grasp the hand of a brother, and agree to differ until they have emancipated the land from feudal absolutism'.²⁷³ Such scenes and expressions of unity were repeated across the north at tenant right displays.

The Rev. Joseph Bellis told an audience gathered in the Cairncullagh Presbyterian meeting house in Dervock that, 'Never was he so near being a Repealer, except perhaps, last week, when he read Sir William Somerville's Landlord Bill'.²⁷⁴ The *Times* expressed disgust at the expressions uttered at these demonstrations, and was particularly rattled by the scale of 'the agitation which has been set on foot by the Presbyterian clergy of the North and the Roman Catholic priests of the South'.²⁷⁵ Similarly, in June it deplored, 'the complete fraternization of the Romish and Presbyterian clergy in a common cause, and with a common end in view', and in particular a recent speech by the Rev. Rentoul, in which he stated that, 'Ireland never has been united before for legal objects.....It has been the interest of designing men to keep us divided..... I am a thorough Presbyterian, but I would suspect the reality of my

²⁷⁰ *Hansard*, 3rd series vol.96, 697-8.

²⁷¹ *NW*, March 14 1848.

²⁷² *BU*, January 29 1850.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ *BU*, March 22 1850.

²⁷⁵ *Times*, March 25 1850.

religion if I were not prepared to meet my Roman Catholic brethren on the common ground of my country's good'.²⁷⁶

Plans for a more concerted effort between northern and southern tenant agitation were spearheaded by McKnight in the north, and by the Young Irelander, Duffy in the south. The latter recognized the potential of the land question in organising and uniting the rural population in Ireland, much as, argues D. George Boyce, O'Connell had done for the Catholic population in previous years.²⁷⁷ A preparatory committee for the planned tenant conference was in operation by May of 1850, sending invitations and rallying support.²⁷⁸ The committee included individuals of diverse political and religious backgrounds, including, Duffy, McKnight, John O'Connell, Frederick Lucas, and Sam Greer. The conference was eagerly anticipated at tenant right demonstrations and in Belfast, at an aggregate meeting, the Rev. Mecredy, 'did rejoice....that they lived in a day when North and South could, on one great subject, unite together on a common platform, [and] forget the differences of the past'. He called the forthcoming Dublin conference, 'a most glorious thing'.²⁷⁹ Addressing a tenant right meeting in Dundalk, the Rev. William Dobbin, 'said he had crossed the frontier of Ulster to shake hands with Roman Catholic countrymen, and he was proud to do so. He loved his native land – her lofty hills, her lovely valleys, her beautiful streams; but more than all, her brave sons and virtuous daughters. He sympathized with their sufferings and misfortunes. The poet said –

“Lives there a man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath saw
This is my own, my native land?”

But the people of Ireland were slaves in their native land, for it was owned by an alien landlord class'.²⁸⁰ At a Tenant Right meeting in Clare in July 1850 Rev. Corbett, the parish priest of Quin in Co. Clare, expressed his thanks to the Presbyterian clergymen of the north, 'who nobly stood forward to denounce, with burning language, the evictions, the oppressions, and the legalized plundering of exterminating landlords – to this noble-minded body of men, who entirely case aside all former prejudices and sectarian differences – who held forth the hand of friendship and of love to their Catholic fellow countrymen of the South and West'.²⁸¹

²⁷⁶ *Times*, June 25 1850.

²⁷⁷ Boyce, *Search for Stability*, pp.126-7.

²⁷⁸ *BNL*, May 14; *Nation*, May 11 1850.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ *Nation*, July 6 1850.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Anticipating the forthcoming conference, the *Nation* envisaged the moment, ‘...when the Presbyterian minister and the Catholic priest shall take their seats together in the Conference, there will be the outward symbols, and we trust, the inward fact of a new union’.²⁸² The *Londonderry Standard* spoke in equally optimistic terms, but not all opinion in the North was so enthusiastic. The conservative Protestant press balked at the prospect of Catholic-Presbyterian unity, recalling uncomfortable memories of 1798, most notably, the *Downpatrick Recorder*, which viewed with horror what it described as an ‘agrarian conspiracy’.²⁸³ Equally, Rev. Henry Cooke made clear his absolute opposition to Presbyterian-Catholic fraternization.²⁸⁴ Whilst some Presbyterians agreed with Cooke, many others fully endorsed the activities of the Church’s radical ministers. Writing to the editor of the *Nation*, ‘T.C.D, And a Presbyterian’, delighted that, ‘the hatchet of sectarian warfare and religious feud between Irish Presbyterians and Roman Catholics is buried forever’.²⁸⁵ The writer noted that at the General Assembly’s meeting, ‘a petition in favour of Tenant Right was unanimously adopted’ despite the efforts of Cooke to stir up ‘religious animosities among the people, by teaching them to despise and distrust their Roman Catholic neighbours’.²⁸⁶

When the conference met in Dublin on August 6 1850, there certainly seemed to be evidence of Presbyterian-Catholic unity.²⁸⁷ Tom O’Shea, a southern priest active in tenant right, was selected alongside the Presbyterians William Dobbin and William Girdwood as secretaries to the proceedings. The Presbyterian minister, Rev. Rentoul caught the significance of the moment, telling the conference that, ‘This day...marks a new era in our country’s history....We have resolved to lay aside all our former jealousies and differences, and agree to work for the regeneration of Ireland. I, a Presbyterian minister, have come from the far North to shake hands with the Roman Catholic priests from the South and West as my brethren, and to unite our hearty energies in our country’s cause against oppression and wrong, having for our motto, “Union, not division”, for our common rights and liberties, and the future prosperity of Ireland’.²⁸⁸

²⁸² *Nation*, May 11 1850.

²⁸³ *DR*, August 24 1850.

²⁸⁴ See *BU* July 5 1850 for report of Assembly’s proceedings.

²⁸⁵ *Nation*, July 20 1850. Could ‘T.C.D’ stand for ‘Tenant of Co. Down’?

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ *BU*, August 9 1850.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

At the Tenant League's inaugural meeting a few days later, this sense of unity was emphasized.²⁸⁹ T. N Underwood, Presbyterian secretary to the Strabane Tenant Right Association declared that the League was, 'indeed, a true union of Irishmen. This was the green shamrock of Ireland, that had risen up from the desolation of the past'.²⁹⁰ Indeed, on his return to the north, Underwood and the local Presbyterian minister, Chambers, received the congratulations and thanks of the Strabane Tenant Society at a special meeting.²⁹¹ Underwood was a descendant of Sam Neilson, a founding member of the United Irishmen in Belfast and co-proprietor of the *Northern Star*.²⁹² Dobbin echoed these sentiments, referring to 'a united brotherhood to resist a common enemy – to proclaim the people's grievances and wrongs, and to demand the rights of our beloved fatherland.'²⁹³ In language equally reminiscent of the imagery of the 1790s, the Rev. John Rentoul declared that in establishing the League, they had launched a ship, whose name, 'should be the "Green Isle"'.²⁹⁴

The *Times* feared that, 'from the speech of the Rev. Mr Dobbin it may be gleaned that the Presbyterian body do not mean to limit their co-operation with their Roman Catholic brethren to the adjustment of the land question, but that there are ulterior objects in view to which they must hereafter stretch forth a helping hand'.²⁹⁵ The *Down Recorder* similarly noted that this 'most ill-omened junction...bears a striking resemblance to the old *United Irish* movement'.²⁹⁶ If aspects of the Tenant League were reminiscent for some of the 1790s, the total absence of any clergy of the established church strengthened the impression that this was more than simply a question of tenant right, for by its nature, the Presbyterian-Catholic co-operation made this 'union of Irishmen' inherently anti-establishment. Indeed, an outraged 'Clergymen of the Established Church' wrote to the editor of the *Times* to condemn the League's proceedings, emphasising that amongst his Irish brethren, 'not...a single clergyman out of upwards of 2,000 has joined the Tenant-right League, or approved of its agitation'.²⁹⁷

²⁸⁹ Presbyterians who attended the first League meeting in Dublin, alongside parish priests from the north and south included, Rev. David Bell, Ballybay; Rev James B. Rentoul, Garvagh; James McKnight, editor of the *Banner*; Rev. John Rogers, Comber; William Gridwood, Lurgan; Rev. John L. Rentoul, Ballymoney; Rev. William Dobbin, Anaghlonge; Rev. Robert Black, Ballycopeland; Rev. Moses Chambers, Leckpatrick; Thomas Neilson Underwood, secretary to the Strabane Tenant Defence Association and the Congregationalist minister Rev. James Godkin, editor of the *Londonderry Standard*.

²⁹⁰ *BU*, August 13 1850.

²⁹¹ *Nation*, September 7 1850.

²⁹² Charles Gavan Duffy, *The League of North and South* (London, 1886) pp51-2.

²⁹³ *BU*, August 13 1850.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ *Times*, August 12 1850.

²⁹⁶ *DR*, November 9 1850.

²⁹⁷ *Times*, August 27 1850.

His emphasis on the ‘loyalty’ of the Anglican clergymen was accompanied by a blistering attack on those involved in the League: ‘The clerical agitators who have united are the same who united in 1797 and 1798 to overthrow, if possible, the British rule in Ireland – I mean the Roman Catholic priests and the Presbyterian ministers. The clergy of the established church have been always....the friends of loyalty, order and peace’.²⁹⁸ The *Wexford Guardian* noted the total absence of the established church from the Tenant League, ‘for the gentlemen of the established church have the bread and butter so plentifully crammed into their mouths, they have not time to give sign of breathing’.²⁹⁹

As early as 1845 when the first tenant right meetings were taking place in the north of the country, Daniel O’Connell had urged Ulster to support repeal, arguing that, ‘An Irish Parliament would remedy their grievances and redress their wrongs without delay. An Irish Parliament would secure to them the advantages of the tenant-right’.³⁰⁰ In 1848, an Anglican minister had warned Sir William Somerville in a private letter of the need to modify his bill, claiming that, many tenant farmers in the north, ‘are threatening to join the Repealers’.³⁰¹ Of course, whilst at times, the language and activities of the Presbyterian clergymen during the tenant right agitation were violent and frequently anti-establishment, no minister had any intention of declaring his support for a repeal of the Union. Indeed, many Catholics themselves recognized the ongoing fears of Presbyterians concerning political Catholicism. In a letter published in the *Nation* in 1848, Edward Magennis emphasized the necessity for Catholic Ulster to offer reassurance: ‘Let the Protestants and Presbyterians understand.... we repudiate ascendancy’.³⁰² Similarly, in 1850, a Roman Catholic, Thaddeus O’Malley addressed a letter ‘To the Irish Catholic Clergy’, urging the necessity of addressing Presbyterian fears of Catholic ascendancy. ‘Such an apprehension, now to a great extent haunting the Protestant mind of the country, is the chief obstacle to the Repeal of the Union’.³⁰³

The thorny issue of Repeal, or rather Catholic support for Repeal, came to the fore at the Limerick by-election in November 1850, where, much to the horror of the conservative press in the north, the Revs. Rogers and Bell travelled to Limerick to support and endorse the return of a pro-Repeal candidate, Michael Ryan, who was

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁹ Printed in *Nation*, August 24 1850.

³⁰⁰ *BU*, April 25 1845.

³⁰¹ Rev. J.R. Moore, Trustee of Annesley Estate, to Sir William Somerville, May 22 1828, PRONI, D/1854/6/3 (MIC/532).

³⁰² *Nation*, June 3 1848.

³⁰³ *Nation*, January 19 1850.

pledged to support the Tenant League³⁰⁴. Bell told a meeting in Limerick in support of tenant right *and* the return of Ryan, that, ‘As a Presbyterian and a Northerner, I may differ widely from many of the religious and political opinions of the people from the South, but on one great principle we are thoroughly agreed’. He continued, ‘...what has your landlord-made law done for the poor of the people during the last five years – whether Protestant or Catholic – whether in North or South?’. ‘I do not ask’, the Presbyterian minister concluded, ‘is Mr. Ryan a Catholic or Presbyterian – an Orangeman, a Republican – but is he honestly for the people – is he a Tenant League man...’³⁰⁵.

In a private letter to Duffy, McKnight described Ryan’s election address as a ‘furious Repeal manifesto’.³⁰⁶ He added, ‘So far as outward appearances go, the League is in this case formally identified with Repeal....Now in the North, any impression of this kind would destroy us’. Hence, Bell’s careful emphasis that political allegiances were irrelevant in supporting a League candidate. Frank Wright noted that John O’Connell attacked Rogers for denouncing Repeal, but as Wright emphasized, Rogers was more subtle than this: ‘what he had actually done was to indicate that he himself did not support it’.³⁰⁷ Ironically, it was Michael Fitzgerald, Archdeacon and P.P, who defended Bell and Rogers. He wrote that, the Tenant League aside,

Mr. Rogers has no more bound himself by that co-operation to become a Repealer, than he has bound himself to practice the Invocation of Saints.... But it is not as a Catholic – it is not as a Repealer – Mr. Rogers and Mr. Bell came from the North to support Mr. Ryan, but as a Tenant Right man.

In God’s name, let us not expect unreasonable things from our friends; and let us accept their aid on fair and neutral grounds, and with a view to the abatement of the great master and monster evil of bad landlordism.³⁰⁸

The *Northern Whig* was less charitable in reference to Rogers and Bells’ behaviour, dubbing them, the ‘Presbyterian Priests’.³⁰⁹ Wright has emphasized that it is unwise to focus too much on the significance of repeal to the Tenant League project, given that, ‘Sharman Crawford himself favoured Repeal in the abstract, and the fact that he was to be the candidate in County Down in 1852, taking two thirds of the vote in

³⁰⁴ *Nation*, November 30; *DR*, December 14 1850.

³⁰⁵ *Nation*, November 30 1850.

³⁰⁶ Wright, *Two Lands* p.192.

³⁰⁷ Wright, *Two Lands*, p.192-3.

³⁰⁸ *Nation*, December 7 1850.

³⁰⁹ *NW*, December 17 1850.

Newtownards, rather undermines the notion that Unionist credentials had to be strong'.³¹⁰

In the months following the formation of the Tenant League, great meetings and demonstrations were held the length and breadth of Ireland, in symbolic displays of north-south and Presbyterian-Catholic unity. As historians have recognized, the League meeting held in Ballybay was of particular significance, given that the town had been the scene of bitter sectarianism in previous years.³¹¹ As Presbyterian minister of the town and an active Leaguer, David Bell led the orations, telling the audience:

We have been poisoned in our minds by those who were our enemies and deceivers, with regard to one and other – (cheers) – and it has been said to you, Roman Catholics, “Don’t trust that black-mouthed Presbyterian” – and it has been said to me... “Put no confidence in that bloody Papist, he will cut your throat”, and we have been foolish enough, and many of our unfortunate people mad enough to act on such devilish suggestions....No, my friends, we shall do it no more.³¹²

Speaking on behalf of the south, the proprietor of the *Cork Examiner*, declared that, ‘I come from the south to lay, as it were, the very first stone of union between both sides – between the North and the South’. The Rev. D.G Brown of Newtownhamilton spoke in similar terms: ‘..we heard today, in the strains of music which floated around us, awakening melody among the tree tops of the distant valley a voice that proclaimed us to be “Paddies evermore” – (loud cheers) – and, as Irishmen, we desire in this land, this fair land of ours, to enjoy the fruits of our labour’.³¹³

At the League meeting held in Omagh in October 1850, attended by a deputation from the south, the Presbyterian minister, Rev. Ferguson of Ballygawley rejoiced that, ‘they might meet together as brother; for, after all, were they not brethren created by the same Almighty God, inhabitants of the same lovely but desolate land, bowed down beneath a common oppressive landlordism, and actuated by one common burning zeal to free their country from impending ruin’.³¹⁴ The Rev. O’Kane, parish priest of Drumraw, near Omagh, endorsed this, commenting, ‘I glory in saying that my friend the Presbyterian minister... finds that the humble priest of the people is not a fiery bigot or a sectarian zealot, and that he does not find him opposed to social progress or social

³¹⁰ Wright, *Two Lands*, p.196.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.186. It was the home of Sam Grey, the Orange leader who had so strenuously opposed Lawless’s Repeal campaign in Ulster. Duffy, as one of the southern League deputation, stayed at the York hotel owned by the Grey family. Naturally it was trumpeted by the League as an example of how far it had succeeded in submerging Presbyterian and Catholic divisions. Elliot notes that, ‘Even in areas of acute religious tensions...priests and ministers shared platforms’, *Catholics of Ulster*, p.319.

³¹² *NW*, October 3 1850; *BU*, October 4 1850;

³¹³ *Ibid.* D.G Brown, the ‘John Knox Jnr.’ of 1835.

enlightenment'.³¹⁵ Duffy, himself present at Omagh, later recalled how the band at the meeting had, 'struck up in succession "St. Patrick's Day" and the "Protestant Boys"', whilst, 'Thomas Montgomery, a Presbyterian Nationalist, of advanced years and solid position, who had belonged to the Young Ireland Party in '48', presided'.³¹⁶

The *Whig* deplored the sentiments expressed at the meeting, noting with some satisfaction that the local liberal Rev. A. P. Goudy had not attended the League proceedings.³¹⁷ Goudy remained personally opposed to such public fraternization between Presbyterian ministers and priests on the tenant right platforms, yet he ultimately defended the ministers involved with the League from attack by the likes of Henry Cooke, Anglicans and other Tory supporters.³¹⁸ In his series of political letters in 1852 he defended the right of the Catholic voter to the free exercise of the franchise,³¹⁹ but his hatred of Popery was strong,³²⁰ and he warned that, 'it behoves the Roman Catholic people to show that their ecclesiastical polity is not incompatible with the true enjoyment of civil liberty. They must be aware that this is the grand charge against it'.³²¹ But Goudy also defended those Roman Catholics involved in tenant right, dismissing as 'false and factious' the allegation that they contemplated 'revolutionary design'.³²² The *Whig* was particularly horrified at Underwood's comment at the subsequent dinner in Omagh, when he referred to, 'the *soldiery* as being Irishmen, and influenced by Irish feelings, notwithstanding that their hearts beat within red coats'. The newspaper deprecated any such, 'hint at the possibility of getting up a young rebellion'.³²³

The year 1850 came to a close with a triumphant meeting of the Tenant League in Newtownards, where McKnight recalled the Volunteers, noting how the tenant right meeting in Dungannon in 1848 had been, 'convened... at... the very spot of the celebrated "convention" whose deliberations gave a national existence to Ireland itself'.³²⁴ He attacked the fact, 'that sectarian dissensions, encouraged by Ministers of the State, have been actually employed by landlords and by politicians in the hope of working out the League's destruction' from within. But he added, 'In the North, this

³¹⁴ *BU*, October 29 1850.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ Duffy, *League*, p.89.

³¹⁷ *NW*, October 29 1850.

³¹⁸ Goudy, *Right versus Might*, p.21.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.15.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.5: 'I do not hate my Roman Catholic fellow-countrymen, whether in the priesthood or out of it – but I do hate, and that with all fervour, that anti-scriptural system which deludes them',

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p.15.

³²² *Ibid.*, p.23.

³²³ *NW*, October 29 1850.

base policy has been utterly unsuccessful, and the present glorious meeting, in one of the most Presbyterian districts in Ulster, is a triumphant demonstration of its failure'.³²⁵ As ever, Rogers of Comber offered up some of the most radical language at the Newtownards demonstration: 'What is it to you', he asked, 'whether Toryism or Russellism rules the State, if you and your children are oppressed? – whether.... a flag of orange or green floats over the country, while all the present state of the law, which ought to protect all alike, crushes without distinction the sons of the Covenant in the North, and the sons of the Celt in the South of Ireland'.³²⁶ The southern deputation who travelled to Newtownards thanked the efforts of the northern Presbyterians, stating that, 'The names of McKnight, Rogers and Bell, are already household words in every family in Leinster and Munster.... They are more popular than the most popular of their own clergy – their names are to inspire and conjure with'. The Rev. Thomas O'Shee, P.P. of Callan added,

“Landlords fooled us,
 England ruled us,
 Hounding our passions to make us their prey;
 But in their spite
 The Irish unite,
 And Orange and Green will carry the day”.³²⁷

Presbyterians and Catholics echoed similar sentiments at League meetings in Armagh, Greyabbey, Donaghadee, Loughbrickland, Carnmoney, Anaghlonge and Belfast throughout 1850 and 1851. Rev. Julius McCullough argued that, 'They should as united Irishmen, press their claims home upon the Government';³²⁸ Rev. Black called for 'union among Irishmen', referring to 'the absurdity of division among Irishmen';³²⁹ and at another meeting Black endorsed a motto stating that, 'The Tenant League is Erin's best hope'.³³⁰ At Donaghadee, Rogers emphasized the distinction between, on the one hand, Presbyterian and Catholic clergymen working on behalf of the tenants, and on the other hand, the Anglican churchmen, 'who he believed had preached against the League'.³³¹ If the tone of the Presbyterian ministers was radical at many northern meetings, their rhetoric was even more so, when they attended numerous League

³²⁴ *BU*, December 31 1850.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ Speech at League meeting in Armagh, *BU*, January 31 1850 (my underlining).

³²⁹ Speech at tenant right meeting in Greyabbey to raise funds for the League, *NW*, February 13 1851.

³³⁰ Speech at tenant right meeting in Donaghadee, *Banner*, February 21 1851.

demonstrations in the south. Rogers caused nothing short of a furore in anti-League circles with his allusions to the 1798 rebellion in his speech at Enniscorthy, in County Wexford in September 1850:

And this is Enniscorthy, whose history is not unknown to Irishmen, and that is Vinegar Hill, celebrated in the annals of one of Ireland's struggles. (Cheers) Without giving any opinion on the question involved in that struggle – for that is not my business here – I may be permitted to congratulate this meeting that we have met to promote union, not dissension – peace, not war – the amalgamation of North and South – (immense cheering) – in the glorious attainment of our object – the regeneration of our common country.³³²

A Presbyterian minister from County Down, standing alongside Roman Catholics in the south and referring to the bloody events of the 1798 rebellion, was clearly significant, no matter how much we may be inclined to dismiss his comments as mere rhetorical propaganda. The *Whig* was horrified that a minister from Comber had gone forth, 'to revive memories of rebellion and to hint to a too susceptible people, that there are causes in existence which might possibly justify, on their part, a little physical-force work'.³³³ In his history of the League published in 1886, Duffy described the Presbyterians of 'Young Ulster' as including, 'enthusiasts who inherited the historic blood of '82 or '98. The tone and temper of these men justified us in believing that there was a new Ulster familiar with the history of the Volunteers and the United Irishmen, who still sang the songs of Drennan and "remembered William Orr"'.³³⁴ Commenting on Rogers' performance at Enniscorthy and recalling the events of 1798, the *Down Recorder* noted that, 'Wexford Bridge, and Scullabogue, and Vinegar Hill suggest reminiscences, which will suit the new agitators, and ought to warn any Protestant from becoming inveigled into the League. At the Wexford massacre, the union of Irishmen was treacherously forgotten; yet Presbyterian ministers are at this time of day to be found to fraternize with priests, and join in another incipient rebellious movement'.³³⁵

Speaking as part of the northern deputation to a League meeting in Tipperary, Rev. David Bell attempted to make light of religious perceptions and fears: 'You, no doubt, have heard that we in the North were a sort of raw-head-and-bloody-bones

³³¹ *Ibid.*

³³² *NW*, September 28 1850.

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ Duffy, *League*, p.51. William Orr was a Presbyterian farmer executed in 1798 for administering a United Irish oath, and his name was remembered as one of many martyrs of that year. Drennan wrote a poem in his memory, entitled 'The Wake of William Orr'.

³³⁵ *DR*, September 28 1850.

people – (laughter) – but we, in the North, I can tell you, heard somewhat of a similar story about you – (laughter) – and the dangers of Popery have been dinned into our ears. In short, we have been sometimes hourly expecting when you would come down and drive us with cabbage stalks into the sea!’³³⁶ Speaking at a meeting in Ennis, County Clare, Rev. Black stated that their watchword must be, ‘Erin expects every man to do his duty’, and he referred to the events of the famine, asking, ‘Was it wrong for all classes and denominations to join together, in the memorable and melancholy year of 1846-47 – when so many of our fellow-countrymen were cut off by famine and pestilence – was it wrong to unite together, to alleviate the sufferings by establishing soup-kitchens and the like?’³³⁷ Rev. Rentoul, referring to the South added, ‘I always had a hankering suspicion that while your crimes were published, the aggravating circumstances in which you were placed, were studiously kept in the back ground’ and he emphasized the warm welcome he had received in coming from the North of Ireland, ‘to hold out the olive branch of national peace’.³³⁸ Rentoul’s comments on ‘Erin’s’, climate, soil and rivers, which had earned for her, ‘the titles of the Green and Emerald Isle’, were certainly reminiscent of the patriotic language of the 1790s. The joining forces of Presbyterian north and Catholic south in the Tenant League was described in the Commons as, ‘a combination not to be disregarded’.³³⁹

Rogers’ controversial comments at a League meeting in Kilkenny were once again a source of major condemnation from the conservative press in the north. Indeed, so strong was his attack on Orangeism, that he had to recant the most extreme of his statements on his return to the north, having aroused the ire of those in the north with Orange sympathies, whose support the tenant right movement could not afford to alienate.³⁴⁰ There was certainly more than a little truth in the comments of Lady Londonderry in a private letter to Disraeli. Referring to Rogers’ ‘tirades’ in Wexford and Kilkenny, she commented with considerable satisfaction how, ‘That horrid Rogers over egged his pudding... by his violent attack on the orange men’.³⁴¹ Rogers commenced in Kilkenny by declaring that, ‘I am an Ulster man, but my sympathies are not confined to Ulster.... I am a Presbyterian – I am more – I am an Irishman’. He continued,

³³⁶ *BU*, October 22 1850.

³³⁷ *Nation*, November 2 1850.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.121, 290-1.

³⁴⁰ See Rogers’ apology to tenants in Newtownards at a tenant right meeting, *BU*, November 12 1850.

³⁴¹ Lady Frances Ann Vane Londonderry, Mount Stewart, to Benjamin Disraeli, November 2 1850, DCRO, D/Lo/C 530 (95).

I feel it to be my duty to remove an impression which I believe has prevailed rather extensively through the South in reference to the North, to the effect that Ulster is Orange, ravenous and bloody. I wish to disabuse the southern mind of this. Presbyterian Ulster is not Orange. (Hear, hear, hear) Presbyterianism is incompatible with, and destructive of, Orangeism. Orangeism is Toryism, and the genius of Presbyterianism is utterly antagonistic to such a despotic creed. (Loud cheers) Orangeism is intolerance, but Presbyterianism has ever been foremost to rebuke intolerance, and to vindicate and defend civil and religious liberty. (Immense cheering) I know little of Orangeism except this, that those who are baptised with its baptism bind themselves to uphold the present constitution in church and state. Presbyterians could not do this, then, without denying their own principles. No one, therefore, but an ignorant and apostate Presbyterian could be an Orangeman. (Tremendous cheering) No; I will tell you who the Orangemen of the North are – landlords and agents in the one extreme – bailiffs and the tag-rag and bobtail of society in the other, which landlordism and Church of Englandism may be able to buy up for Orange purposes, and a miserable bargain they have.... Orangeism is, in fact, a gosling which the High Church goose in Ulster has hatched, and which is peculiarly and exclusively under its own wing. (Laughter and cheering) The curates of that church having little to do, can superintend the Orange Lodges...but the middle classes, the moral strength of Ulster, who are generally Presbyterian, are not only not Orangemen, but opposed to Orangeism.³⁴²

It is easy to see why such a bitter attack on landlords and the Anglican church – the two pillars of the establishment and of ‘Protestant Ascendancy’ – made by a Presbyterian, received such a rapturous reception from the Catholic audience. It is possible to argue that Rogers was simply being a clever propagandist by denouncing Orangeism in the south, but later moderating these expressions in the north. However, propaganda aside, there is no reason to doubt that Rogers himself, who had demonstrated his anti-establishment credentials in the extreme, was, like many other Presbyterians, hostile to the Orange movement.

The backlash in parts of the north after the Kilkenny demonstration, raises interesting questions about the relationship between Presbyterians and the Orange Order. As Marianne Elliott has noted ‘Orangeism to Catholics represented hatred of their religion and insulting dominance’,³⁴³ and it is evident that whilst numbers of Presbyterians were attracted to Orangeism from its foundation in 1795, a larger proportion continued to find the movement’s bigotry and sectarianism abhorrent.

³⁴² *BU*, October 1 1850.

Beyond its anti-Catholicism, the Order was associated closely with Anglicanism and Toryism; this perhaps more than anything rendered it unpalatable to most Presbyterians. From the outset, class, economics and geographical location had played an important role. As Holmes has emphasized, the Presbyterians of east Ulster were much more likely to be hostile to Orangeism, than their counterparts west of the Bann.³⁴⁴ However, this was not exclusive and the comments of John Andrews to Londonderry, suggest a more complex picture: whilst Rogers had apparently offended some of the tenantry in Newtownards, this had not been the case in Comber, just a few miles away.³⁴⁵ It is certainly evident that the majority of Presbyterian ministers and middle class Presbyterians around Belfast opposed Orangeism. Indeed, the fact that Cooke, although closely involved with and capable of courting 'Orange' Protestant feeling in his Protestant/conservative crusades, never actually joined the Order is interesting. Lack of respectability perhaps? At the time of Cooke's appearance at the Tory 'Orange' Demonstration at Hillsborough in 1834, the *Belfast Newsletter* had claimed that 'out of 230 or 240 ministers belonging to the Synod of Ulster, not one fiftieth part will be found to even countenance Orangeism'.³⁴⁶ It is certainly unlikely that Cooke was chastened from joining the Order because of the opposition of large numbers of his colleagues – given that he frequently and openly incurred their opposition on many other matters of politics.

What seems clear is that tenant righters were keen to woo Orange Presbyterians to their cause, and detach them from their supposed loyalty to their landlords – the symbols of 'Protestant ascendancy' and supremacy. As McKnight had attempted to articulate in his pamphlet of 1848 on tenant right, loyalty to the British crown did not necessitate blind allegiance to the landlord class. Rogers' brutal attack on the Orange Order was clearly a potential own-goal in terms of the broader tenant right campaign in the north, excluding those who may have boosted support for the movement. Whilst it expressed the anti-establishment political feelings of many Presbyterians in the north, the incident is revealing. Firstly, as demonstrated again in 1852,³⁴⁷ the Presbyterian tenant right leaders made strident efforts to encourage 'Orange' support for the League and eventually for Crawford's candidature in Down. Secondly, that there was clearly a degree of support for the Orange Order among some rank and file Presbyterians – even

³⁴³ Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, p.351.

³⁴⁴ Holmes, *Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, p.76.

³⁴⁵ John Andrews to Londonderry, October 6 1850, D/Lo/C 158 (93).

³⁴⁶ Quoted in Finlay Holmes, *Presbyterians and Orangeism 1795-1995* (Presbyterian Historical Society pamphlet, Belfast, 1996), p.5.

³⁴⁷ See editorial entitled 'The County Down Orangemen and the Tenant League', in *BNL*, May 3 1852.

at a time when many others were forging partnerships with Catholics against their landlords' political and economic dominance. The situation reiterates the divisions among Presbyterianism as a whole and, moreover, the essential continuities with the period 1795-8.

At a Tenant League meeting in Dublin in January 1851, several Presbyterian ministers made significant speeches in support of the union of Irishmen theme. Rev. Dr. Coulter cheered, 'the great rallying cry' of 'Old Ireland – all Ireland'. 'I go farther....', he added, 'and proclaim from this place, "Ireland for the Irish"³⁴⁸. Lord Londonderry, writing to the Lord Lieutenant, Clarendon, denounced tenant right as quite simply, 'a union of Presbyterian men and Roman Catholic Priests', who, 'raise the standard of positive rebellion'.³⁴⁹ Like the *Down Recorder*, Londonderry saw parallels between the League and the United Irishmen, especially since such public emphasis had been placed on the union between Presbyterian and Roman Catholic in Ireland. Discussing Irish affairs, Lord Ripon privately described the union for tenant right as, 'particularly unnatural and dangerous',³⁵⁰ whilst Baron Hatherton, also writing to Londonderry in late 1850 on the union of Presbyterian and Catholic in the League, warned that, 'There is far more danger in it than there was in O'Connell's Repeal Agitation'.³⁵¹

But in 1851, a new and potentially damaging matter arose in English and Irish politics, which posed a credible threat to Catholic-Presbyterian unity on tenant right. As is well-documented, there was an upsurge of anti-Popery feeling in England when the Pope reintroduced a Roman Catholic hierarchy in Britain. Lord John Russell's Whig government responded by passing an Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, forbidding Catholic bishops to assume the titles of existing Anglican bishoprics. Whilst Roman Catholics were placed on the defensive across Britain, Holmes has noted that in Ireland in particular, the act was regarded as, 'the return of penal legislation'.³⁵² The subsequent establishment of a Catholic Defence Association in Ireland, clearly ran counter to the non-sectarianism of the Tenant League, and possessed the sectarian potential to frighten Presbyterians away from notions of Irish unity. However, the League did its level best to ride out the storm, and although it was a serious moment, it did not cripple it in the short term, perhaps not even in the long run, in the way that many of its enemies had

³⁴⁸ *BU*, January 28 1851.

³⁴⁹ Lord Londonderry to Lord Clarendon, October 10 1850, Clar. Dep. Ir. Box 18.

³⁵⁰ Lord Ripon to Lord Londonderry, November 17 1850, DCRO, D/Lo/C 97 (9).

³⁵¹ Baron Hatherton to Lord Londonderry, DCRO, D/Lo/C 89 (2)

³⁵² Holmes, *Cooke*, p.181.

clearly hoped. Indeed, as Frank Wright emphasized, if anything, ‘as Dr. McKnight fended off theological attack, he became increasingly forthright about the need for northerners to co-operate with southerners’.³⁵³ Referring to the passing of the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, McKnight echoed his words from a year earlier and attacked the ‘divide and rule’ policy, arguing that: ‘While it might be deemed too much to say that the breaking up of the Irish Tenant League was a primary element in the calculations of statesmanship, I have no doubt of its having been reckoned upon as a secondary consequence’.³⁵⁴ The *Banner* quickly predicted that local landlords in the north, mindful of the approaching election, would use the matter to discredit the League, and in February it complained that in County Down, David Ker, ‘is hawking about, with laudable activity, a protest against the “Papal aggression”, as it is called, though no human interest, except the spiritual pride of the English bishops, is really hurt by it’.³⁵⁵

However, the ongoing controversy did not dampen the spirits of the Presbyterian ministers who attended the League demonstration in Belfast in May 1851.³⁵⁶ Moreover the proceedings at a meeting of the Synod of Belfast emphasized the efforts being made by Presbyterian Leaguers to minimize the impact of the whole affair. Rev. Dr. Coulter and Rev. Rogers’ attempt to introduce a denunciation of Prelacy equal to that of Popery within its resolutions against Papal aggression, was seen by Cooke as an endeavour to lever attention away from the matter in hand.³⁵⁷ Coulter argued that, ‘They had heard much of the great anti-Christian system; but he regarded the whole Church of England system, with the Queen at its head, as a great system of anti-Christ’. Cooke was furious at such an attack on the established church from within his ranks, and at any attempt to deflect attention from denunciations of Papal activities:

From the established church of England and Ireland I so far differ that I do not belong to it; and though, for having always thought well of it, I have been attacked on platforms and in various other places, still I am ready to stand in my own defence here; and though I have frequently stood alone, I will oppose this sinister mode of assailing a sister church when our object is to stem the flood of Popery, which, if it be unopposed, will sweep away both Dr.Coulter and those who join with the priests of Rome, on whatever platforms they may select for the exhibition.

³⁵³ Wright, *Two Lands*, p.194.

³⁵⁴ *BU*, December 31 1850.

³⁵⁵ *BU*, February 7 1851.

³⁵⁶ These included, Rentoul of Garvagh, Rogers of Comber, McCullough of Newtownards, J.L. Rentoul of Ballymoney, Coulter of Gilnahirk, Black of Ballycopeland, Rutherford of Ballydown, William Girdwood and John Greenfield. See *BU*, May 2 1851.

³⁵⁷ See *Times*, May 19 1851 for report of proceedings of the Synod of Belfast.

Cooke denounced Coulter's actions, '...however accustomed he may be to rub elbows with the "creeshy" priests of the church of Rome'.³⁵⁸ The vote taken was twenty-seven to three against Coulter's amendment. This debate in the Synod of Belfast merits close attention, because it encapsulates the two extreme positions within orthodox Irish Presbyterianism in respect of Roman Catholicism. On the one hand, Cooke, with his anti-Catholic, conservative, pan-Protestant endeavours, and on the other, men such as Rogers, who had no more love for the established church than that of Rome, and who were prepared to place religious matters aside to work with Roman Catholic priests in the Tenant League. Between these two points there fell a spectrum of Presbyterian opinion: those in favour of tenant right, resolutely opposed to the Protestant establishment and to Cooke's politics, but wary of too much fraternisation with the Roman Catholic clergy; those in favour of tenant right and co-operating with priests, but opposed to the doctrines of the league; and others such as the Rev. Robert Gault of Killileagh, who supported legalized tenant right to check the power of the landlords, but vehemently opposed the League, both because of its more extreme doctrines and as a 'monstrous coalition' of Presbyterians and Roman Catholics.³⁵⁹

The proceedings of the Synod of Armagh and Monaghan in debating the papal aggression took a similar turn, and after considerable debate, their resolutions were modified to state that, 'prelacy, whether Anglican or Roman, in its polity and its spirit of civil and ecclesiastical supremacy...contravenes the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ'.³⁶⁰ As Duffy later commented on the "Papal Aggression" furore, 'the Presbyterians of Ulster had as little sympathy at bottom with the lawn sleeves and silk apron of the episcopacy in possession in England as with the biretta and pectoral cross of the new bishops'.³⁶¹ More significantly, at the same meeting, Rev. Bell, the prominent Tenant Leaguer, was chosen as the Synod's new Moderator for the coming year by an overwhelming majority. The *Times* noted that, 'this event is hailed as a great triumph by the partisans of the League, Roman Catholic as well as Presbyterian'.³⁶² Clearly, Bell's very public League involvement and his association with priests had not prejudiced his own Synod against him. Similarly, the Rev. Dr. Coulter's appointment as Moderator of the General Assembly in July 1851 again emphasized that orthodox

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁹ See Gault's letters on tenant right to the *DR*, March 22; May 10 1851.

³⁶⁰ *Times*, May 26 1851.

³⁶¹ Duffy, *League*, p.132.

³⁶² *Times*, May 26 1851.

Presbyterian ministers had no difficulty in selecting a Tenant Leaguer as their head, and moreover, suggests that the impact of the ‘Papal aggression’ should not be overstated.³⁶³

But what of opinion beyond the Presbyterian clergy? Unfortunately, this is much harder to gauge. In a speech to the weekly meeting of the Irish Tenant League in Dublin in June 1851, William Girdwood stated that, ‘with reference to the so-called Papal aggression....he could not forbear saying, as a Northerner and a Presbyterian that, so far as his observation extended, the laity of his Church generally were perfectly indifferent to this aggression; and, as to the Tenant Leaguers, that they had no objections whatever to the present agitation of their Catholic fellow-countrymen in defence of their religious liberty, but would still look to them for assistance against the “aggressions” of the landlords’.³⁶⁴ Girdwood emphasized Bell’s selection as Moderator of the Synod of Armagh as evidence of the, ‘popularity of the clergymen who were connected with the League’. In particular, he launched a bitter attack on Cooke and his policies, arguing that, ‘this government official and pluralist, and his party, did not represent the laity of Presbyterian Ulster’.³⁶⁵

The campaign of the Presbyterian Leaguers to minimize the impact of anti-Catholic feeling in the wake of the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, was demonstrated at a tenant right meeting in Carrmoney, County Antrim in July. The Rev. Rogers rejoiced that, ‘party spirit is extinguished, and that men of all religious creeds are beginning to feel that it is better to be united as Irishmen – (cheers) – than be pitted one section against another – made the footballs of statesmen’.³⁶⁶ Rogers referred to John Sadleir, M.P for Carlow and Francis Scully, M.P for Tipperary, ‘both Roman Catholics – who had done more to make the Presbyterian Church felt and honoured to the British House of Commons than all the members put together’. He referred in particular to their efforts on behalf of the Presbyterian Church in the Mathews affair.³⁶⁷ Rogers told Antrim that, ‘he would say it was their duty to dispense with the services of their two Protestant members, if they could be represented by two such men as those’.³⁶⁸ This is significant, given that Sadleir was active at this time in the Catholic Defence Association.

Referring to the alliance formed between the Tenant League and the so-called ‘Irish Brigade’ – liberal Irish M.Ps who had voted together against the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill – ‘to build up a distinctive Irish Party in Parliament’ at this time, John Whyte

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.179.

³⁶⁴ *Nation*, June 14 1851.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ *BU*, July 22 1851.

³⁶⁷ See Chapter One.

³⁶⁸ *BU*, July 22 1851.

emphasized that the opposition within League ranks to such a venture did *not* so much emanate from its Presbyterian ministers.³⁶⁹ He argues that, ‘though they openly proclaimed their dislike of the Defence Association’, they seem to have been ‘quite resigned to accepting its existence’.³⁷⁰ On the contrary, the opposition came from Duffy himself.³⁷¹ Both Whyte and Wright have emphasized the role played by William Sharman Crawford as a leading figure in the northern tenant right movement, in maintaining north-south cohesion at this time. Crucially, Wright highlighted the fact that Crawford had opposed the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill from the start, this being, ‘the greatest single proof that the League was capable of defending religious liberty more effectively than any purely “pan-Catholic” movement might do’.³⁷² Indeed the adoption of Crawford’s Tenant Right Bill by the League following its annual conference in Dublin in August 1851, was an optimistic sign of at least outward unanimity between members. The *Banner* trounced the *Newsletter*’s professed hope that, ‘the Papal aggression would have dissolved the fraternity between the Presbyterian ministers of the North and the surpliced agitators of the South’. Above all, McKnight’s *Banner* editorial reiterated the necessity of keeping, ‘the Ecclesiastical Titles Act, and... every other topic of political discussion’ out of the League.³⁷³

As plans were under way for a ‘popular’ Tenant League challenge in the next general election in 1852,³⁷⁴ north-south unity was an abiding theme at tenant right electioneering meetings across the country. The tenor of certain Presbyterian ministers at a Tenant right meeting of Presbyterian and Catholic clergymen in Banbridge in March 1852, was distinctly defiant. Dobbin reminded the meeting that, ‘It required years of persevering effort to carry Catholic Emancipation.....Tenant justice may be long deferred, but its triumph is infallibly secure’. Rev. Rutherford reiterated, ‘the great necessity for union and exertion among the tenant class everywhere in Ireland’.³⁷⁵

Significantly, the tenant leaguers in Down were desirous that Lord Castlereagh should stand as one of their ‘popular’ candidates for the county, alongside Crawford (a role that Castlereagh declined). In addition to his sympathetic stance towards the legal security of tenant right, Castlereagh had made the headlines with his vote in the Commons in favour of the increased Maynooth endowment and more recently his vote

³⁶⁹ J. Whyte, *The Independent Irish Party 1850-9* (Oxford, 1958), p.31.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁷¹ O’Shea, *Prince of Swindlers*, pp.187-8.

³⁷² Wright, *Two Lands*, p.198.

³⁷³ *BU*, August 26 1851.

³⁷⁴ See Chapter Five.

³⁷⁵ *BU*, March 9 1852.

against the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill.³⁷⁶ Evidently, neither Crawford nor Castlereagh's recent pro-Catholic votes had been considered as grounds to disqualify them for running for the largely Presbyterian county of Down. Referring to the appearance of priests and ministers together at a tenant right/election meeting in Saintfield in March, the *Down Recorder* noted, 'we can well understand why Roman Catholic priests should be eager to support two candidates, who voted against the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill; but it is difficult to understand why Presbyterian ministers, who ought to hold Protestantism as a primary and indispensable consideration, should support the same candidates. These ministers appear to be men of one idea. For tenant right they would sink more important questions'.³⁷⁷ The Rev. Julius McCullough confirmed this at a meeting in Portaferry: 'Disunion had hitherto been the curse and weakness of Ireland. The enemies of the people knew rightly the weak side of the Irish heart... and their motto ever since England set foot on our native land, has been to divide and conquer'.³⁷⁸ McCullough may have opposed Repeal, but his comments certainly sailed close to the wind for a Unionist.

The *Newsletter* confidently predicted that, 'when the excitement of electioneering and anti-landlord agitation [are] over, the clerical Presbyterian demagogues will find to their cost that they have been made tools of by the Romish priests'.³⁷⁹ There is no doubt that landlords and the conservative press across the north utilized the 'No Popery' cry to undermine the efforts of the Tenant League in defying landlord electoral power and in attempting to return their own tenant right candidates. One month prior to the general election, the Rev. Mecredy warned that, 'their enemies had sought to mix up religious matters with the objects for which they were assembled, but what religion, let him ask, could be mixed up with cheap bread?'.³⁸⁰ Writing 'To the Protestant Electors of Ulster', the Presbyterian T. N. Underwood launched a bitter attack on landlord control, urging no one to vote for them. He added, 'My friends, the Presbyterians fear no Pope, the Protestants of the United States do not fear him. The cry "No Popery" is not the cry which will redeem you from serfdom'.³⁸¹ Underwood went further still and, recalling the Ecclesiastical Titles controversy, concluded that, 'When Lord John Russell wrote the Durham letter he intended to sow discord amongst

³⁷⁶ *Times*, February 25 1852. It was precisely Castlereagh's more 'liberal' stance on these matters which rendered him no longer a suitable candidate for the landlord interest in Down.

³⁷⁷ *DR*, March 20 1852.

³⁷⁸ *BU*, March 23 1852.

³⁷⁹ *BNL*, May 7 1852.

³⁸⁰ *NW*, June 29 1852.

³⁸¹ *Nation*, May 22 1852.

the Irish people, and thereby break up the only truly national political association formed in Ireland since the Volunteers grounded their arms and the fatal act of Union condemned your country to a base dependence on the will of another'.³⁸²

Reporting on the progress of electioneering in County Londonderry, the *Derry Standard* noted with glee the extent of Roman Catholic support for the Presbyterian tenant right candidate, Sam Greer.³⁸³ Writing in the paper, 'A Presbyterian Elector' maintained that, 'it would be utterly absurd to say that the Protestant friends of tenant freedom should reject the aid of a numerous and respectable body of electors, merely because they differ with them in a religious point of view'.³⁸⁴ Similarly, in Tyrone, a meeting of 'Liberal electors' was held on the eve of the election, 'to denounce the attempts made by the Government to connect the Catholic priests and Presbyterian clergymen who advocate the great principles of tenant right with Ribbonism and the commission of outrage'.³⁸⁵ Above all, the tone of this meeting of Presbyterian ministers and local parish priests was one of unity, denouncing the efforts of the landlords to rouse sectarian feeling. The Rev. Moses Chambers described how a neighbour had denounced him as 'worse than a Papist' for advocating tenant right alongside Catholic priests.³⁸⁶

The *Derry Standard* condemned the efforts of the Tory candidate in, 'raising every question of sectarian strife – by raking up extinct animosities, and blowing them into a fresh flame'. The newspaper added, 'Witness their outcry against the union of Presbyterians and Roman Catholics on the hustings... If the Roman Catholic goes up with the Presbyterian to vote for Tenant Right and Free Trade, shall he be thrust back and his vote refused? Why then did he get the franchise? Would the sitting members exclude all Roman Catholics from the Constitution?... How cordially would Jones and Bateson clasp the hand of a Priest if he would only support them!'³⁸⁷

The almost total failure of the Tenant Leaguers to return candidates across the North offered a distinct contrast with the south of the country, where there had been considerable success. Whilst the political power of the landlord had been clearly displayed, the results suggested that the "No Popery" issue had indeed played its part in discouraging votes for the League, despite the best efforts of its supporters in the

³⁸² *Ibid.*

³⁸³ *LS*, June 24 1852.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.* Indeed, in November 1853 long after the election, the *Banner* maintained that, 'a large number of the Roman Catholic voters' had indeed voted for Greer. See *BU*, November 18 1853.

³⁸⁵ *DS*, July 1 1852.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

north.³⁸⁸ Writing in retrospect on the great swathe of Tory victories across the north in the 1852 election, and in particular, on the impact of the Ecclesiastical Titles Act, the *Banner's* editorial concluded that, 'To be sure, no sensible protestant feared Papal aggression, but then Papal insolence was difficult to be endured and the result was that luke-warm Liberals....made Papal aggression a pretext for siding with Toryism'.³⁸⁹ Moreover, it is impossible to discount Presbyterian disquiet with the increasingly Ultramontane tone of the Irish Catholic hierarchy, after Paul Cullen succeeded the liberal William Crolly as Archbishop of Armagh in 1850.³⁹⁰ Cullen, having spent several years in Rome, was strongly anti-English and he offered a stark contrast to the 'political quietism'³⁹¹ which had characterized figures such as Crolly.³⁹²

To take County Down as an example in the 1852 election, although Crawford was defeated overall, the majority of voters in the Presbyterian heartland around Newtownards and Comber did support the Tenant League's candidate. Writing to Lord Londonderry in August, John Vandaleur Stewart lamented that, 'there is a very bad feeling here ever since the Election.... The Catholics almost universally voted against the wishes of their landlords and in many cases insulted them, and the Presbyterians in great numbers did the same'.³⁹³ Down was clearly a significant Tenant League heartland, as the county had provided some of the most radical and outspoken ministers throughout the campaign, who had pioneered Catholic-Presbyterian unity.³⁹⁴ Whilst Tenant Leaguers saw the landlord interest as engaged in a campaign to split catholic and presbyterian unity, that same landlord interest regarded the Presbyterian Tenant Leaguers as renting asunder Protestant unity. Writing privately on the eve of the election, John Andrews, Down land agent to Lord Londonderry commented on how, '...Lord Edwin's anti-Maynooth declaration had roused the implacable ire of the

³⁸⁸ *BU*, July 10; 27 1852.

³⁸⁹ S.M. Stewart, 'Presbyterian Radicalism', p.176.

³⁹⁰ R.F.G. Holmes, 'Ulster Presbyterians and Irish Nationalism', in Stuart Mews (ed.), *Religion and National Identity: papers read at the Nineteenth Summer meeting and Twentieth Winter meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society (Studies in Church History, 18)* (Oxford, 1982), p.544-5.

³⁹¹ Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, p.279.

³⁹² E.D. Steele emphasized Cullen's prominent involvement with the Catholic Defence Association and also his hostility to the Protestants of the "Black North", including the presbyterians, whom Steele argued he regarded as, 'not Irish to him, these descendants of the Scots planted by James I, but invaders'. See E.D. Steele, 'Cardinal Cullen and Irish nationality', *Irish Historical Studies*, 19,75 (March 1975). According to S.M. Stewart, 'the presbyterian Liberals regarded Cullen's alleged Ultramontanism as a factor detrimental to their holistic concept of Liberalism based on civil and religious liberty'. See his thesis, 'Presbyterian Radicalism', p.177.

³⁹³ John Vandaleur Stewart to John Andrews, August 18 1852, DCRO, D/Lo/C 520 (2), (viii-ix).

³⁹⁴ In his thesis S.M. Stewart recognized that, 'the controversy over the restoration of the English Catholic episcopate in 1850-51 did not deter the presbyterians involved in the national league organisation, nor did it prevent a joint Catholic and Presbyterian association in Down', S.M. Stewart, 'Presbyterian Radicalism', pp.146-7.

Priests, and the Presbyterians are too happy to fan the flame'.³⁹⁵ However, another problem within the north, was an increasingly Presbyterian-centric vision on the part of many liberal and pro-tenant right Presbyterians, for whom the election was also regarded as an opportunity to bolster the much-deplored lack of Presbyterian representation in Parliament as well as pursuing tenant right interests. This clearly highlighted differing agendas between northern and southern leaguers, which soon became more pronounced over the 'pledge breakers' controversy, helping to seal the fate of the League's north-south basis by 1853.

The immediate aftermath of the 1852 election did not, however, dampen at least outward efforts to maintain League principles. At a tenant right gathering in Rutherford's Ballydown meeting house near Banbridge, the minister spoke of never deserting 'the cause of my fatherland....even when the green grass waves over my tomb'. He continued:

"Buried and cold, when this heart stills her motion,
Green be thy fields, sweetest isle of the ocean;
And thy harp-striking bards sing aloud with devotion –
Erin mavourneen, Erin go bragh"'.³⁹⁶

Such rhetoric clearly, and deliberately, echoed the language of the 1790s, and the songs in *Paddy's Resource*. The meeting's resolution reaffirmed, 'the necessity of union against landlordism'.³⁹⁷ At a public dinner in Letterkenny given to Donegal's League candidate, Underwood and Rentoul demonstrated a continuing commitment to north-south unity on the question of tenant right, despite the election results. Underwood predicted that at the forthcoming League conference in Dublin, 'Not then shall it be said that the Catholics are more National than the Presbyterians – we will retrieve our name'.³⁹⁸ Commenting on the conference, the *Newsletter* attacked the *Banner* and those Presbyterians who attended as putting themselves, 'in the same harness as the organs of Ultramontane Papists, of the enemies of the Protestant Church establishment, of the fierce republicans, and of the desperate communists who make up...the "Great Dublin Conference"'.³⁹⁹ Similarly, the *Down Recorder* accused the *Banner* of being, 'too much enamoured of the *United Irish* work, to break up the League, and part company with the priests'.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁵ Andrews to J.V. Stewart, June 27 1852, DCRO, D/Lo/C 520 (2) (iii).

³⁹⁶ *BU*, July 23 1852.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁸ *Nation*, August 21 1852.

³⁹⁹ *BNL*, September 20 1852.

⁴⁰⁰ *DR*, August 21 1852.

The breach between northern and southern members of the Tenant League did happen in 1853, when a bitter dispute erupted between McKnight and Rogers on the one hand, and with Duffy and the other southern delegates, on the other, at a special meeting of the League convened in January of that year.⁴⁰¹ The source of conflict, as mentioned, was the accepting of two government posts by the Irish M.Ps of the Brigade, John Sadleir and William Keogh.⁴⁰² The staunch insistence on the pledge of independence by the Catholic members, contrasted with the support of the Presbyterian Leaguers for the move. This reflected a more pragmatic stance within the north, and no doubt more so given that the new Prime Minister, Lord Aberdeen, was himself a Presbyterian. As far as the Catholic press were concerned, ‘The Doctor [McKnight] has had his turn out of Tenant Right, and he is now teaching the Presbyterian aspirants of the North to lower their tone and look to Government for good things’.⁴⁰³ Duffy also claimed that the Presbyterian elder Wilson Kennedy, ‘an intimate friend and ally of Mr. John Sadleir’ and director of Sadleir’s bank,⁴⁰⁴ had been a significant influence in the north. One conservative writer in the *Newsletter* declared with satisfaction that, ‘The true Presbyterians of Down don’t make speeches of a revolutionary kind at Popish chapels on Sabbaths – they don’t patronise the Dublin cabal...nor will they bear such an atrocious misrepresentation as the editorial of the *Banner*’.⁴⁰⁵ The *Times* reported with similar eagerness that, ‘the “union of the North with the South” had been extinguished.’⁴⁰⁶ Following the northerners final breach with the League in October 1853, Frederick Lucas, a tenant right newspaper editor from the south, complained that the Presbyterians had, ‘betrayed us at the elections’, referring bitterly to them as the ‘slaves of self-interest’.⁴⁰⁷

But not even the acrimonious split within the Tenant League, nor the efforts by its enemies to raise the cry of “No Popery”, succeeded in pushing northern Presbyterianism any closer to sympathy, harmony or co-operation with Protestants of the established church. Rev. A.P. Goudy underlined this in his series of political letters in 1852, denouncing the fact that the established church had allied itself on the side of landlord power in the late tenant right struggle. He noted, ‘Their apathy as to their [*i.e.*

⁴⁰¹ See *Nation*, January 15 1853 for League proceedings.

⁴⁰² See Armstrong, *Economic History*, pp.25-28; O’Shea, *Prince of Swindlers*, pp.307-25.

⁴⁰³ Quotation from the *Belfast Mercury* as reported in the *Nation*, February 5 1853.

⁴⁰⁴ O’Shea, *Prince of Swindlers*, p.120.

⁴⁰⁵ *BNL*, April 4 1853.

⁴⁰⁶ *Times*, April 7 1853.

⁴⁰⁷ Extract from Frederick Lucas’ newspaper, the *Tablet*, printed in *Times*, October 3 1853. In many ways, Lucas’s description was quite accurate, given that for many Presbyterians, achieving proper parliamentary representation had been as important a concern as tenant right at the 1852 election.

the tenant farmers'] grievances, and opposition to their claims, are not rendered a whit the more palatable that they are presented under the guise of alarm at the encroachments of Popery'.⁴⁰⁸ This was also emphasized in a letter in the *Banner* in December 1853 denouncing in bitter terms, Toryism, 'Protestant Peace', and Cooke himself.⁴⁰⁹ However, the same letter did emphasize a growing preoccupation with a more insular, sectarian outlook, occupied primarily with the aim of increasing Presbyterian influence and power, particularly in their own representation in Parliament.

As Wright noted, this Presbyterian-centric agenda had already been evident from prior to the 1852 election,⁴¹⁰ and became more entrenched thereafter. Clearly it was a policy guaranteed to be bitterly resented by Catholics such as Lucas, as well as by conservative Presbyterians, landlords, and the Church of Ireland. As Bew and Wright have noted, 'as the ties between the C[atholic] D[efence] A[ssociation] and the Tenant League in the south seemed to grow closer, northern tenant-right candidates...began to speak more of the need for Presbyterian parliamentary representation plus support for Sharman Crawford's bill'.⁴¹¹

In a bitter attack on Rev. John Rogers in a pamphlet of 1861, the Comber minister's 'alliance with Popish priests' during the Tenant League was recalled with disdain: 'In a few years however', the author commented, '....the Papists kicked him out of partnership'.⁴¹² Similarly, a Presbyterian poem published in 1857 recalled how Rogers,

'Presumes, in frothy sentences, to teach
To Downshiremen what Connaught priestlings preach
Of "tenant right" – a thing well understood,
Of course, by men who never owned a rood'.⁴¹³

In drawing conclusions from the failure of the Tenant League to maintain Irish unity, Duffy argued that, 'the estrangement of the Northern delegates...did not originate in any hereditary causes of quarrel existing between North and South', but rather from, 'such a difference of political opinion as constantly divides men in England, and in all countries where free institutions exist. The controversy primarily was whether certain

⁴⁰⁸ Goudy, *Right versus Might*, p.9.

⁴⁰⁹ *BU*, December 22 1853.

⁴¹⁰ Wright, *Two Lands*, p.200.

⁴¹¹ Paul Bew and Frank Wright, 'The Agrarian Opposition in Ulster Politics, 1848-87', in S. Clark and J.S. Donnelly jnr (eds.), *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914* (Madison, 1983), p.199.

⁴¹² *The Ballygowan Revival Demonstration*, p.4.

⁴¹³ *A Rod for the Rhymer; or, Presbyterianism Defended: Being an Answer to the Un-Presbyterian Doggrel of "R.M.C."*, by W.J.M., *A Presbyterian of the Right School* (Belfast, 1857), p.20.

persons in accepting office had acted with probity and good faith'.⁴¹⁴ Whilst Duffy's own agenda must be borne in mind, the ability of certain Presbyterian and Catholics to co-operate together in such virulent opposition to the powerful landed class, and despite the bitter hostility of conservative Presbyterians, cannot be dismissed.

Of course, the demise of Repeal as the central issue in Irish politics made such north-south unity possible, but Catholics involved in the League still remained Repealers. Presbyterians involved in the movement were, naturally, well aware of this. However they showed themselves willing to put political and theological differences aside, driven forward by a continued alienation from the landlord class and resentment of their political and economic domination. Above all, the tenant right movement underlined the extent of the opposition to Cooke's 'Protestant Peace' among a majority of his own colleagues in the Assembly. What more emphatic way to demonstrate this than by working alongside priests and Repealers north and south, in order to challenge the Protestant establishment and secure tenant right?

If many Presbyterians have been noted for their silence on the rebellion in the immediate aftermath of 1798, including the Synod of Ulster, for Roman Catholics the legacy of '98 was just as awkward. As Whelan has rightly argued, O'Connell, the leader of Catholic Ireland in the post-rebellion era, was just as keen to distance himself and his fellow countrymen from any rebel associations⁴¹⁵ – they were after all striving to obtain Catholic Emancipation from government. In the process of defending Catholic participation, O'Connell made strident efforts to emphasize Presbyterian leadership in '98. Whilst each side dealt with the rebellion's legacy, the question of how far Catholics and Presbyterians moved apart after 1800, must be underwritten by the question of exactly how close together each side had been in the 1780s and 1790s. Was 1798, as Whelan and others have optimistically wondered, the potentially missed moment in Irish history, when Catholic and Presbyterian almost subsumed their differences – or an inevitable failure?

The stance of many Presbyterians towards their Catholic countrymen in the 1790s was ambiguous, and whilst it is impossible to disregard the sectarianism which ultimately scarred the rebellion, the genuine desire of many Presbyterians to support Catholic interests both before and after 1798 should not be forgotten. Presbyterians such as Henry Montgomery assumed the mantle of Drennan and Dickson in the post-United Irish era, actively involved in supporting Catholic interests despite the growing

⁴¹⁴ Duffy, *League*, p.272.

presence of O'Connell and his 'Catholic Ireland'. Whilst attitudes towards the Act of Union became a significant dividing line after 1800 between the Presbyterian and Catholic communities, this did not prevent their co-operation in the tenant right movement, and the participation of significant numbers of Presbyterian clergymen in the Tenant League – a Dublin based and Catholic-led organisation. It is clear that with the exception of Cooke and his Tory followers, most Presbyterian ministers remained utterly opposed to and largely alienated from the power and privilege of Ireland's Anglican ruling elite.

Alvin Jackson has recognized how, 'Cooke harnessed Protestant bewilderment at the rapid evolution of Irish Catholicism from political passivity and legal subjection in the late eighteenth century to political assertiveness and (at least nominal) legal equality in the 1830s'.⁴¹⁶ This, combined with the growth in evangelicalism, clearly presented new difficulties in the history of Presbyterian-Catholic relations, but in the first half of the nineteenth century at least, such relations had not yet been irrevocably polarized. Hostility to the Protestant establishment clearly continued to offer a degree of common ground. Despite the large-scale political mobilisation of Irish Catholicism from the 1820s, many Presbyterians remained utterly hostile to Cooke's solution of a Protestant 'bloc'. Arguably, within the safety net of the Union, many Presbyterians felt secure in continuing to condemn and challenge Anglican domination, and in co-operating with Catholics in the non-political arena. Presbyterianism in the first fifty years after the Union was, therefore, in many ways entirely consistent with that of the 1780s and 1790s, albeit tailored by the seismic events of rebellion and the emergence of a very different and more 'combatative [*sic*]'⁴¹⁷ Catholic political nation under O'Connell.

⁴¹⁵ Kevin Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism, and the construction of Irish identity 1760-1830* (Cork, 1996), pp.150-1

⁴¹⁶ Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998*, p.65.

⁴¹⁷ Connolly, *Religion and Society*, p.26.

CHAPTER 5 PRESBYTERIANS AND ELECTORAL POLITICS

The word 'transformation' has been used persistently to describe the progress of presbyterian politics from the 1790s through to the nineteenth century.¹ But it is a term both misleading and simplified, not least because it presupposes a unity of purpose to presbyterian politics in the years immediately prior to the 1798 rebellion, which never existed. Indeed, many who had been considered 'liberal', even 'radical', in their political outlook during the 1780s, most notably Henry Joy and Rev. William Bruce, repudiated the subsequent extreme radicalism of the latter 1790s.² Equally, as noted, many Presbyterians west of the River Bann, moulded by their experiences of bitter sectarianism, offered their allegiance to the loyalists. Indeed, the 'fragmented politics of the Presbyterians'³ was as strong in the 1790s as in 1852.

This chapter seeks to examine the half-century after 1798 in more detail, highlighting the continuities in Presbyterian politics. These included, most notably, an independent and strong liberal/radical tendency, with an abiding resentment of the landlord and Anglican domination of electoral politics and northern representation. As exponents of radical political reform, the aims of many Presbyterians after 1800 remained those of the original United Irishmen, of '1791 vintage'⁴ (indeed the *Banner of Ulster* itself acknowledged this in 1852). Beyond the middle class liberal elite, Presbyterian ministers and tenant farmers were to be deeply involved in the agrarian radicalism of the tenant right campaign, constituting a significant democratic movement to challenge Toryism and landlord politics.

The County Down election of 1805 was the first opportunity to test the waters of Presbyterian political opinion in the aftermath of the rebellion, in a county with a strong Presbyterian heartland, which had been one of the most powerful areas of United Irish

¹ A.T.Q Stewart used the term in the title of his M.A. thesis in 1956, 'The Transformation of Presbyterian Radicalism'. In 1954, T.W. Moody named the 'transformation of Ulster liberalism' as one of the most significant features of post-1800 Ireland. See, his 'General Survey', in Moody and Beckett, *Ulster Since 1800: a Political and Economic Survey*. In his 1972 study of 'County Down Elections, 1783-1831', Peter Jupp cited the 1820s as the period when, 'radical presbyterianism was transformed into a more conservative mould'. See *Irish Historical Studies*, vol.18 (1972), p.188.

More recently, Elaine McFarland in her *Scotland and Ireland in the Age of Revolution*, described how, 'the political allegiances of the Ulster Presbyterian population were on the brink of a historic realignment' in 1799, p.209.

² Bruce, Rev. William and Joy, Henry (eds.), *Belfast Politics; or A Collection of the Debates, Resolutions and other Proceedings of that Town in the years M,DCC,XCII, and M,DCC,XCIII. With Strictures on the Test of Certain of the Societies of United Irishmen: Also, Thoughts on the British Constitution* (Belfast, 1794).

³ K.T Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885* (Oxford, 1984), p.267.

⁴ Wright, *Two Lands*, p.51.

support. Local Presbyterian ministers such as William Steel Dickson⁵ and Samuel Barber supported Colonel John Meade, in opposition to Lord Castlereagh, British foreign secretary, who had overseen the brutal suppression of the rebellion, and had been a central figure in the carrying of the Act of Union. Castlereagh's defeat in 1805 reflected a personal hatred stemming from his political 'betrayal' – he was first elected for the county in 1790 as the 'independent' candidate to challenge the conservative monopoly of the Downshire family, with significant support from local radical Presbyterians.⁶ But his subsequent distancing from both his own Presbyterianism, and his whig politics (and ultimately his elevation to personal glory in Pitt's Tory government) horrified those Presbyterians who had assisted in levering him into the world of politics.

An Irish emigrant writing from America in 1798, bitterly recalled how Castlereagh had overseen the arrest of 'his former supporters when in the Whig Club and at the Down election', including William Tennent and Samuel Neilson.⁷ Writing to Castlereagh's half-brother (the future Third Marquis of Londonderry), the Rev. Samuel Barber plainly stated that he would not be voting for the former at the 1805 election, owing to Barber's imprisonment at the hands of Castlereagh in 1798.⁸ John Sherrard, whilst promising his vote to Castlereagh, warned of the strong opposition he was likely to face in being re-elected. He wrote,

It is true your Lordship now stands upon high and strong ground: your political conduct has gained the favourable ear and confidence of majesty; but be assured, my Lord, it has lost you the confidence of many of your best and warmest friends among the people of this country..... Add to this that the people of this county in general have lost all relish for elections, even suppose the candidates were the most popular men that could be proposed. They consider Ireland as in a state of complete subjection and subordination to England, and that if all the members she is entitled to send to the Imperial Parliament were to propose and debate any measure for the good of their country, if opposed by England they could not carry it into execution.⁹

⁵ Bailie, 'William Steel Dickson', p.69.

⁶ Such as Rev. Samuel Barber and Rev. William Steel Dickson.

⁷ Typescript entitled, 'A Letter from an Irish Emigrant to his Friend in the United States, giving an account of the Commotions in Ireland, of the United Irishmen, and Orange Societies and of Several Battles and Military Executions', (written in New York, September 1798), among the letters gathered by the Presbyterian historian, David Stewart. A note attached states that the original of this letter is in the library of the New York Historical Society. PRONI, D/1759/3B/8 (now found at MIC/637/10).

⁸ Samuel Barber to Charles Stewart, c. August 1805, PRONI, D/3030/N/51.

⁹ John Sherrard to Lord Castlereagh, July 29 1805, D/3030/N/33.

The lengthy election squib published by reformers in Down in 1805 gives a flavour of the very personal Presbyterian hatred directed towards Castlereagh:

the good old spirit of the county is roused... to wipe off the stain of misrepresentation, and convince the world, that the county of Down will no longer suffer the man, who, filched from Ireland, its parliament, its constitution, its independence...¹⁰

A 'County of Down Farmer' in Killinchy, recalled Castlereagh's betrayal of his 1790 election promises, lamenting the dissolution of the Irish parliament at his hands.¹¹

Of course, many of the lamentations for the old Irish Parliament were merely rhetorical, for as pro-Castlereagh propaganda reminded the electors, '...did you never complain of that Parliament; - did you never say it was incurably corrupt?'¹² Indeed, reformers, it argued, should naturally support the Act of Union: '...observe how your interests have been attended to', it argued, 'you are not governed by a Parliament, in which you are not fairly represented, you have at least your full share of representation'.¹³ Perhaps, however, the cynicism of what might be gained under an English legislature, alluded to by Sherrard, dampened potential enthusiasm for the Act of Union. Indeed, a variety of Presbyterian reformers spent the next fifty years protesting that this 'representation' remained illusory, so long as landlords and aristocrats dominated the electoral process and candidate nominations, more so since these men were rarely Presbyterians.

But despite the logic of the argument for supporting Union, many Presbyterians clearly struggled to enthuse on the subject. There was indeed anger at the corruption employed in its passing, but also perhaps a lingering regret at the *symbolic* loss of national pride in its own legislature, however inept and unrepresentative. The squib's comment that 'Whatever be the consequences to ensue from the completion of the Union, it is now established – and we are silent; but the means employed to accomplish it, can never be forgotten',¹⁴ certainly suggests that Presbyterian silence on the subject was not borne out of approval of the Act, but rather a passive acceptance, accompanied by a long memory. This is reiterated by the editor of the 1805 squib, in his concluding remarks, when he notes that, 'we do not hesitate to declare, that the general opinion, not only of the county of Down, but of the nation at large, is in every aspect, contrary to that of Lord Castlereagh, even on the famous question of the Union...Having already

¹⁰ *County of Down Election* (1805), p.12-13.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.22.

¹² *County of Down Election* (1805), p.99.

¹³ *Ibid*, p.42.

¹⁴ *Ibid*.

declined entering into the merits of that question, we now dismiss it, once more expressing our sincere wish, that it may be productive of all the advantages which his Lordship has laboured so much to make us believe the country will derive from it'.¹⁵

The sharp division within Presbyterian ranks was evident, with the conservative Rev. Robert Black of the Synod of Ulster offering his electioneering support to Lord Castlereagh in 1805. Chapter One has already noted his pro-establishment Tory credentials which certainly did not win him the respect of the Presbyterian ministry. In a reply to one of Black's election letters, one writer dismissed his efforts to impugn Castlereagh's opponents as 'disloyal', arguing that, 'there is no danger of any disturbance, or disaffection to Government, or friendship with Bonaparte, even if *your* favourite candidate should not succeed'.¹⁶ This was not the last time that conservatives would endeavour to use memories of '98 to discredit the reforming or independent interest. The 1805 squib's reference to the 'troubled conscience' of Castlereagh and his father, to whom, 'the ghosts of PORTER and of GOWDY haunt his pillow', suggest that memories of the atrocities against the Presbyterian community were still raw.¹⁷ In a satirical mock hustings speech by Castlereagh which appeared in the 1805 squib book, reference was inevitably made to his 'early exertions' for reform in the northern Whig club in 1791: '...if...some misguided men have fallen a sacrifice to these principles which I, and my associates then favoured – if Birch and Baker narrowly escaped being hanged – if Porter, Gowdy, Orr and others were hanged, they themselves only are to be blamed, who did not recant, and new model their political creed, with as much *dexterity* as I did..'.¹⁸ The parodying of a supposed play entitled, 'Justice Done at Home' – starring 'Lord Slender' *i.e.* Castlereagh, who, on hearing news of Meade's increasing support, declared, 'It is these damned UNITED IRISHMEN whose party revives'¹⁹ – is a reminder that some of the personnel of the movement remained politically active long after its organisation and structure had collapsed.

Interestingly, the veneration of the Volunteer patriots of the 1780s and the bitter and disrespectful attacks on the First Marquis of Londonderry (Castlereagh's father) found in the pages of the 1805 Down election squib, were echoed again on the pages of

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.103.

¹⁶ Black's pseudonym was 'Dr. Philalethes'.

¹⁷ *County of Down Election* (1805), p.52. The Rev. James Porter of Greyabbey was hanged in front of his meeting house in Greyabbey in 1798, and local feeling maintained that Lord Londonderry had the power to prevent the execution, but chose not to, in revenge for Porter's bitter attacks on him in the infamous pamphlet *Billy Bluff and the Squire* (1796), one of Porter's most celebrated works for the United Irish cause.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.34-5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.79.

the radical *Belfast Monthly Magazine* between 1809 and 1814, and again, many years later in the county at the height of the Presbyterian tenant righters' campaign in the 1852 election. By this time, it was the Third Marquis of Londonderry who had become the Presbyterian focus of attack. John Caldwell's letter from New York to Robert Simms in Belfast, remarking how much he had enjoyed reading the 'County Down pamphlet' – 'I rejoice in the discomfiture of the Presbyterian Lord' – demonstrates that the 1805 election propaganda even reached the shores of America, and the United Irishmen in exile there.²⁰ At times of future political excitement, the events of the Down election of 1805 were recalled in the pages of the Presbyterian liberal *Northern Whig* newspaper.²¹

The triumph of the reformers in Down in 1805, however, had only been possible thanks to the powerful backing given to the independent interest by the Dowager of Downshire and her own personal vendetta against Castlereagh. Thus, when in 1812 the two powerful families agreed a political pact to support each other for a seat each in the future representation of Down, the county's electoral process became in effect a closed house. The fact that such a large county, with a strongly independent Presbyterian population, consistently returned Tory aristocratic candidates, was a source of frustration to Presbyterian reformers throughout the nineteenth century.²² Indeed, the Presbyterian electoral success in 1790 was frequently and triumphantly recalled as a source of inspiration by Presbyterian reformers of the nineteenth century, as the moment when Presbyterian had defied landlord. After the 1812 electoral pact, however, such a scenario seemed unlikely.

Historians, such as Peter Jupp and Brian Walker have identified a number of factors contributing to the Hill-Stewart domination in Down, other than the simple coercion of economically dependent tenant voters, including the natural deference of tenants.²³ These included a combination of 'stern paternalism', and when required, blatant oppression, or at least the threat of it, to control and influence the votes cast at the polls. Walker has argued that the Hill-Stewart coalition was only achieved with considerable endeavour and expense, their dominance at the polls disguising the

²⁰ John Caldwell to Robert Simms, May 15 1806, PRONI, D/1759/3B/6.

²¹ In a letter calling Presbyterian reformers to action, 'Amicus Justile' urged electors to combine against, 'lordly influence', reminding them, 'how, 'the Electors of the County Down expelled from their representation, a Castlereagh, when Secretary of State'. *NW*, February 9 1837.

²² In the first half of the nineteenth century, only 5 out of 22 Down elections were even contested. See Brian Walker, 'Landowners and Parliamentary Elections in County Down, 1801-1921', in L. Proudfoot and W. Nolan (eds) *Down: History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin, 1997), p.307

²³ See Jupp, 'County Down Elections 1783-1831', pp.177-206.

ongoing efforts to rally independent opposition among lesser gentry. But, ultimately he argues that, 'what remained of radicalism in the county after the 1798 rebellion failed to manifest itself in county politics',²⁴ which stayed the preserve of a very tiny elite.

The Down electoral scene preoccupied Drennan and Tennent's political periodical, the *Belfast Monthly Magazine*. In 1809 it voiced its frustration of landlord domination of politics, both in their direct influence in the nomination of hand-picked candidates, and indirectly, through their control of their tenants' votes at the polls. For Presbyterian reformers, this landlord control retarded all chance of meaningful parliamentary reform. In an address clearly aimed at the new Marquis of Downshire, who had just come of age,²⁵ the *Magazine* warned that,

your lordship will indulge a wish to influence, and perhaps direct elections for the county in which you live [Down].... Suppose you wish to put in a friend to represent that great and populous county; you will naturally expect his being your friend should be a sufficient recommendation to the approbation of your tenantry. But my lord, I am not quite certain of the soundness of that patriotism, which assumes a right of demanding the elective suffrages of a body of tenantry, as a necessary, a stipulated, or an implied appendage to their leases'.²⁶

In October 1811 the *Magazine* urged Belfast, 'once so famous for its public spirit', to assume the mantle of patriotism and lead the campaign for parliamentary reform.²⁷ It argued that, 'The freedom of election is a most material branch of parliamentary reform'. 'In vain, the rotten boroughs may be lopped off', but 'if the counties are not set free from the shackles imposed by the aristocracy, and the influence of government, operating directly thro' the places and pensions', then there would be no hope of meaningful reform or representation.²⁸ For Presbyterian reformers, the most obvious solution to curb landlord political power was meaningful parliamentary reform;²⁹ they visualized a House of Commons which represented the people, and not merely the ambitions of a tiny landed elite: 'Reform, to be radical and effectual, must attack the prevailing errors of the system, and the influence of landlords is at present one of the most prominent'.³⁰ The Presbyterian radicals envisaged biennial or triennial

²⁴ Walker, 'Landowners and Parliamentary Elections in County Down', p.307.

²⁵ *BMM*, July 1809, pp.29-37.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *BMM*, October 1811, p.316.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, February 1812.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, October 1811, pp.314-5.

elections, and most importantly, vote by ballot: 'The House of Commons ought to be the real representatives of the people'. In the case of County Down, 'the people, and the people only have an interest in elections, regardless of all degrading, and unconstitutional claims set up by the rival houses of Hill or Stewart'.³¹

At the County Down election of 1812 the Hill-Stewart junction was the source of much condemnation. Eldred Pottinger, a radical on the Down political scene, and known sympathiser of the United Irishmen, warned freeholders of the efforts being made to return Lord Castlereagh for the county, reminding them of his stance in 1790. Drennan's *Monthly Magazine* attacked the Marquis of Downshire and his 'Aristocratic squad', 'who consider the freedom of election as subservient to their own interests...counting the people as nothing...branded like sheep, and brought at an election into the pens of the man, on whose land they reside.'³² In a private letter, Pottinger attacked Downshire's intention to, 'drive his tenantry to the poll for Castlereagh.', affirming, 'I will neither buy the Electors or sell my vote'.³³

At the election nominations in Downpatrick, Pottinger claimed that he could name many men who had voted independently in Down elections after 1790, 'who were persecuted for many years, after giving their vote contrary to their landlord or his agent's wishes'.³⁴ The references to Castlereagh's early associations with the Northern Whig Club unsettled the Stewarts, prompting Castlereagh to write to his half-brother denying that he was ever party to any of the society's resolutions.³⁵ Despite the efforts of Pottinger, William Montgomery and other independents, to thwart landlord domination, the 1812 election was a success for the Hill-Stewart combination. The *Belfast Monthly Magazine* lamented that, 'the County of Down is bought and sold'.³⁶

Studiously avoiding recollection to the events of the 1790s, the *Belfast Monthly Magazine* continued to hark back to the glory days of the Volunteers and the Dungannon Convention. Its editors, 'too young to forget to what glorious height the Irish people were exalted in the year 1782', in the name of 'the genuine principles of civil and religious liberty'.³⁷ But at the same time, there was a sense of frustration at what one correspondent called the present 'political stupor apparent among Presbyterians',³⁸ and when the *Magazine* closed in December 1814, Drennan and

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *BMM*, February 1812, p.144.

³³ Eldred Pottinger to William Steele, 1812, PRONI, D/1405/36

³⁴ *BNL*, June 2 1812.

³⁵ Lord Castlereagh to Charles William Stewart, October 12 1812, D/3030/Q2/1.

³⁶ *BMM*, October 1812, p.322.

³⁷ *BMM*, July 1809, p.68.

³⁸ *BMM*, March 1812, p.237.

Tennent lamented, 'the apathy, and almost total decay of public spirit' in the north, and more especially in Belfast itself.³⁹ In the final editorial, Drennan outlined the, 'principles which have guided, and he trusts ever will guide his political conduct: a firm adherence to the principles of civil and religious liberty: a zealous advocacy of the equal rights of conscience and of the cause of Catholic Emancipation...a fearless and undaunted opposition to the Orange system...[and] Above all, as a security for all the others, and as the only means of attaining them...he professes his utmost zeal for parliamentary reform'.

As Chapter One emphasizes, Presbyterian radicals were soon to find a public spirit and a new direction for their patriotism, in the form of their educational experiment with the establishment of the Belfast Academical Institute. I have already demonstrated how Drennan and others involved, considered the sphere of education as a viable alternative to directly political endeavour. 'Inst' gave Presbyterian radicals a purpose once again, and crucially, a legitimate purpose; equally, it had helped revive the voice of radicalism within the Synod of Ulster, whose members had played such a pivotal role in the events of the 1790s. Writing against BAI and Drennan, in the *Belfast Newsletter* in 1816, 'Presbyter' wondered how, 'the reputed framer and zealous defender of the United Irishmen's oath, should, of all men, be the presiding mind, the spokesman, penman, and champion of an establishment supported by the State'.⁴⁰ The educational and cultural activities of Presbyterians at this time (involved, for instance, in Belfast's Harp Society and maintaining a keen interest in the Irish language⁴¹) was clearly, in many respects, an antidote to their political caution.

In a speech given to a meeting in Belfast on Catholic emancipation in 1816, Drennan argued for, 'the unqualified repeal of all the penal laws', and attacked the 'political monopoly' of the 'Protestant Ascendancy' as 'an appropriation of political power for the exclusive use and enjoyment of a part of the People'.⁴² The momentum of political activity in Belfast was certainly being reawakened, and in 1817 some of Belfast's leading radical citizens demanded a meeting to petition Parliament for 'a REFORM of the REPRESENTATION on the COMMONS HOUSE of PARLIAMENT'.⁴³ The petition subsequently drawn up at the meeting, attended by Presbyterians such as John Barnett, Robert Tennent, James Munfoad and Robert Grimshaw, demanded 'a pure and uncorrupted House of Commons, fairly, freely, and

³⁹ *BMM*, December 1814, p.532.

⁴⁰ *BNL*, August 9 1816.

⁴¹ See Roger Blaney, *Presbyterians and the Irish Language* (Belfast, 1996).

⁴² T/965/1.

frequently chosen', and an end to the corruption which had 'dispossessed' the people of 'all real representation in Parliament'.⁴⁴ A draft of the petition sent to Robert Tennent from Drennan and in the latter's handwriting,⁴⁵ suggests that he was still the literary force behind radical Presbyterian political activity. Interestingly though, Drennan simultaneously expressed his opinion in a private letter to Tennent that 'my decided belief is that reform will never be obtained by petitionary means – Persevere said Lord Charlemont, thirty years ago'.⁴⁶ As Chapter One emphasized, Drennan placed future hopes on the medium of education and he regarded the establishment of BAI as a crucial part of wider *political* progress. The author of a letter to the *Belfast Commercial Chronicle* in June 1818 on the subject of the electoral politics in that other Presbyterian heartland, County Antrim, lamented that, 'Freedom and Independence....are at present...obsolete, and totally expunged from our Electioneering Vocabulary'. He asked, would the people, 'tamely suffer one or two great landed proprietors to put whom (and only whom) they please, in nomination for this important trust...'.⁴⁷

The 'democratical tendency' of Presbyterians, referred to in the House of Commons by the Earl of Mansfield in 1821, had certainly been demonstrated in 1820 when Presbyterian reformers had made public their support for Queen Caroline. Writing to his father, Robert Tennent, in 1820, Robert James Tennent reported on the level of popular support for the Queen in Belfast, including her picture on display in a shop window.⁴⁸ William Mitchell's account in a letter to his friend, young Tennent, of the illuminations in Belfast organized by the radical Catholic campaigner, Jack Lawless, estimated that, 'On the whole, 9/10 of the town illuminated'.⁴⁹ A similar account of the excitement generated in Belfast in support of the Queen, and in defiance of the town sovereign, Verner, was detailed by Robert Templeton in a letter to Robert James Tennent.⁵⁰ S.J. Connolly has emphasized that during these years Belfast indeed, 'remained the center [*sic*] of a recognizable body of Protestant, overwhelmingly Presbyterian, radicalism...'.⁵¹

From its formation, the *Northern Whig* newspaper articulated a sustained campaign on the necessity of parliamentary reform and catholic emancipation, and

⁴³ *BNL*, February 21 1817

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ William Drennan to Robert Tennent, no date, c.1817, D/1748/C/1/60/8.

⁴⁶ Drennan to Tennent, no date, c.1817, D/1748/C/1/60/7.

⁴⁷ *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, June 1818, PRONI, T/965/2-5 (political cuttings and extracts belonging to William Drennan)

⁴⁸ Robert James Tennent to Robert Tennent, October 12 1820, D/1748/C/1/215/10.

⁴⁹ William Mitchell to R.J. Tennent, November 24 1820, PRONI, D/1748/G/457/8.

⁵⁰ Robert Templeton, Belfast, to Robert James Tennent, Dublin, November 20 1820, D/1748/G/652/1A.

above all, offered one of the most strident voices of opposition to the electoral control of the landlord class. For old Presbyterian radicals such as Archibald Hamilton Rowan, imprisoned briefly in 1798 and later involved in the establishment of the *Whig*, 'a great reform in the representation is the only thing worth the people contending for.'⁵² In 1826, the *Whig* deplored some of the outcomes of the recent general election in Ulster, and in particular on the re-instatement of the Stewart and Hill representatives in Down. The editor used an extract from the late William Drennan, to articulate the situation, stating that,

...the House of Commons is not an elective, but to all purposes, an hereditary House...the people may be said to be personated rather than represented...The occasional periodical bustle of an Election gives a certain air of liberty... that intoxicates the country, for a time, into a wretched satisfaction, and a disgraceful acquiescence.⁵³

He added, 'that the exercise of the rights of Election, is nothing more than a pastime to amuse the populace' and attacked the 'wealthy and titled Aristocrat, who is the owner of acres which he never saw, and drains a country which he never visits, requests his obsequious servants to vote for some penniless and brainless member of a noble family, or some military protégé, who may languish for the honour of seeing an M.P, added to his name'.⁵⁴

When in 1824 Daniel O'Connell launched his attack on the politics of northern Presbyterians since 1798, accusing them of repudiating their republican principles, and joining the ranks of the Orangemen, the *Whig's* response was simply to deny that Presbyterians were 'republicans in principle' and it advised O'Connell that any dampening of Presbyterian radical zeal owed more to the tone of the Catholic Association.⁵⁵ But the Catholic orator had rightly identified the fact that Presbyterian radicalism was certainly not synonymous with a separatist tradition. The *Whig* articulated this position itself in an editorial of August 2 1827, addressing the thorny issue of why so many Presbyterians had rebelled in 1798. The reason was not, the paper argued, that their religion naturally generated republican principles, but rather that, 'oppression' had pushed them into such a stance.⁵⁶ The comment emphasized the 'loyal' tone of Presbyterian radical liberalism. The fact that the Presbyterian paper

⁵¹ S. J. Connolly, 'Ulster Presbyterians', p.36.

⁵² Archibald Hamilton Rowan to John Carr, April 20 1821, PRONI, D/2930/8/14. From 1830 the *Whig* was under the editorship of James Simms, originally ordained for the Presbyterian ministry.

⁵³ *NW*, July 6 1826

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ See Chapter 4.

⁵⁶ *NW*, August 2 1827.

addressed the issue at all, and its defensive stance in doing so, underlined the effort still required to erase the mark of disloyalty from the Irish Presbyterian name. Whilst Presbyterian liberals rallied to the cause of parliamentary reform, there was an acceptance of the reality of the Act of Union. The *Whig* editorial expressed its hope for, 'a UNION of political sentiment among Irishmen of all religious persuasions, to pursue a legitimate object by legitimate means'. 'Though we believe that the Irish Parliament had no right to sell the trust committed to them', the paper added, 'yet as the Parliament has been expatriated, and since it must be – let it be so still'. The focus for Presbyterian radicals now, was a reform in the British House of Commons to end the 'mockery of representation'.⁵⁷

Cooke's pursuit of the Arians in the 1820s certainly gave credence to the popular assumption that Arians or 'New Light' Presbyterians were political radicals and that 'Old Light' or orthodox Presbyterians were generally conservative. Cooke's utter repudiation of the radicalism of the United Irish era was contrasted by the Arian leader's pride in the fact that his brothers had both fought on the rebel side in 1798.⁵⁸ William Porter, the Arian clerk of the Synod, ousted from his post, was a staunch and public advocate of Catholic Emancipation and had supported the veteran of '98, William Steel Dickson in the Synod in his battle with Black. Significantly, Porter had also opposed the revised *regium donum*. The attendance, for instance, of a probationer of the Presbytery of Antrim at a dinner for John Lawless in Carrickfergus in 1826, again seemed to confirm that non-subscribers were most closely allied with more radical politics. The *Newsletter* reported that at the dinner, he had 'eulogized the Arians and Mr. Lawless, advocated the cause of the Roman Catholics, and spoke in terms of disapprobation of the late Lord Londonderry [*i.e.* formerly, Lord Castlereagh the Foreign Secretary] and the Rev. Henry Cooke',⁵⁹ apparently confirming the correlation between politics and theology.

Some historians, notably, John Jamieson and J.M. Barkley, have argued that political and not religious scruples were the motivating factor in Cooke's determination to impose religious orthodoxy. Thus, it was less about purging the Synod of Arianism and rather about purging it of political radicalism. That said, Finlay Holmes has taken a more measured approach, acknowledging the strength of Cooke's evangelical orthodox convictions, as well as his own politics. He warns against the tendency to read history

⁵⁷ *NW*, November 1 1827.

⁵⁸ As well as Henry Montgomery, Finlay and ministers such as the Rev. William Porter were political liberals and Arians.

⁵⁹ *BNL*, May 12 1826.

backwards, in light of Cooke's subsequent pivotal role in conservative political circles during the 1830s, 40s and 50s. But as the history of the Synod of Ulster after the withdrawal of the Remonstrants testifies, and later the General Assembly, Cooke's conservative, pan-Protestantism was deeply unpopular with the majority of ministers whose politics remained strongly liberal. In 1829 the Rev. James Morrell (who had been Moderator of the Synod in 1813) emphasized that, 'there is no *necessary connexion* between orthodoxy and illiberality'.⁶⁰ The political significance of the link between the increasing evangelicalism among many Presbyterian clergy – the chief symptom of which was the imposition of a firm theological orthodoxy – has been much debated by historians. Some argue that it did encourage a more conservative position, whilst others argue that there is no clear connection between the two.⁶¹ Certainly, both Robert Tennent and Robert James Tennent denounced the formation of the new Reformation Society in Belfast, and the leading position of Rev. John Edgar within it.⁶² In a draft speech against the scheme, the younger Tennent argued that it was, 'calculated to interrupt the friendly relations which have so long subsisted among persons of all religious denominations'.⁶³

In 1826, prominent Presbyterian radicals attended a dinner in Belfast in honour of the radical Catholic journalist, Jack Lawless, including William and Robert Tennent, John Barnett, James Munfoad, Robert James Tennent and Robert Grimshaw. They toasted not only unqualified Catholic Emancipation, but also parliamentary reform, BAI, and the memory of William Drennan. Significantly, they too eulogized the memory of the patriots of 1782.⁶⁴ Speaking during the debates on the government's abolition of the forty-shilling freeholders in the Commons in March 1829, William Brownlow spoke of the necessity of creating, 'an independent race of voters in Ireland, whom the landlords could not influence and direct as they pleased', and he recalled the briefly successful exertions made in County Antrim fifty years earlier by Presbyterians to elect a popular candidate in defiance of landlords and Anglicans. However, he lamented how quickly, 'the aristocracy regained their influence'.⁶⁵ In June 1829, a letter from 'The Descendant of a Volunteer of 1782', was published on the subject of Antrim's electoral politics. The author was clearly frustrated that, as in Down, 'the

⁶⁰ *NW*, April 2 1829.

⁶¹ Notably, S.J Connolly, who regards the 'increasing self-assertion of Irish catholics' as far more significant to Presbyterian politics than 'the growth of evangelicalism' or 'any doctrinal influences'. See 'Mass politics and sectarian conflict', pp.77-8.

⁶² *NW*, May 22 1828.

⁶³ PRONI, D/1748/G/778/2B.

⁶⁴ *NW*, April 6 1826.

⁶⁵ *Hansard*, 2nd series, vol.20, 1335-7, March 19 1829.

representation of this great and opulent County, seems, by general consent, to be vested as an heirloom in the hands of two noble families..'.⁶⁶

The immense political excitement generated in the years between 1830 and 1832, as the Whig government's proposed Reform Bill was debated within and outside Parliament, inspired Presbyterian reformers to an even more aggressive denunciation of landlord political influence. The election of 1830, following the death of King George IV, prompted the 'Down Independent Electors Club' to stage another attempt to challenge the landlord coalition by returning Colonel Matthew Forde.⁶⁷ The *Whig* viewed the contest in Down as quite simply, a 'battle', 'between the people on the one side, and the aristocracy on the other', and offered its full editorial support to the independent challenge.⁶⁸ Similarly, the election in Antrim was portrayed in the same way, and the liberal newspaper supported attempts to thwart the Marquis of Hertford's nominee, in order that the county would not be enslaved for another seven years.⁶⁹ The Presbyterian paper also attacked the, 'despicable Tory principles' of the Hertford interest, as 'adverse to the rights and blessings of Ireland'.⁷⁰

On the eve of the election, a bitter and protracted war of words erupted between two contributors to the local press.⁷¹ In a letter to the *Whig*, 'An Independent Elector' avowed his support for Forde and denounced the 'Down Elector' as '...some ecclesiastical or other retainer scribbling for pay or preferment'.⁷² Indeed, the author of these letters was the Church of Ireland minister of Newtownards, Mark Cassidy, a loyal aide to Lord Londonderry and vehemently opposed to the Down reformers. The 'Independent Elector' attacked Cassidy's defence of the Hill-Stewart coalition, arguing that it would once more, 'degrade the county to the abject condition of a "close and hereditary borough", by handing down the representation as an heirloom with their estates...'. Whilst denouncing the stance of Lord Arthur Hill and Castlereagh on reform, he added, '...it is sufficient to know, that a majority of the Members in the House of Commons, is returned to Parliament by 154 individuals!!!...a system of mock representation remains in all its vitiousness and deformity....in what was intended to be, and ought to be, the people's House of Commons'.⁷³ Echoing the same sentiments of

⁶⁶ *NW*, June 18 1829

⁶⁷ *BNL*, July 23 1830; *NW*, September 23 1830.

⁶⁸ *NW*, July 22 1830

⁶⁹ *NW*, July 15 1830

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ The letters of 'A Down Elector' appeared in the *Newsletter*, whilst those of 'An Independent Elector of Down' appeared in the *Whig*.

⁷² *NW*, July 15 1830.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Presbyterian resentment at the betrayal of the late Lord Castlereagh, he reminded readers that it was exactly forty years since the county's reformers had triumphed in defying landlord bidding at the 1790 election. Moreover, the writer claimed that, 'had Reform been given in proper time', that is back in 1791-2, then the rebellion of 1798 would never have occurred, and the Act of Union avoided.⁷⁴ The *Whig* also vented its spleen against those smaller landlords, such as Sir Robert Bateson and Lord Kilmorey, who had promised their tenants' votes wholesale to the 'noble coalition'.⁷⁵

The *Whig* delighted in the toasts of the recent meeting of the Down Independent Club, to freedom of election, parliamentary reform and civil and religious liberty, attended by John McCance, William Montgomery, and the radical Protestant landlord, William Sharman Crawford. The newspaper also reiterated its own pledge to support, 'radical reform in the representation of the people'.⁷⁶ Despite the fact that many influential Presbyterians had opposed the junction, for instance William Montgomery of Greyabbey, the independent interest again failed to prise Down from the hands of the Stewart and Hill families in 1830. Coming at a time of 'reform' excitement, the *Whig* had regarded the 1830 elections as the best opportunity so far for, 'shaking off the influence of aristocratical usurption...'.⁷⁷ The dramatic language of the *Whig*, describing voters as, 'so long habituated to the dictation of their enslavers, that, like the Spartan Helots, the very sight of their masters has been sufficient to terrify them into submission', was re-echoed twenty years later by the *Banner of Ulster* in its continuing battle with the political power of landlordism.⁷⁸ At a dinner to Colonel Forde in September 1830, leading Presbyterian radicals took the opportunity of denouncing landlord influence.⁷⁹ John Barnett praised efforts to 'break through an improper, unjustifiable and ambitious junction, formed in the County by two Peers of the realm, who, not satisfied with their influence in the Upper House, must also have two representatives in the Lower House', whilst William Montgomery avowed himself 'a radical reformer' and advocated the necessity of the ballot.⁸⁰ Barnett added, 'I see around me the sons and grand-sons of my early associates in this place. In 1790, the period of the great contest for this County, I first imbibed my political principles, and which have remained unchanged to the present moment'.⁸¹ He expressed his hope that

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *NW*, August 12 1830

⁷⁶ *NW*, September 16 1830.

⁷⁷ *NW*, July 19 1830

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *BNL*, September 21 1830 (and also *NW*, September 20)

⁸⁰ *BNL*, September 21 1830

⁸¹ *NW*, September 20 1830.

Government would concede 'timely reform, and thereby prevent the possibility of revolution'.⁸²

'An Independent Elector of Down' published another letter, praising the dinner to Forde and the efforts, 'to rescue the County of Down from the state of thralldom and political slavery which it is at present sunk, by an unconstitutional and arrogant combination of two noble families, to perpetuate their own power, by destroying the liberties of the people'. The author emphasized that parliamentary reform was long overdue to end this 'notorious delinquency of the aristocracy' and he advocated Triennial Parliaments.⁸³ By contrast, the 'Down Elector' responded with a denunciation of 'the politics of Messrs Barnett, McCance, & Co. of the radical consistency firm of Belfast' and the '*Radical Club*', (i.e. the Down Independent Club).

The outcome of the Down election of 1830 prompted the *Whig* to launch an energetic campaign in support of vote by ballot.⁸⁴ Even O'Connell, although still bitterly scathing at the refusal of even radical Presbyterians to endorse his, 'Anti-Union' sentiments, conceded that the recent election in Down had showed 'promise of better days'.⁸⁵ His revisiting of the 'republican spirit' of Presbyterians in 1798, was a sharp contrast to the radicals themselves, who avoided the topic with care, and preferred to recall the Volunteers as their focus of political continuity. In a series of articles the *Whig* attacked the fact that the members in the Commons, 'instead of being the *representatives* of the people, are, the great majority of them, either selected from among the nobility, or holding their seats under the influence of the aristocracy'. It added, 'A Reform in the House of Commons must be effected, before we can have anything like that check upon aristocratical power...', and one of the chief elements of that was vote by ballot.⁸⁶ For Presbyterian reformers, 'the simple truth is, that landlords have no more any exclusive right to directing the votes of their tenants, than any other man in the country has...'

The growing momentum of the campaign for parliamentary reform was clearly demonstrated at a Belfast Reform Society meeting in December 1830.⁸⁷ Dr. Robert

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *NW*, September 23 1830

⁸⁴ *NW*, September 9 1830.

⁸⁵ 'Mr. O'Connell's Third Letter to the People of Ireland', printed in the *NW*, October 4 1830.

⁸⁶ *NW*, September 23 1830. The paper pointed to the late contest in Antrim when, 'Mr. McDonnell, it appears had the presumption to canvass some of the tenants of the Marquis of Donegall without asking permission...'. *NW*, September 30.

⁸⁷ *Report of the Proceedings at the Town Meeting, Held at Belfast, on the 2nd December 1830, for the purpose of Petitioning Parliament for A Reform in the System of Representation* (Belfast 1830), PRONI, D/2922/C/1/1; and also reported in *NW*, December 6 1830. Presbyterians in attendance included Robert

Tennent moved a resolution expressing the right of the people to a fair representation in the Lower House of Parliament', whilst John Barnett denounced how '..Antrim had been held... for many years past, in chains by two noble families, Hertford and O'Neill, is as notorious as the sun at noon-day'. He went on to describe his native county Down, which, 'groans under a state of nomination and bondage to the families of Downshire and Londonderry: and such is their influence in the County, that at the late Election two sprigs of these Noble Houses were returned, although they refused to support Reform in any shape..'.⁸⁸ It was, however, Rev. Henry Montgomery's lengthy speech and his fervent advocacy of vote by ballot,⁸⁹ which best reflected the spirit which prevailed among many Presbyterians at this time, in relation to the landed classes: 'Give us a genuine House of Commons, fully, freely and honestly representing the wishes and wants of the Democracy'. He continued,

Do we not all know, that Peers not only interfere in the choice of members for the Lower House of Parliament, but that, by their simple will and influence, they return the majority of the House of Commons...

... I need not refer, in illustration...to the late elections for Antrim and Down... and, yet, these are our boasted moral, religious and enlightened counties! Who can look at these things, and dare to talk of freedom of election, or to say, that the people are represented?... I abhor this system, as a subversion of the fundamental principles of this Constitution...giving a destructive preponderance to the Aristocratical branch of the Legislature....

But how is a change to be effected? Will the Aristocracy unite to curtail their own pleasures and privileges? The hope is vain. The evil must be remedied by sending into the House of Commons, genuine representatives of the people, instead of the mere echoes of the Nobility, that now make an idle mockery of representation! But can this be accomplished under our present system of voting? We have the theory, but not the fact of representation.... What, then, in ninety-nine cases out of every hundred, is the freedom practically enjoyed by our voters? Why, they are perfectly free to vote – just as their landlords command them! If they dare to murmur, some kind agent, or gentle bailiff, gives them a hint, that they hold their farm by leases... and that perhaps, other tenants, more grateful to a good landlord may be found!

Montgomery concluded that the only way to remedy this situation, was by an extension of the franchise, and above all, the introduction of vote by ballot, and he went on to

Tennent, Robert James Tennent, Montgomery, Simms, Munfoad, William Tennent, Grimshaw, Barnett and Sinclair.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

offer a marathon defence of the principle of secret voting. He described vividly the scenes of landlord coercion at the recent Antrim election. He attacked the hypocrisy of the landlords in resisting vote by ballot: 'the hollowness of the pretext, about a manly spirit, is, however, ludicrously illustrated by the conduct of the very men who use it. In all their own Associations and Clubs, literary, hunting, drinking, or agricultural, they constantly vote by ballot!'.⁹⁰

At the same meeting, James Simms and James Munfoad spoke in favour of parliamentary reform, 'to secure to the Counties and towns, at present returning Members to Parliament, not merely a nominal but a real representation'.⁹¹ In the printed resolutions from that meeting, Robert James Tennent inserted another, deploring the 'undue influence exercised by...the Church and the Landed Aristocracy'.⁹²

The bitter attack of the Tory mayor of Carrickfergus, John Campbell, on the Belfast meeting and on Reform in general, was typical of the efforts of those opposed to reform to characterize its advocates as demagogues and revolutionaries. Campbell noted that, 'Previous to the late rebellion, the advocates for Reform bore a very conspicuous character in the Town of Belfast: their principal leaders were followers of Priestly and Paine; and the nature of the Reform they then avowed, was the overthrow of the Established Church, and revolution of the State'. In particular he attacked Henry Montgomery's language at the late Belfast meeting. He noted how, 'Such language is scarcely becoming in a man who is himself receiving the King's bounty; but it is not strange that those who are fond of dethroning Kings, should have little consideration for the servants of Kings'. Above all, Campbell expressed his belief in the link between political radicalism and Arian theology, in his comment, 'As well might his Majesty's Government expect to find "grapes on thorns, or figs on thistles", as expect to find loyalty to an earthly King from those who deny it to their heavenly one'.

The success of the meeting in Belfast was consolidated with a Reform Dinner later that month, attended by the town's usual radical stalwarts and some prominent reformers from the County Down campaign. Grimshaw, the chairman, toasted, 'A full, fair, and free representation of the People in the Commons House of Parliament – the only remedy for national grievances'. Barnett commented how,

⁸⁹ NW, December 6 1830. He attacked the hypocrisy of the landlords in resisting vote by ballot, since, 'In all their own Associations and Clubs, literary, hunting, drinking, or agricultural, they constantly vote by ballot!'

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² PRONI, D/1748/G/779/2.

To be accounted a radical reformer, not long since, was esteemed by many violent men as little short of rebel, or revolutionist – they are however, become more sober-minded, and...can perceive that they were mistaken. Why any honest man should be disinclined to avow himself to be (what in my opinion constitutes) a radical reformer, I am at a loss to conjecture – that he wishes to root corruption out of the constitution, by the abolition of rotten boroughs, all useless places and pensions, triennial parliaments and vote by ballot.⁹³

The liberal Presbyterian Councillor James Gibson, also present, made his toast to the veteran reformer, Robert Tennent. The printed list of toasts compiled from the Reform Dinner included, ‘The People – the only source of legitimate power’, ‘A full, fair and free representation of the people in...Parliament’, ‘William Sharman Crawford and the Reformers of Down’, ‘An equitable appropriation of the property at present in the possession of the Established Church’, ‘The people of France’, ‘The United States of America – an example for the free, and a refuge for the oppressed’, and ‘An oblivion of party, and a union of all Irishmen for the common good’.⁹⁴

The *Northern Whig* was delighted with the sentiments expressed at the dinner as one, ‘well worthy of the Athens of the North’. In particular the editorial noted that of the main speakers, ‘there was not one who was not either a student of the Belfast Institution, or a member of the Historic Society’. There were certainly echoes of Drennan’s emphasis on the role of education in effecting longer-term political change in its comment that, ‘Education and intelligence were often alluded to, during the evening, as the moving causes of all national improvement and popular reformation’.⁹⁵ A meeting of Down freeholders in favour of reform was held in the same month in Downpatrick, at which Barnett led the familiar denunciations of the current state of parliamentary representation – ‘the *master evil* from which all the other grievances have sprung up and proceeded’ – and of the two current county Down M.P.s for their failure to offer support to the cause of Reform. The subsequent petition to the House of Commons drawn up at the meeting demanded triennial parliaments and a full and fair representation in the Commons.⁹⁶

This period of feverish activity culminated in the establishment of a new ‘Northern Reform Club’, involving Sinclair, Robert Tennent, Grimshaw and Barnett.⁹⁷ Lord Dufferin wrote with some alarm to Lord Londonderry in January 1831 about the

⁹³ *BNL*, January 4 1831.

⁹⁴ D/1748/G/779/4.

⁹⁵ *NW*, January 3 1831.

⁹⁶ D/2918/8/56.

⁹⁷ *NW*, January 27 1831.

situation in Down, referring to, 'that....organization of Radical and Reforming Clubs which are now about to throw our yet peaceable Co [sic]....into confusion'. On the recent meeting at Downpatrick, Dufferin denounced it as the work of 'the Radical Club'.⁹⁸ Writing on the activities in Down and Belfast, he informed Londonderry,

I do not learn that the Reform Club increases in Down District but one of most extraordinary nature is setting up in Belfast, where I perceive any person being introduced and paying one shilling becomes a member, some of the members promoting it appeared conspicuous in the report of the Secret Committee of Houses of Lords and Commons at the time of the Rebellion.⁹⁹

Londonderry reacted with horror that 'the Empire at large' should hear a petition from County Down advocating triennial parliaments.¹⁰⁰

The very public opposition of Lord Londonderry and his son Castlereagh to the Whig government's proposed Reform Bill in the years 1830-32, naturally made Down an even greater focus of political excitement and much anti-landlord sentiment. When parliament was dissolved and an election called in April 1831, the *Whig* expressed its wish to 'unseat the Tory maligning member' for Down.¹⁰¹ Despite presenting petitions in the Commons that he had received in favour of reform from Down, Castlereagh stated that he would vote against the Bill, and he objected to the claims of some of those petitions for triennial parliaments and vote by ballot. Moreover, he denounced those reformers who regarded such a Bill as, 'the panacea for all the evils which afflict that country'. Referring to the radical tone of the speech of one of the reformers at a meeting in Belfast (a reference to the 'democratic, republican institutions of America'), Castlereagh expressed his belief that, 'the more intelligent advocates of the measure regard it only as a means towards the attainment of their more extensive ulterior goals'.¹⁰² Speaking in the House of Lords only a few days later, Lord Londonderry dismissed the presentation of a Down reform petition by Lord Grey in withering terms. The so-called 'independent' club was nothing more than, 'a radical Club', and the petition signed by no one of respectability. Above all, its reform demands, 'would effect the ruin of the aristocracy'.¹⁰³

Referring to Castlereagh, the *Whig* expressed anger that Down, 'should have given a seat to a lordling, who had the hardihood to proclaim himself an enemy to that

⁹⁸ Lord Dufferin to Lord Londonderry, January 22 1831, DCRO, D/Lo/C 103 (2).

⁹⁹ Dufferin to Londonderry, February 7 1831, D/Lo/C 103 (3).

¹⁰⁰ Copy of Lord Londonderry to Lord Dufferin, February 22 1831, D/Lo/C 103 (5).

¹⁰¹ *NW*, April 25 1831, *i.e.* Castlereagh.

¹⁰² *Hansard*, series 3 vol.3, 750-4, March 22 1831.

¹⁰³ *Hansard*, series 3, vol. 3, 884-7, March 24 1831.

measure of Reform, which is now in progress through Parliament'.¹⁰⁴ In a private letter to Lord Londonderry, Lord Dufferin, referring to the forthcoming election and the Reform Bill, warned him that, 'there is a very strong impression here in favour of the bill, among every rank', and he predicted that, 'Lord Castlereagh's Independent votes would be greatly thinned if he votes against the Bill'.¹⁰⁵

In April a meeting of reformers was held in Belfast to discuss the best way to promote the reform candidate, the radical William Sharman Crawford, in opposition to the Hill-Stewart coalition.¹⁰⁶ Barnett led the resolution stating that 'the conduct of Lord Castlereagh, in opposing the Reform demanded by the voice of the nation... rendered him quite unworthy of representing the great and enlightened County of Down in Parliament'. Crawford's nomination as a candidate was seconded by Robert Tennent, and a committee of fourteen assembled to promote his return. This included McCance, Sinclair, Barnett, William Pirrie, Robert Tennent, and R. J. Tennent.¹⁰⁷ Despite the *Whig's* eleventh hour plea to Down voters to save the county, 'from the black infamy that would be for ever fastened on it', should 'that resolute anti-reformer Castlereagh'¹⁰⁸ be returned, the election was however, another triumph for the two great land-owning families. The *Whig* was quick to denounce the dark shadow of landlord influence at the polls: 'There cannot be a moment's doubt', it stated, 'but that freedom of election has been, in this instance, completely stifled by the most unjustifiable interference on the part of landlords. Had the voice of the constituency been permitted honestly to speak the general feeling, we have no hesitation in saying that Sharman Crawford, would have come in by a most triumphant majority'.¹⁰⁹ 'A County Down Reformer' writing on the unsuccessful outcome for the reformers of Down, similarly blamed, 'the political thralldom under which the tenantry of the noble Peers of that County have been held, for the last forty years'.¹¹⁰ These attacks were echoed in 1852, when an even more concerted Presbyterian challenge to the Hill-Stewart junction was once again unsuccessful.

¹⁰⁴ *NW*, April 7 1831. One correspondent to the *Whig*, Peter Johnston, who had organised the petition, blamed the efforts of Mark Cassidy and referred to a notice Cassidy had posted in Newtownards in April warning Londonderry's tenants, 'against signing any such papers; otherwise they will find their names annexed to documents which neither they nor their best friends approve of'. Johnston maintained that with only one exception, every freeholder he had called on had signed the petition in favour of reform. See *NW*, April 21.

¹⁰⁵ Dufferin to Londonderry, March 9 1831, DCRO, D/Lo/103 (6).

¹⁰⁶ *NW*, May 2 1831

¹⁰⁷ The reformers agreed to support Down's other current M.P, Lord Arthur Hill, on the grounds that he had voted in favour of the Reform Bill on its second reading.

¹⁰⁸ *NW*, May 12 1831.

¹⁰⁹ *NW*, May 16 1831.

¹¹⁰ *NW*, May 30 1831.

It is evident that conservative election propaganda in Down against reform endeavoured to associate its advocates with revolutionary ideas, and, more damagingly, with the 1798 rebellion. Attacking Barnett, Finlay, Tennent, McCance, Sinclair and Grimshaw individually, one squib entitled the 'Revolutionary Alphabet' stated, 'To this '98 set, we could many more add'. Another piece imagined the auction of 'The Belfast Branch of the Radical Stud', recording the previous 'forms' of Robert Tennent, Barnett and co., as: 'ran for the United Irishman's Reform and Revolution Stakes'; 'particularly distinguished himself in 1798'; and, finally, 'For performance, see Racing Calendar of 1798 and 1803'.¹¹¹ In May 1831 the ' '98 set' attended a dinner in Belfast held in honour of the liberal M.P for Limerick, Thomas Spring Rice, for his services to Ireland. William Tennent, Sinclair, Finlay, Barnett, Francis McCracken and Montgomery toasted reform and the efforts of the independent club in Down.¹¹²

The House of Lords' rejection of the Reform Bill in 1831, provided another opportunity for a denunciation of the negative influence of the landed classes in the country's political process.¹¹³ The *Whig* attacked men like Lord Londonderry, as 'the hereditary sages of the Legislature', for their 'unperishing hatred of popular liberty'.¹¹⁴ At a reform meeting that month in Belfast, Barnett asked, '...shall the destiny of twenty millions of the people hang upon the fate of forty one individuals, however exalted in station, ennobled by birth, or dignified by title? Surely not!'¹¹⁵ Once again, Henry Montgomery demonstrated a similar lack of deference to the landed classes, sarcastically asking, 'Did it require any very uncommon degree of information to know, that people's money would be as well kept in their own pockets, as if it went to pay the kept mistresses of Noble Lords? (Great cheering)'. R.J. Tennent told the meeting that, 'Old Ireland was alive again'.¹¹⁶

In a letter to Finlay at the *Whig*, the Presbyterian veteran radical, Archibald Hamilton Rowan stated that he had, 'ever adhered to the principle which directed the original engagement of the United Irishmen'. Rowan proposed, 'the test of that Society, with some slight alterations, for the adoption of the friends of reform', emphasising, 'an impartial representation of British subjects in Parliament', notably this time, with a reference of loyalty to the King.¹¹⁷ There were certainly echoes of the 1791 pledge of

¹¹¹ *The Down Squib Book* (1831), pp.61-4.

¹¹² *NW*, May 26 1831.

¹¹³ *NW*, October 13 1831.

¹¹⁴ *NW*, July 14 1831.

¹¹⁵ *NW*, October 17 1831.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *NW*, October 13 1831.

the United Irish Society in a declaration of the Belfast Reform Society in December 1831: whilst emphasising the need for a radical reform in the representation of the people in Parliament, it stated that, 'DISUNION is WEAKNESS'; 'we are bound together by a sincere and ardent desire to promote the happiness of ALL our countrymen', and above all, 'Let the names of Catholic, Presbyterian and Protestant, be merged in that of Irishmen'. But their public stance on the question of repeal was unambiguous: '...Reform, Union and Ireland'.¹¹⁸

The furore over the 1831 election in Down rumbled on well into the following year. In May 1832, leading Presbyterian reformers attended a dinner for Peter Johnston in a show of support for his recent treatment as a tenant of Lord Londonderry.¹¹⁹ Several Presbyterian clergymen from the Remonstrant Synod attended, including the Newtownards New Light minister, Rev. Hugh Moore, Rev. Fletcher Blakely, and Rev. John Scott Porter, at which Crawford led the usual denunciations of undue landlord influence at elections.¹²⁰ Unsurprisingly, Cassidy was quick to denounce the meeting as a mere vehicle to attack Lord Londonderry for his recent 'uncompromising resistance to the march of revolution'. It was composed, he claimed, 'of the ultra Radicals and Revolutionists of Belfast....together with the Socinian Ministers, the Priests and the Deists, from all parts, who have united now, as they did in 1798, in the vain hope of overturning the Protestant Established religion'.¹²¹

In response, Johnston defended the dinner which had been held to support him, arguing that its aim was less about reform itself, but rather, 'to prove to his Lordship, that he could not persecute any tenant on his estate, with impunity, who deemed it right to give that measure his humble support'. In addition he denounced Cassidy's claim of purely Arian Presbyterian clergy involvement, by noting the attendance of Rev. Mr. Henry, 'the Covenanting Clergyman, whose *Orthodoxy* you will not presume to question'. His comment that Londonderry had given the land in question to several other 'deserving inhabitants', seemed to offer proof to the reformers of the differing treatment tenants could expect between those who had obeyed and those who had disobeyed their landlord at the polls.¹²² In a similarly curt response, the Presbyterian Guy Stone who had attended the dinner for Johnston and had voted against Castlereagh,

¹¹⁸ *NW*, December 29 1831.

¹¹⁹ *NW*, May 31 1832 Johnston had been deprived of his forty acres of land on Londonderry's estate, without any remuneration for the improvements he had undertaken and he believed that this had been punishment for his 'voting against Lord Castlereagh, the son of my landlord, who is the avowed enemy of the Reform Bill'.

¹²⁰ *NW*, May 31 1832.

¹²¹ *NW*, June 7 1832.

¹²² *Ibid.*

defended himself from Cassidy's attacks.¹²³ The connection between political and theological radicalism was similarly reiterated by Emerson Tennent in a private letter in 1832.¹²⁴ He informed John Forster that, in Belfast, 'The Whigs are the unitarians and Catholics. The Tories old light Presbyterians and the Church'.¹²⁵

In May 1832 a meeting of advanced reformers was held in the *Northern Whig* offices in Belfast to pass a resolution in support of the late pro-Reform Whig ministry of Lord Grey, whose resignations had been forced by the refusal of the King to support the Reform Act. The report noted that, the King's name appearing on some trades' flags, had been covered with black crêpe. Robert Tennent, in the chair, led Crawford, Barnett, Grimshaw, R.J Tennent and Finlay in attacking the Peers of the House of Lords, and in calling for reform. But the meeting was equally strident on the subject of the necessity of 'keeping within the limitations of the law', rather than 'physical force'. Similarly, Finlay condemned one placard he had seen outside the meeting which advocated, "Reform, or the Pike".¹²⁶ But memories of 1798 alongside current fears of repeal were used by conservatives as political ammunition against the reformers. This was demonstrated at the orange, conservative demonstration near Downpatrick in January 1832. In a political speech clearly directed towards Presbyterians, one of the Anglican speakers urged 'Protestants of all denominations' to rally to the 'The Orange Institution.....as the best conservative system'. Having denounced the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, the Rev. A Bullick denounced 'Reform' as being supported by, 'Daniel O'Connell, the abettors of Popery, sedition, and faction, and the worthies of 1798'. He dubbed the 'Belfast Radical Club' as 'Dan's friends' and urged Presbyterians, 'to make common cause with us'. 'I know that there are black sheep both among you and us....I mean the Leaven of 1798, who are anxious to throw the apple of discord between us, to divide our interests'. Bullick concluded that, 'The Church of England is the only bulwark between the Presbyterians and the...insatiable fury of the Italian Church'.¹²⁷

When the Reform Act did finally become law, and a general election was called later that year, the Belfast radicals finally hoped that their chance to overturn the Tory, aristocratic monopoly of Belfast by its local landlords, the Donegall family, had arrived.

¹²³ *NW*, June 7 1832.

¹²⁴ An Anglican and son-in-law of William Tennent, Emerson was a leading radical in reform circles until the Belfast liberals chose his cousin by marriage, Robert James Tennent, to contest the Belfast election in 1832 rather than himself. When Emerson married Letitia Tennent in 1832 he added Tennent to his own name, as stipulated in William's will.

¹²⁵ James Emerson Tennent to John Forster, [?] 1832, D/2922/B/14B/11.

¹²⁶ *NW*, May 17 1832.

¹²⁷ Pamphlet entitled, 'A Voice from Inch...', PRONI, D/3244/G/1/75.

However, the seeds of disaster were sown early on in the campaign with their decision to select R.J. Tennent as the other Liberal candidate to run alongside Crawford, instead of Emerson Tennent. Emerson, who had been one of the most radical voices among the reforming party, and having, in the past, openly declared his republican sentiments, was left out in the cold. It was a disastrous move, for the able and ambitious Emerson seceded from the radicals, initially as an independent, but ultimately running in conjunction with the conservative candidate, Lord Chichester. Writing in an open letter to James Emerson Tennent in the *Belfast Newsletter*, James Simms, Presbyterian editor of the *Whig*, commented bitterly on Emerson's u-turn: 'You seem to be filled with due *Conservative* indignation, because I have alleged that you have been a Republican. I assure you, I do not think there is any thing disgraceful in entertaining Republican principles: the disgrace is, in having avowed them, and then wishing to *steal* away from them'.¹²⁸ Moreover, at a reform meeting in August 1832, Robert James Tennent talked of promoting a brotherhood of affection among Irishmen, yet crucially failed to clarify his opposition on Repeal of the Union, refusing to give any public pledge on the subject whatsoever.¹²⁹

More fundamentally, the very nature of Belfast politics was being rewritten by changing demographic and economic conditions. As numerous historians have recognized, the politically radical, predominantly Presbyterian character of the small town of Belfast in the late eighteenth century was transformed during these years. The 'phenomenal'¹³⁰ population increase in Belfast in the first half of the nineteenth century, largely through migration from rural areas, transposed the sectarianism that had scarred areas such as county Armagh in the late eighteenth century, into the close confines of a burgeoning industrial city. This, as David Hempton argues, added to the tension already generated in Belfast by the 'political and religious polemics of the late 1820s'.¹³¹ David Miller has noted that, 'The introduction of machine-spun cotton transformed Belfast from a little port of some 13,000 inhabitants in 1782, to an industrial city of over 30,000 by 1831, when its textile industry was reverting to linen'.¹³² Moreover, whereas in 1785, Belfast's Catholic population had been about 8% of the total,¹³³ by the middle of the nineteenth century this had shot up to one third.

¹²⁸ *BNL*, October 2 1832.

¹²⁹ *NW*, August 28 1832.

¹³⁰ Sybil E. Baker, 'Orange and Green: Belfast, 1832-1912', in H.J. Dyos and M. Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*. Vol.2 (London, 1973), p.793. See also, Catherine Hirst, *Religion, politics and violence in nineteenth-century Belfast: The Pound and Sandy Row* (Dublin, 2002).

¹³¹ Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture*, p.104.

¹³² David Miller, *Queen's Rebels*, p57.

¹³³ Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture*, p.103

Crucially, 'Though Presbyterians continued to dominate the city's elite' – men such as the Tennents, Grimshaws, Simms, and Finlay – 'they were reduced to a mere 35% of the total population by 1861'.¹³⁴

Holmes has noted how the emergence of the National Education System question in 1832, finally catapulted Cooke into 'a party politician', active in Belfast's electioneering.¹³⁵ He certainly offered his support to Emerson Tennent, in a relationship which was to grow closer throughout the 1830s. However, as Holmes emphasizes in his biography of Cooke, the Presbyterian minister did not yet play the central role in Belfast conservative politics, that he had assumed by the 1837 electoral contest.¹³⁶ A declaration of political principles published in August 1832 by the 'Independent Electors of Belfast' advocated Triennial Parliaments; 'a real and not a nominal abolition of tithes'; revision of the Grand Jury laws; the 'discountenance' of all kinds of Monopoly; and even exertions, 'to appropriate the immense property of the Church in Ireland, to national purposes'. It was signed by, amongst others, John Sinclair, John Barnett, Robert Grimshaw and the Presbyterian councillor and elder, James Gibson.¹³⁷

At a meeting of 'Belfast Radicals' in October 1832, denounced by the conservative *Guardian* newspaper, and attended by Barnett, Grimshaw and Gibson, attacks were made on Donegall family's monopoly of the representation of Belfast for the last one hundred years. Finlay reportedly 'eulogized' Drennan among the, 'names ever to be held in reverence', adding, '...but we have our Tennents, our Barnetts, and our Grimshaws to preserve the sacred fore of freedom'.¹³⁸ At a meeting of electors immediately prior to the election in December, the reformers' reiterated their political succession from the Volunteers in the 1780s, by hanging the flag of the Belfast Reform Society alongside an old, original Volunteer flag from 1782, which, according to one newspaper report, 'attracted great attention'.¹³⁹ Edmund Getty, one of the speakers, referred to the need for an end to 'disunion' among Irishmen. However, just as the United Irishmen's similar message was woefully out of touch with the sectarian realities of Presbyterians west of the River Bann in the 1790s, so too did Getty's comments in the Belfast of 1832 seem equally out of touch. Once again, the era of the Volunteers was hailed as, 'the only bright era of our history, in late times'.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Miller, *Queen's Rebels*, p.57.

¹³⁵ Holmes, *Cooke*, p.90.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.105-6.

¹³⁷ Printed declaration of 'A number of the Independent Electors of the Borough', entitled, *Representation of Belfast*. (August 1832), PRONI, D/410/2.

¹³⁸ *Guardian*, October 12 1832.

¹³⁹ *NW*, December 6 1832.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*

Conservative election propaganda accused the Belfast radicals of arrogance: ‘the Town of Belfast has been, for the last thirty or forty years, completely ruled by a body of men, who were entitled neither by their rank, wealth or intelligence, to arrogate or maintain the influence they exercised. Their activity, however, has given them a superiority on every occasion; and their interference has fixed upon the Town a character which is foreign to its real sentiments’. The writer continued, ‘..the Faction has gained so much strength and confidence, as to aspire to the complete mastery of the Town, and to dictate to the Inhabitants upon every occasion; and so arrogant have they grown, as to attempt to oust Lord Donegall from his legitimate influence as a Landlord, and, by nominating Two members for the Borough, to shut his family out altogether from any chance of representing a Town on their own Estate’. ‘...you must endeavour to put down the “Natural Leaders”’.¹⁴¹

By 1832 Emerson Tennent’s view of political allegiances seemed not altogether wrong. The first election after the Reform Act saw the largely Presbyterian reformers – the ‘Natural leaders’ – of the town eclipsed and defeated.¹⁴² The feeling among contemporaries, of not only conservative opinions, seemed to be that the radical reformers had indeed been over-confident in their hopes of success in this first election under reformed conditions. James McKnight encapsulated this feeling in a private letter commenting that, ‘For my own part, I feel a sort of gratified pride in the result...the “Natural Leaders” had overstretched their power, and had been particularly insolent to myself, as if I must submit to their dictation, or be excommunicated from the fellowship of all that is liberal or honest in political society. In this respect, then, you may be sure that I am not grieved for their humiliation. And, yet, in other points of view, I almost regret our success, for with all their faults, the “Natural Leaders” have done good service to Belfast, and to the community at large’.¹⁴³

The *Whig* newspaper was immensely disappointed with the result, alleging that Emerson Tennent had, ‘openly countenanced Orangeism’ to secure votes.¹⁴⁴ The growth of what Baker described as ‘Orange and Green’ mobs was a symptom of the increasing sectarianism in the city, although she emphasizes that both respectable liberal and conservative sides viewed such mobs with contempt.¹⁴⁵ Crucially, the Presbyterian paper praised the Catholic electors for voting almost exclusively for Robert James

¹⁴¹ T/2771/6A.

¹⁴² Lord Arthur Chichester and Emerson Tennent were elected.

¹⁴³ James McKnight to Miss Barber, January 1 1833, in *Extracts from Original Letters of James McKnight*, p.8.

¹⁴⁴ *NW*, December 24 1832.

¹⁴⁵ Baker, ‘Orange and Green’, pp.790-1.

Tennent (perhaps his ambiguity on Repeal had been partially successful in wooing Catholics votes) and Crawford, but it could lavish no such praise on the rank and file of Belfast's Presbyterian voters. As Miller has emphasized, by 1832,

The fundamental reality of Belfast politics...was already sectarianism. The Liberals commanded the Catholic vote and the Tories the Anglican (and Methodist) vote. While the Liberal elite was predominantly Presbyterian, more rank and file Presbyterian electors voted for the 'Protestant' (i.e. Tory) candidates than for the Reformers, who, because they would not eschew Catholic votes, were painted as at least covert supporters of Daniel O'Connell and the Catholic ascendancy'.¹⁴⁶

Reflecting on the 1832 election in Belfast some five years later the conservative *Ulster Times* commented that, 'up to this time Belfast had been notorious for the ascendancy of revolutionary and republican principles, a character which it retained since the unhappy rebellion of 1798, which was chiefly conceived and concocted by the liberals of that important town. This party, so long predominant had maintained their colourable superiority, almost undisputed, until the election of 1832'.¹⁴⁷ Certainly, for many Presbyterians within Belfast, now faced with an increasing Roman Catholic population living in close proximity, and fuelled by intense economic competition, the anti-Catholic stance of the conservatives and their clear disavowal of Repeal, was evidently a vote-winner. However, as Robert Grimshaw assured R. J. Tennent in a private letter of 1833, 'the feeling of the Mercantile Interest' – that is the largely Presbyterian middle class elite of Belfast – remained 'liberal'. Moreover, they still optimistically anticipated the day when they would be successful. 'Once we get rid of the corroding Interest of the Donegalls, all will be well', Grimshaw informed Tennent, 'and it is pretty plain that their influence is fast on the wane, as they are not paying a shilling of their debts and I know that it was the expectation of getting paid that induced many to vote for them'.¹⁴⁸

Whilst Cooke's nineteenth century biographer, Porter admitted that, 'during the first quarter of the present century, nine-tenths of the Presbyterians of Ireland were Whigs', he claimed, however, that, 'About the year 1830 a change began to be perceptible, more perhaps among the laity than the clergy...'. Confirming the simplified association of political and theological liberalism, Porter described how, 'A powerful reaction set in against the Radical politics of Arians, and the aggressive

¹⁴⁶ Miller, *Queen's Rebels*, p.59.

¹⁴⁷ *UT*, May 30 1837.

¹⁴⁸ Robert Grimshaw to Robert James Tennent, December 20 1833, D/1748/G/242/2.

demands of the Roman Catholics'.¹⁴⁹ Whilst Belfast electoral results suggested that many Presbyterian voters had been chastened into voting 'conservative' through a fear of 'Catholic Ascendancy' and threats of Repeal, nevertheless, the 1830s continued to provide evidence of the strongly liberal political convictions of many Presbyterians, both lay and clerical. This was especially clear in the response to Cooke's infamous attendance at the Orange, Tory demonstration at Hillsborough in 1834.¹⁵⁰

Among the list of protestors to the Hillsborough demonstration of November 1834, were McCance, Robert Tennent, Sharman Crawford, Ruthven, Grimshaw, Barnett, Pirrie, Robert James Tennent, Guy Stone, two New Light ministers from Kilmore and Glastry, and Hugh Woods, Presbyterian minister of Bangor. The *Guardian* typically denounced the names on the protest as, 'sham liberals, radicals, revolutionists, and decided enemies of the established churches of the British empire'.¹⁵¹ In particular, it denounced the, '*liberal* Belfast gentry' whose names appeared on the top of the protest. One conservative Presbyterian writing in the *Guardian*, supported Cooke's attendance at Hillsborough, dismissing the Synod's Moderator, William McClure, as the leader of a 'radical junta'.¹⁵²

In contrast to Cooke's activities, a meeting of those, 'friendly to Reform principles and opposed to a Tory administration' convened in Belfast in December 1834. Among those attending were Sinclair, McCance, Grimshaw, Robert Tennent, Robert Simms junior, Edmund Getty and Robert James Tennent. Speaking at length, the latter praised the work of the late Whig ministry led by Lord Melbourne and reiterated the Belfast liberals' commitment to reform, whilst bitterly denouncing the prospect of a new Tory administration. Tennent doubted whether such an administration could, 'endeavour to quash the cry for Repeal, – not by the bullet and the bayonet, – but by conferring all the substantial benefits that could possibly be looked for from the one, and by thus taking away all reasonable motive for the other'.¹⁵³ The *Caledonian Mercury* reported at length on the meeting, praising the efforts of the reformers in vindicating the character of the North, 'from the impression attempted to be made by the celebrated meeting in Downshire'. It contrasted favourably, Tennent's speech with that of Cooke's at Hillsborough, applauding Belfast's 'free and independent

¹⁴⁹ Porter, *Life and Times of Henry Cooke*, p.224. (Porter was also Cooke's son-in-law.)

¹⁵⁰ See Chapter 2.

¹⁵¹ *Guardian*, November 4 1834.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, November 18 1834.

¹⁵³ *Anti-Tory Meeting, to Address the King, Speech of R.J. Tennent, Esq. At a Meeting of Inhabitants of Belfast, who are opposed to a Tory administration, and favourable to Constitutional Reform, held in the Brown Linen-Hall, on Wednesday, 3rd December, 1834, pursuant to the Requisition numerously and respectably signed, D/1748/G/783/2.*

spirit', 'against the relentless opposition of the High Church Party and marked discountenance of the Tory Government'. As the town's sovereign had refused to call such a meeting, 'those well-known, undaunted, persevering friends of Ireland, viz. Messrs John Sinclair, the Tennents, John Barnett, Robert Grimshaw...took upon themselves the responsibility of a public meeting'.¹⁵⁴

Cooke's political conservatism and his efforts to forge Protestant unity came under sharp criticism in Rev. D.G. Brown's pamphlet, demonstrating that political liberalism within Presbyterian ranks was by no means confined to the Arians. Brown referred to, 'that large and powerful class of liberal-minded and religious men, who regard with equal disgust and aversion the lamentations of Conservatism over its well-beloved Prelacy, now smitten with incurable decay, and the gross absurdities of repealers and radical reformers'.¹⁵⁵ He protested bitterly at the idea that Presbyterianism could ever be a bed-fellow of Conservatism, which was inextricably linked to the Anglican church and its abuses. Most significantly, Brown lamented on the 'humiliating' fact that Irish Presbyterians, 'have no political existence'.¹⁵⁶ Thus, 'It is generally supposed that we hold the principles of old Whiggism; but where is the proof that we have acted upon them in any public emergency?' He described how, for 'Too long have we been made the footstool for mere party politicians to ascend to power, that they might trample with more impunity on the rights and liberties of the people'. Foreshadowing future events, Brown added, 'We want, and must have representatives in the British Parliament – men who know accurately the state of Irish Presbyterianism', so that, 'they may boldly state all our grievances, and demand redress in the name and with the authority of nearly a million of Presbyterians'.¹⁵⁷

In a pamphlet of 1834 by 'Dr.Grattan', Cooke's performance at Hillsborough was dismissed as mere political manoeuvring. The real object of the meeting was, first and foremost, 'To advance certain electioneering purposes connected with the politics of the county, and exclude any candidate who should not be nominated by the great proprietors'. On the subject of tithes, the author noted that, 'The Conservatives of the county Down may approve of this system, and the Rev. Dr. Cooke may praise it; but we, who suffer from it, protest against it'.¹⁵⁸ That many orthodox Presbyterians were hostile to the Tory party and Cooke's efforts to secure a 'Protestant Union', is further underlined by the stance taken by the Rev. John Paul, the Covenanting minister, and his

¹⁵⁴ Extract contained in cuttings book of Robert James Tennent, D/1748/G/782/1.

¹⁵⁵ [Rev. D.G. Brown], *First and Second Blast of the Trumpet*, p.4.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.20.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.21.

Eastern Presbytery. In 1835 they published a pamphlet deploring the Hillsborough meeting¹⁵⁹ and regretting that, ‘the enemies of civil and religious liberty are raising the cry of No Popery’. ‘Tories are afraid of Papists, and no wonder; they have injured them, and *guilt* begets fear’.¹⁶⁰

Above all, John Paul gave thanks for the political programme of the Whigs, and the recent Reform Act. ‘The political changes which are passing before us furnish us with causes of gratitude to God’:

The reform lately effected in the House of Representatives, we regard as a measure of great importance. The disenfranchisement of rotten boroughs, and the extension of the elective franchise to the inhabitants of large towns, are great improvements. Prior to these changes, the House of Representatives was a complete misnomer. We had no representation, or only a mock representation. The members of the Houses of Commons were only the nominees or the tools of the House of Lords. They were not the representatives of the nation, but only of the aristocracy. They represented not the people, but themselves and their friends....They enriched themselves and their families, but impoverished the nation..... In so far as the reform bill is calculated to deliver us from such a state of things, we regard it as a great national blessing worthy of a grateful commemoration.

The pamphlet also included: ‘the abolition of slavery’, ‘the abolition of church rates, or church cess’, the ‘repeal of the Test Act’, and ‘the breaking down of monopolies’, as other examples of recent, ‘great improvement’. ‘During Tory misrule, monopolies were the order of the day’.¹⁶¹

The pamphlet underlined its support for the present Whig ministry (in power once again from 1835 under Lord Melbourne), and in particular for its commitment to, ‘Reform, retrenchment, and peace’.¹⁶² Referring to Rev. John Paul’s pamphlet, the Rev. Thomas Houston, also a minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Synod, but involved in a bitter dispute with Paul, attacked its highly *political* tone:

They contain abundant declamation about Tithe and Regium Donum; they portray in the darkest colours, real or imaginary evils that flow from these imposts; they eulogise, in the most unqualified terms, the measures of the present Whig-radical

¹⁵⁸ ‘Dr.Grattan’, *An Interesting Review of the Great Hillsborough Meeting*, p.4;8.

¹⁵⁹ Eastern Presbytery, *The Signs of the Times*.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.8.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp.31-4.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp.34-5.

administration; - but they contain hardly the least acknowledgement of individual or relative sins.¹⁶³

That such political sentiments among the Reformed Presbyterian Church were not confined to Paul and his Eastern Presbytery, is clear from a comment of the Rev. Dr. R.J Bryce, a Covenanting minister, in a private letter to Robert James Tennent. Bryce recalled the 'intense interest which....many of the strictest Covenanters' felt, 'in the great cause of political freedom and, involved in the success of the Reform Bill' in 1832.¹⁶⁴ Writing in 1833 in a defence of the principles of 'Civil and Religious Liberty', as part of his bitter debate with Houston, Paul denounced the 'persecuting principles' of Houston's support for the power of the civil magistrate in matters of religion. He found it 'mortifying' that such 'old established abuses' should find a defendant in Houston, '....a minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church! I always thought that Covenanters were Whigs. I believed them to be the friends of civil and religious liberty....Have I been mistaken? – God forbid'.¹⁶⁵

Alvin Jackson has highlighted, 'the growing relationship between a small but significant section of Irish Presbyterians and the developing Conservative movement of the 1830s' – remarkable given that it was a tradition which had, 'for long been... repugnant' to Presbyterianism.¹⁶⁶ The lynchpin of this was of course Cooke himself and was epitomized at the Hillsborough Demonstration in 1834. However, this was clearly repugnant to many other Presbyterians, both orthodox and Arian. The report of the death of the veteran reformer John Barnett in 1835, offered a reminder that there was no fixed correlation between politics and theology among Presbyterians of the old, as well as the newer generation. Barnett was acknowledged to have been, 'In politics...a decided Whig', yet a strict Orthodox Presbyterian.¹⁶⁷

The Belfast by-election of 1835 was bitterly contested between liberals and conservatives. R.J. Tennent, 'the Whig and radical candidate'¹⁶⁸ – running once again for the former, and an Anglican, George Dunbar for the latter. The alignment of O'Connell with the Whig administration from 1835 (to 1839) horrified conservative onlookers in Ireland, and thus ensured that the whole subject of the 'Liberator' and Repeal dominated as the central issue of the election debate. As Holmes noted, Cooke's

¹⁶³ Robert L. W. McCollum, 'John Paul and his Contribution to the Shaping of Presbyterianism in the Nineteenth Century', (Master of Theology, QUB, 1992), p.154.

¹⁶⁴ Rev. Dr. Reuben J. Bryce to Robert James Tennent, April 13 1833, D/1748/G/76/37.

¹⁶⁵ *A Review of the Rev. Thomas Houston's "Christian Magistrate", and A Defence of the Principles of Civil and Religious Liberty by the Rev. John Paul, of Carrickfergus* (Belfast, 1833), p.iv; p.20.

¹⁶⁶ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998 Politics and War* (1999; Oxford, 2003), pp.63-4.

¹⁶⁷ *BNL*, March 24 1835.

¹⁶⁸ *Times*, August 20 1835.

pivotal position within Belfast conservative ranks was emphasized by his correspondence with both Emerson Tennent and Sir Robert Peel during the short-lived Tory ministry of 1834-5. Holmes refers in particular, to a letter from Cooke urging Peel to concede to the request of an imminent deputation from the Synod of Ulster for the equalization of the *regium donum*. Cooke's reference to the need to conciliate 'the red hot whigs' in the deputation who might make the synod, 'too hot for my friends and myself who are conservatives',¹⁶⁹ emphasizes the political opposition to Cooke from within his own orthodox ranks. The conservative press successfully denounced the Belfast Liberals as the mere 'tail' of O'Connell. Certainly, the alliance between the Catholic leader and a Whig administration made liberals vulnerable to accusations of not being 'good Protestants' and of offering support to Catholic ascendancy.

Nominated by John Sinclair, and seconded by the Presbyterian elder and barrister, James Gibson,¹⁷⁰ Tennent's speech to the hustings bitterly attacked the Tories, whilst praising the Irish Church Bill and Reform. His denunciation of the Conservatives for their position on Reform and their treatment of Roman Catholics – 'violence' rather than conciliating their hearts to affection' – was almost a direct echo of the points made by the Rev. John Paul. In particular, Tennent endeavoured to silence all doubt on his position regarding repeal, by giving 'a *distinct denial*' that he supported such a measure.¹⁷¹ Another conservative election squib clearly aimed at alienating Presbyterian support for the liberal candidate, denounced Tennent as a repealer, a friend to W.S. Crawford (in turn a friend of O'Connell's), and of wanting to pull down established churches, including that in Scotland. It referred sarcastically to those who would be voting for Tennent as, '300 Roman Catholics' and 'the remnant of the glorious SIXTY-FIVE, with all that can be called RADICAL'.¹⁷²

The *Whig* attacked Dunbar and the, 'little cabal of Conservative dictators, who wish to rough-ride the town' by electing a 'thorough-going Tory, wedded, by principle, to Corporation abuses, Church despotism, &c'.¹⁷³ But for the Tory electioneers, the Belfast liberals' support for the Whig administration made them an easy target, 'for no one can support the Ministry....without bowing to O'Connell, the Supreme Head'.¹⁷⁴ One letter addressed to Tennent from a conservative recalled the '*Hereditary*

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Holmes, *Cooke*, p.117.

¹⁷⁰ *Times*, August 29 1835.

¹⁷¹ Printed sheet entitled, *Belfast Election: Mr. R.J Tennent's Speech at the Hustings*, D/1748/G/784/6.

¹⁷² *To the Electors of the Borough of Belfast* from 'A Truly Liberal Elector', (Belfast, 1835), D/1748/G/784/3.

¹⁷³ *NW*, August 24 1835 (from Tennent scrapbook of press cuttings, D/1748/G/784/1).

¹⁷⁴ Extract from the *Chronicle*, 24 August 1835 from the above cuttings book.

Radicalism’ of his Presbyterian family, a reference to the well-known radicalism of his father and uncles. On the subject of repeal, the author recalled that, ‘the name of Robert Tennent, M.D., not long ago, was attached to a Repeal Petition. I grant you are not necessarily infected with the political opinions of your Father, but, still, in choosing a “Chip”, men will sometimes think of the “Block” ’.¹⁷⁵

The notion that radical reform was merely a by-word for ‘Repeal’ was reiterated in the stream of conservative election propaganda in Belfast in 1835 – ‘the venomous poison lurking beneath the mask of Reform’.¹⁷⁶ Undoubtedly, O’Connell and the spectre of repeal blighted the liberal agenda within Belfast. The *Newsletter* printed an extract from the *Albion* newspaper which stated that, ‘Even the radicalism of Belfast has hitherto been an independent Radicalism, and the late member, Mr. McCance, though no friend to the institutions of the country, was no slave of O’Connell. But an attempt is to be made to change all this – Presbyterian Belfast is no longer deemed worthy to enjoy the privilege of two independent Members..... We trust that the Electors of Belfast will save their town...by refusing to elect the Radical and ‘Repealer’ which the O’Connell influence (secretly working to that end) now seeks to thrust upon them’.¹⁷⁷ At the end of August, Tennent resigned from the contest.

The Belfast by-election of 1835 demonstrated the extent to which O’Connell’s growing political prominence and his Repeal campaign had damaged Presbyterian (indeed Protestant) liberal credibility, at least in the environs of Belfast. In a letter to Tennent, the Rev. P. S. Henry of the Synod of Ulster in Armagh described the former’s defeat as, ‘a blow to my friends here’, and an ‘abominable injustice’ to Belfast public opinion. He added that it was, ‘disheartening that Belfast should be represented by two conservatives’.¹⁷⁸ The polarization of Belfast politics, and of specifically Presbyterian opinion, was demonstrated by the fact that whilst Cooke and some of his colleagues such as Rev. Robert Stewart, were increasingly active in the Belfast Conservative Society, other Presbyterians, such as Montgomery, Gibson, Grimshaw, Francis McCracken Snr., Robert Tennent and William Simms were among the membership of the Belfast Reform Association.¹⁷⁹ In July 1836, A.J. Macrory, a member of the Synod of Ulster, made a speech to a Conservative Meeting in Belfast in which he showed no reluctance in attacking James Gibson, one of the Synod’s own elders, for his liberal politics, and his pretensions in standing at the next election in Belfast alongside Lord

¹⁷⁵ Extract from the *Chronicle*, August 24 1835 (*Ibid.*)

¹⁷⁶ Extract from the *Newsletter*, August 25 1835 (*Ibid.*).

¹⁷⁷ *BNL*, August 25 1835 (*Ibid.*)

¹⁷⁸ Rev. P. Shuldham Henry to Robert James Tennent, August 27 1835, D/1748/G/265/3.

Belfast to oppose the two conservative candidates. Macrory accused Gibson of doing the Synod of Ulster, a 'great injustice' by '...coming forward to represent that venerable body', adding that, 'Mr. Gibson's views and those of his party are diametrically opposed to the feelings and interests of the great majority' of the Synod. In an echo of Cooke's stance, he expressed his belief that, 'The Synod of Ulster differed but little from the Established Church', adding his confidence that, 'Protestant and Conservative principles would triumph' at the next election in the city.¹⁸⁰

The growing influence and confidence of the Belfast conservative party is reflected in a number of letters to Robert James Tennent from the Presbyterian journalist James McKnight. McKnight referred to attempts by conservatives to oust him from his position as editor of the *Newsletter*, noting that their failure to do so had induced them to establish a new conservative paper, the *Ulster Times*, in 1836.¹⁸¹ This paper certainly made its name as a staunchly conservative organ, and in September 1836 its editorial alleged that R. J. Tennent's association with, 'the establishment of Popery in absolute ascendancy, and the Repeal of the Union', adding that this of course would be denied by, 'every one of those Protestant liberals whom Dr. Montgomery well and worthily claims to represent, and on whom Mr. Robert James Tennent must rely for support'.¹⁸²

In December 1836, Cooke was one of the principal speakers at a great Conservative Dinner in Belfast, attended also by his colleague Rev. Robert Stewart, and his conservative allies of the established church including Emerson Tennent, Sir Robert Bateson and Lord Castlereagh.¹⁸³ Cooke denounced what he called, 'Destructive Whig-Radicalism' and emphasized his resistance to 'the domination of Rome'. The *Whig* was furious with Cooke's 'political exhibitions' and for allowing the Tories to use the 'Presbyterian name'. Moreover, the paper was concerned that, '..he is then held up, by the Tory organs, as carrying with him, into every Tory-Orange meeting which he condescends to grace by his presence, the weight and influence of the whole Synod'. The editorial urged the Synod of Ulster to, 'emancipate itself' from what it described as the, 'despotism' of Cooke and his cronies.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ List of members of the Belfast Reform Association, D/1748/G/772/8.

¹⁸⁰ *UT*, July 29 1836.

¹⁸¹ James McKnight to Robert James Tennent, December 20 1835, D/1748/G/421/3.

¹⁸² *UT*, September 20 1836.

¹⁸³ *Report of the speeches and Proceedings at the Belfast Society's Fourth Anniversary Dinner, held on Tuesday December 20th 1836, in the Conservative Hall, Belfast, D/2922/C/6/17.*

¹⁸⁴ *NW*, January 3 1837.

At a subsequent dinner held in Belfast for W.S. Crawford in January 1837, Robert James Tennent toasted ‘a speedy and entire abolition of tithes’, whilst James Simms, Presbyterian editor of the *Whig* attacked the established church for its wealth and property, whilst millions of Irish starved. Henry Montgomery praised the National Education System, and had this to say on Presbyterian politics: ‘..He wished to take that opportunity to deny, that the Presbyterians were, generally, opposed to Liberal measures. He regretted that some of them had fallen off from the spirit of their forefathers displayed in the time of the Volunteers; but the principle of Presbyterianism was Liberal in its character. (Cheers) Nothing was more opposed to the spirit of Toryism’.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, these words were to be echoed in 1851 by the Rev. John Rogers, during the Tenant Right campaign. Whilst Montgomery and the Presbyterian liberals continued to demand political reform and vote by ballot, Cooke endeavoured to offer up Presbyterian loyalty to Anglican conservative landlords. Addressing a Conservative Dinner in October 1837 he declared that, ‘Ireland cannot be saved by Whiggism, or Toryism, even by Conservatism, but it will be saved by landlordism’.¹⁸⁶

The opposition to Cooke’s Tory and pro-establishment politics among his own colleagues of the Synod of Ulster, also became increasingly vocal. In March 1837 a furore broke out over a speech given by a Presbyterian minister, the Rev. Robert Anderson of Banbridge, to a conservative dinner in Dublin. At a special meeting of the Presbytery of Dromore, several ministers and elders condemned his conduct. Writing in the *Ulster Times*, ‘A Presbyterian’ denounced the ministers involved in the resolutions against Anderson as radicals, out of touch with the real political opinion of their congregations. He added, ‘It is fortunate that whatever leaven of radicalism exists in the Synod, is almost entirely confined within their own contracted sphere... The Presbyterian people are almost to a man Conservatives’. The letter commented that these ministers – including the Rev. S. Dill, Rev. J Johnston of Tullylish and the Rev. H. Dobbin of Hillsborough – had been among those who had recently voted against unqualified subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith.¹⁸⁷ Responding to ‘A Presbyterian’s’ claims that the Dromore Presbytery had recently undergone, a ‘Radical change’, another writer defended the Presbytery, recalling how it had, in 1829, repelled pressure from the ‘Pope of the Synod’ [*i.e.* Cooke] to petition Parliament against Catholic Emancipation. On the subject of the Westminster Confession of Faith, he

¹⁸⁵ *NW*, January 7 1837.

¹⁸⁶ *Times*, October 24 1837. Full speech also published as *Speech of the Rev. Henry Cooke... on 19th October, 1837*.

¹⁸⁷ *UT*, March 21 1837.

attacked the conservative writer's efforts to, 'excite the *odium Theologium* against those ministers who did not sanction his political beliefs.'¹⁸⁸

The campaigning for the general election of 1837 highlighted the continued division within Presbyterian party politics. An editorial in the *Ulster Times* bitterly attacked the Belfast liberal Presbyterian candidate, James Gibson, for canvassing on the basis of his being an, 'Old Light Presbyterian'. The majority of old light Presbyterians, the paper argued, were conservative, and it rejected Gibson's attempts to, 'array Presbyterian against Episcopalian'. It was keen to emphasize that, '*In Belfast his allies and supporters are the political Arians and the Roman Catholics*'.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, 'Already are the O'Connellite journals exulting in the anticipated addition of a Presbyterian joint to their master's tail'.¹⁹⁰ A letter from 'An Old Presbyterian', attacking Gibson for misrepresenting his own Synod of Ulster, reinforced the alleged connection between Arianism and political radicalism.¹⁹¹ Reporting on the Belfast election, the *Times* described how, 'The radicals are trying to introduce a Presbyterian gentleman, Mr. Gibson, to join Lord Belfast, thinking that as the former is an elder of the church, many of the body may be induced to support him'.¹⁹² By contrast, the *Newry Examiner* expressed its hope that Belfast, 'will now shake off the incubus of Toryism, and act as becomes its ancient character'.¹⁹³ Holmes argues that Cooke was, 'deeply involved in the bitter conflict' which characterized the election. Certainly, his willingness to support a Tory candidate over a theologically orthodox liberal elder of his own Synod, emphasized his devotion to the conservative cause. Gibson had of course opposed Cooke over National Education and unqualified subscription, but as Peter Brooke noted, there was no ambiguity in his stance towards O'Connell, despite what conservative propagandists suggested. Like Rev. John Paul, and later James McKnight, Gibson maintained the belief that, 'a liberal attitude to Catholics was the best programme for undermining Catholicism'.¹⁹⁴

Gibson and Lord Belfast's election in August 1837 was a major shock for Emerson Tennent and the Tory camp in Belfast. The *Whig* was unsurprisingly jubilant with, 'the glorious victory which the advocates of liberty and impartial justice have achieved in the town of Belfast'.¹⁹⁵ Writing to Emerson Tennent, J.D. Jackson, a

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, April 6 1837.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, July 18 1837.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, July 20 1837.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Times*, July 18 1837.

¹⁹³ *Newry Examiner*, June 28 1837, D/1748/G/787/4.

¹⁹⁴ Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, pp.182-3.

¹⁹⁵ *NW*, August 8 1837.

prominent conservative, was, 'grieved' with the result. 'How', he asked Tennent, 'have the Radicals contrived to defeat you? There must have been (I take it for granted) some foul play'.¹⁹⁶ If the news from Belfast was a reason for the Presbyterian liberals to celebrate, it was marred by frustration with the situation in Down. Once again, the two Hill-Stewart nominees had been returned uncontested, and the *Whig* squarely blamed 'lordly interference'. Its editorial vented its anger in vehement style, lamenting,

...the solemn election-mockery which has since been enacted in our Northern Counties. Armagh, Down, Antrim, Derry, Donegall, have all returned their Members; and will any man venture to say, that the fact of those elections having taken place is any proof, that the individuals returned, as Representatives, do really represent the feelings of the majority of their respective constituencies?

Look at Down. We know a good deal of that County; and our firm conviction is, that there are few Counties, in Ireland, in which the feelings of the people are more decidedly favourable to Liberal principles.... But what about the existence of the feelings, if they cannot be expressed? Of what importance is it, that the electors are anxious for the progress of Reform, if the landlords step in, and compel them to declare for Toryism? And this is exactly what takes place. Two powerful families, with their respective adherents, lord it over the electoral body....

We need not go over the other Counties. Of all of them, the story is nearly the same. There is no freedom, or even appearance of it. The elector is enslaved.

The newspaper attacked the recent behaviour of the Marquis of Abercorn towards his tenantry, and of Lord Downshire's recent description of tenants as 'vassals': 'Is it not wonderful, seeing the hold which the Tory aristocracy, and landed gentry, have upon the Counties...?'.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, the series of dinners held across the county in 1835 in honour of William Sharman Crawford certainly indicated that the situation in Down during these years was far from as quiet as the recent uncontested election suggested. In December 1835 Crawford informed his son John of dinners given to him at Bangor, Holywood and Kircubbin, where tithes and the landlord and tenant act had featured prominently. In the county that was to become the leading voice for Tenant Right in the 1840s and early 1850s, Crawford wrote of a 'strong expression of independent and liberal principle'.¹⁹⁸ It is significant that Crawford was being toasted in Down in 1835-6, at a time when his alleged association with O'Connell was being used by conservatives in Belfast to damage liberal electoral chances.

¹⁹⁶ J.D. Jackson to James Emerson Tennent, August 10 1837, D/2922/C/1/10.

¹⁹⁷ *NW*, August 10 1837.

¹⁹⁸ William Sharman Crawford, Crawfordsburn to John Sharman Crawford, New York, December 31 1835, D/856/D/44.

Repercussions from the Belfast election were felt in the Synod of Ulster, where an elder had been threatened with expulsion by his Kirk Session in Belfast for avowing his intention to vote for Gibson. The *Whig* reported how, 'A vote given for this most respectable individual, was construed as an act in favour of Popery'. Focusing its attack on Cooke and his conservative friends, it denounced, 'the present tyrannical and un-Presbyterian...attempt to control individuals....and to make Toryism a test of Protestantism'. The paper lamented how, 'the honour and pride of Presbyterianism are lowered at the feet of Episcopacy, to please a political faction'.¹⁹⁹ A similar story emerged from Armagh, where Rev. P.S Henry's vote for the liberal candidate at the city's recent election, had caused a split within his own Presbyterian congregation. The *Ulster Times* remarked, 'It is painful to be obliged to state, that a Presbyterian Clergyman, in connexion with the Synod of Ulster, actually voted in favour of an O'Connellite candidate'. The *Whig* criticized those Tory Presbyterians in Armagh for their, 'monstrous efforts to introduce into the Presbyterian Church the odious example of making liberality, in politics, a religious offence'.²⁰⁰

Immediately after the election, Cooke was one of the central figures in the establishment of a Protestant Defence Association in Belfast, where he stood alongside established church men, and his political allies, including Emerson Tennent.²⁰¹ The need for Protestant union in the face of 'the reviving powers of the church of Rome' was its abiding theme. Anticipating the response of liberal Presbyterians to his actions, Cooke commented that, 'He was aware that his appearing there would afford a handle to some who called themselves Presbyterians....to hold him up to public reproach, as courting a church who despised him'.²⁰² Addressing a Conservative Dinner in October 1837, Cooke was emphatic in his denunciation of O'Connell and in his praise for the established church and landlords, and he ventured to assure his conservative and Anglican friends that, 'in Ireland, the great Presbyterian flock are strictly Conservative'.²⁰³

Yet the growing and vocal Presbyterian opposition to Cooke's political stance was demonstrated at the meeting for the Rev. John Paul and the Eastern Presbytery in 1838. Praise was lavished on the Whig and pro-Reform stance of Paul's *Signs of the Times*, and, with clear allusions to Cooke, an attack was made on those who identified Whigs as, 'inimical to Protestantism'. Praise for the National Education System and for

¹⁹⁹ *NW*, September 5 1837.

²⁰⁰ *NW*, September 19 1837.

²⁰¹ Indeed, they met in Cooke's meeting house in May Street.

²⁰² *Times*, September 5; 7 1837.

the era of Reform was accompanied by Paul's own speech, in which he described how the Bible denounced 'tyranny' in the family, the church *and* the state. Significantly, Rev. John Porter of the Remonstrant Synod, concluded the meeting with an eulogium on the 'political and social character' of Sharman Crawford.²⁰⁴ In January 1839 Crawford²⁰⁵ took the chair at a testimonial dinner given to the Rev. John Paul, held in the Rev. John Alexander's meeting house in Linen-hall Street in Belfast. Alexander praised James Gibson, whilst Paul himself launched a bitter attack on Toryism, rejoicing that, 'The age in which we live is an age of Reform. Every Church must be reformed; every State must be reformed'. Although Whigs dominated the party of 'movement', he added, 'both Whigs and Tories have been advancing. The tide is carrying both forward – the former *with their will*, and the latter *against* it. The Tories are a drag on the wheels of Reform. They retard, but cannot prevent, the movement'.²⁰⁶

In 1839, the Rev. Richard Dill of the Synod of Ulster, mooted the issue which was to come to dominate Presbyterian politics for the next twenty years – the nature of Presbyterian representation. He rallied to the defence of the efforts of a Presbyterian minister, Mr. McWilliams to bring the issue of the Presbyterian soldiery before Parliament's notice whilst on a visit to London. This action had received a swift rebuke from Emerson Tennent, conservative M.P for Belfast,²⁰⁷ and his ally, Henry Cooke, who both agreed that Lord Hill, M.P for Down and Lord Howick²⁰⁸ should have been waited on, and the matter left in their hands. Richard Dill launched a fierce attack on Cooke for placing his political bias over the welfare of his church, and for, laying his sympathies with, 'a Conservative member of Parliament, [rather] than a poor Presbyterian brother minister'. Moreover, he denounced the failure of Lords Hill and Howick to act on their behalf despite several appeals. Dill alluded to the lack of 'friendly representatives in Parliament' in matters concerning the Presbyterian Church.²⁰⁹ In proceeding to print on the subject he questioned the wisdom of the Church leaving its affairs to disinterested Tory landlords and Anglican M.Ps.

In August 1839, James Boyle, writing from London 'To the Presbyterian Electors of Belfast', on the same subject, similarly attacked Emerson Tennent's apathy

²⁰³ *NW*, October 24 1837, and also the *Times* of same date.

²⁰⁴ *NW*, September 29 1838.

²⁰⁵ Not only was Crawford a liberal, but he was a frequent advocate of Presbyterian interests. Born an Anglican, Crawford and his family had a pew in the Presbyterian Church in Bangor (see *Banner of Ulster*, April 30 1852).

²⁰⁶ *NW*, January 3 1839.

²⁰⁷ Gibson's election was overthrown on a technicality in 1838. See Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*, p.183. Thus, Belfast was once again represented by the conservative M.P. Emerson Tennent.

²⁰⁸ Howick was Secretary of War at this time.

towards the interests of his Presbyterian constituents. Moreover, he criticized Cooke's insistence on support for Tennent: 'my loathing is...extreme, at such a priestly despotism so intolerable as that he is now exercising over his brethren, and over the Church at large'.²¹⁰ Of the Belfast M.P., Dill similarly asked: 'In a word, what has Mr. Emerson Tennent ever said or done in behalf [*sic*] of the Presbyterian Church in Parliament or out of it'. He also attacked the M.P for Coleraine, Mr. Litton for his similar disinterest in the soldiery issue, reporting how, when asked by Dill to meet him to discuss the matter, he had stated, 'that he thought the measure unnecessary and impracticable – unnecessary because there was no difference between Episcopacy and Presbyterianism, and that Presbyterian soldiers might as well attend the service of the church of England'.²¹¹

Dill's reference to Litton's description of a 'radical' element within the Synod, constantly agitating, demonstrates how ministers who refused to comply with Cooke's conservative, 'head-down' strategy, were vilified. Dill wrote in disgust at the conduct of Litton and Tennent, asking, 'Do they imagine that we have been so long habituated to stupid endurance as to have become at length utterly insensible – that we have so long fawned upon and followed those who have never done aught but trample on us, except for their own purposes, that we are never treated but as dogs?'.²¹² His statement was a bold rejection of the conservative vision of 'Protestant Union' and he lamented, 'what a wretched state of degradation and impotence, in reference to the Government and Representatives of the country, have Presbyterians been reduced?'. In a direct attack on Cooke's politics, Dill emphasized his contempt for those Presbyterian ministers who, 'will canvass with the utmost zeal for the veriest political charlatan, if he professes himself a Conservative, whilst they will as zealously oppose the most pious Presbyterian'.²¹³

Interestingly, the liberal Presbyterian opinion of the *Whig* attacked Dill's position, for whilst it undoubtedly agreed with his attacks on Cooke and the conservative Protestant establishment, the newspaper disliked the sectarianism of his suggestion that Presbyterian voters should only support Presbyterian candidates.²¹⁴ The increasing rejection of Tory dominance in county Down, was reflected in a meeting organized to protest at a recent congratulatory address to Lord Roden emanating from

²⁰⁹ *NW*, June 29 1839.

²¹⁰ *BNL*, August 16 1839.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *NW*, August 17 1839.

conservatives in the county, including Sir Robert Bateson and Emerson Tennent²¹⁵. The counter-declaration drawn up included names such as R.J. Tennent, Sinclair, Pirrie, Miller, John Martin, Sharman Crawford, and a number of Presbyterian ministers, including, the Rev. Hugh Moore of Newtownards, the Rev. William Doherty of Comber, and the Rev. Fletcher Blakely of Moneyrea [*sic*]. Commenting on this meeting at Downpatrick, the *Whig* outlined the attempts of the Tories to sabotage it, including their efforts to dub it a, 'meeting of the Ribbonmen of County Down'.²¹⁶

This chapter has noted the increasing difficulties facing liberal Presbyterians from O'Connell's repeal agitation, to the *Whig* government's concessions to Catholicism during the Lichfield House compact, 1835-9. In particular, this provided conservative Protestants with ammunition to brand their political rivals as radicals, 'traitors to Protestantism', and advocates of Catholic ascendancy. The difficulties of the liberal Presbyterians in Belfast were only increased with the establishment of a Catholic newspaper in the city in 1840. The *Whig* feared that the *Vindicator* would split the reformers of Belfast. It defended itself from an attack by O'Connell, by recalling the prominent role that Presbyterian and Protestant liberals in Belfast had always taken in the reform campaigns, and the support given to the paper by Catholics in Belfast and across county Down.²¹⁷ More damagingly, O'Connell had urged all real liberals to oppose a new Registration Bill of Lord Stanley's in Parliament. Indeed, the Presbyterian liberals in Belfast did immediately campaign against the measure, but the fact that they held the same position as O'Connell – by now, agitating openly once more for Repeal of the Union – placed them in a vulnerable position.

In May 1840 the *Whig* reported on a significant Belfast meeting to oppose Stanley's Bill, and delighted at the presence of 'Volunteer veterans'. Henry Montgomery stated that, 'The question was – are the people of Ireland to send Representatives to Parliament; or are the Tory gentry, and landlords, and Clergy, to have the exclusive power of doing so?' He claimed that Stanley's Bill would consolidate the aristocracy's power to bribe, barter and intimidate voters.²¹⁸ The *Ulster Times* denounced it as 'a Radical Meeting', 'assembled to do the bidding of O'Connell'.²¹⁹ In contrast to Montgomery's position, Cooke and the Rev. Robert Stewart attended a conservative meeting in Belfast in support of the Registration Bill,²²⁰

²¹⁵ *NW*, November 26; 28 1839.

²¹⁶ *NW*, January 9 1840.

²¹⁷ *BNL*, April 24 1840.

²¹⁸ *NW*, April 30; May 2 1840.

²¹⁹ Quoted in *Times*, May 5 1840.

²²⁰ *NW*, May 7 1840.

In defiance of both the liberal Presbyterians in Belfast, and his own Synod of Ulster brethren such as Richard Dill, Cooke re-affirmed his commitment to the 'Protestant Peace', lavishing praise on Down's landlords and on the conservative M.P.s Emerson Tennent and Litton, and attacking the idea of proper Presbyterian representation. More significantly for future events, Cooke emphasized his belief in Sir Robert Peel and the Tories to support the Presbyterian cause in the Intrusion question in Scotland.²²¹

The establishment of the 'Ulster Constitutional Association' in July 1840 – the liberals' response to the political excitement generated by the Registration Bill – was dubbed by its conservative opponents as the 'Ulster Radical Association',²²² and further denounced as the efforts of, 'the so-called Liberals to get up a society of mischief-makers'.²²³ Crawford and David Ross, the Association's two secretaries, wrote an open letter to the Repeal Association, rejecting the claims that they were acting under the guidance of O'Connell.²²⁴ At the first meeting of the Ulster Constitutional Association, Montgomery outlined the organisation's aims, and underlined its position within the Irish political spectrum. He declared that, 'The bane of Ireland has hitherto been the perpetual divisions of her sons', describing how reformers in mainland Britain had hitherto misunderstood the situation in Ireland: 'Whatever was Protestant in Ulster was uniformly considered as Orange and High Tory in politics, while all that was Liberal was supposed to be confined to the Roman Catholic party alone'. Thus 'Our Constitutional Association...has been introduced to...shew to the people in England, that there are two Protestant parties in Ireland', one of those, in favour of civil liberty and for uniting with Roman Catholic countrymen in pursuit of that goal.²²⁵ Speaking again at an Association meeting in October, Montgomery criticized the established church for having made, 'Protestantism odious and hateful' in Roman Catholic eyes, whilst also attacking the Tories in general.²²⁶ The toasts made at the meeting included: 'Lord Melbourne... whose judicious and impartial government of Ireland entitles him to our gratitude'; 'the memory of Mr. Drummond'; 'freedom of election'; and a 'happy union of Irishmen of every denomination'.²²⁷ The Presbyterian liberals involved in the Ulster Constitutional Association, made clear their support for a Whig government

²²¹ *BNL*, July 21 1840.

²²² *Times*, August 31 1840.

²²³ *Times*, July 24 1840.

²²⁴ *Times*, July 27 1840.

²²⁵ *NW*, August 15 1840.

²²⁶ *NW*, October 1 1840.

²²⁷ Printed list of toasts from the meeting, D/1748/G/775/1.

which had proven increasingly accommodating to Catholics in Ireland.²²⁸ Presbyterian and Protestant liberals feared being completely squeezed out of a Belfast political scene that seemed to be becoming increasingly polarized.

The difficulty of the position of the Presbyterian and Protestant reformers in Belfast was increased by O'Connell's visit to Belfast in 1841, in which Cooke led the denunciation of both the man and his Repeal organisation. As Frank Wright emphasized, 'For the Liberal Protestant leadership in Belfast, the occasion was a cause of considerable embarrassment. Many were descendants of United Irishmen (at least of 1791 vintage), and had supported Catholic emancipation and the Whig-O'Connell alliance between 1835 and 1839'.²²⁹ Whilst most did agree with Cooke on the subject of Repeal, they were certainly not conservatives or supporters of the Protestant Ascendancy. But political liberalism seemed somewhat overshadowed, in the face of the mass of feeling against O'Connell and Repeal which swept through Belfast and the north. At a great conservative meeting in Belfast in January 1841, to celebrate O'Connell's flight from Belfast (and his refusal to accept Cooke's challenge of a face-to-face debate), Emerson Tennent praised Cooke and attacked the Ulster Constitutional Association, Montgomery and Crawford. He argued that, 'when the Liberal gentlemen of Down and Antrim make cause with us, they will discover that our principles are purely defensive'. Tennent likened, 'the attempts made by the Ulster Association to obtain a reduction of the franchise to something like the zero of the Chartists'.²³⁰

In an effort to counteract the emboldened position of Cooke and the Belfast Tories, Montgomery addressed the Ulster Constitutional Association at a special meeting in February 1841, also attended by Grimshaw and Sinclair. As well as attacking Lord Stanley's Registration Bill, Montgomery denounced a recent claim by Robert Bateson in the Commons that all Protestants in Ulster were Tories. He lamented that, 'an attempt had been made of late to identify the Presbyterians of Ulster with political bigotry and intolerance', and admitting that many did indeed support the Tories, he added, 'They were not the Presbyterians of 1782, who....battled for liberty'.²³¹

²²⁸ *Report on the Registration and Election Laws of the United Kingdom; As Prepared by a Sub-Committee of the Ulster Constitutional Association* (Belfast, 1840) It listed the Rev. Henry Montgomery, R.J. Tennent, and James Gibson among the committee's members, p.3. The report reiterated the liberals' demands for vote by ballot and triennial parliaments, and there could be no doubt on their commitment to the Union, as they emphasized the need for a United Kingdom wide reform movement to demand a fairer, and more equal representation of the people, p.22; 26-8.

²²⁹ Wright, *Two Lands*, p. 51.

²³⁰ *DR*, January 23 1841.

²³¹ *BNL*, February 26; *NW*, February 27 1841.

So bitter had political divisions in Belfast become by 1841, that the Presbyterian minister Rev. James Morgan even suggested a truce between the liberals and conservatives, whereby they would settle to contest one seat each.²³² Such a compromise did not occur, however, and the city's election that year promised to be more bitter than ever. The issue of the Scottish Church – as a subject dominating Presbyterian opinion in Ireland – featured prominently.²³³ The *Newsletter's* editorial emphasized the need for Presbyterians to 'interrogate' candidates on their position in the Scottish Church patronage controversy, referring to a comment in the Scottish press that, Peel and the Tories had resolved on a course of, 'bitter and unyielding hostility to the Scottish Church'.²³⁴

The realisation of the vulnerability of the Presbyterian Church in parliament, and the growing feeling that its community needed to return at least some Presbyterian M.Ps, was not only a clear declaration of no confidence in Ulster's aristocratic representatives, but also signalled the first stages of the forthcoming conflict between the landed classes and parts of the Presbyterian community. It was of course, also an emphatic rejection of Cooke's Tory politics. As a letter from a Whig minister of the Synod of Ulster, Rev. John Brown of Aghadowey, demonstrated, the Scottish Church (and later Marriages question) intensified the increasing frustration within the Synod, and the wider Presbyterian public, with Cooke's contentment to sit supportively and obediently alongside the Protestant ascendancy. In a specifically political rally, Brown addressed 'the Presbyterian Electors of Ireland', lamenting the lack of Presbyterian influence in parliamentary representation, despite the fact they were, 'the chief mainstay of the British connection'. In a direct hit at Cooke, he echoed Dill's words, attacking current Presbyterian leaders whose, 'ambition seems to be to render us subservient to others'. On the matter of the Scottish Church question, Brown expressed his belief that their representatives, 'had not done enough, and urged Presbyterian electors to ask for a pledge from candidates both to support their Scottish colleagues, and to secure equal religious privileges for Presbyterian soldiers.'²³⁵ Whilst the two conservative candidates were declared the winners in Belfast's election, their triumph was short lived, for the following year, a Committee established to investigate allegations of bribery and

²³² See for instance, Rev. James Morgan to Robert James Tennent, June 9 1841, D/1748/G/472/1.

²³³ See, *NW*, June 17; 19 1841.

²³⁴ *BNL*, June 22 1841. The Scottish paper it quoted was the *Edinburgh Witness*.

²³⁵ *BNL*, June 25 1841.

corruption, announced to Parliament that the return of Emerson Tennent and Johnston was in fact void.²³⁶

For Belfast's conservatives, and particularly for Cooke, the Committee's findings were disastrous, in more ways than one. With Presbyterian feeling on both the Scottish Church question, and now the Marriages question gathering momentum, it was increasingly difficult for any Irish Presbyterian to offer such a public defence of a Tory government so apparently hostile to Presbyterian claims. In early 1842 Rev. John Brown succeeded in passing a series of resolutions in the Presbytery of Coleraine, attacking Cooke's faith in the Tory government.²³⁷ As meetings took place across the north to protest at the treatment of Irish Presbyterians, both by the established church and the government, the Rev. H. J. Dobbin of Ballymena launched a blistering attack on the representation of Ulster in a gathering held in his meeting-house. He,

regretted, that, though the constituency of Ulster were Presbyterians, they had not one Presbyterian Representative in Parliament. It was high time that such was the case. In the County Constituencies of Antrim, Down, Derry and Tyrone, and in the Boroughs of Belfast, Downpatrick, Coleraine, Derry &c., the Presbyterian electors were the majority.... They ought, then, to have Members who would carry their feelings before Parliament – he did not mean as political partisans – but as honest Presbyterians, ready and willing to state their feelings, their numbers, their influence, and their importance.²³⁸

The *Whig* joined orthodox Presbyterians in condemning the community's current representatives, notably the three Tory members of largely Presbyterian constituencies – Bateson (in Londonderry), Litton (Coleraine) and Emerson Tennent – for their failure to remonstrate in parliament against the government's proposed Marriage Bill. Indeed, it was William Smith O'Brien, an Anglican landlord, repealer and M.P for Limerick, who had spoken up for Presbyterian rights.²³⁹ Similarly, it fell to Sharman Crawford – always a staunch supporter of Presbyterian interests – to 'represent' the Presbyterian community. In a letter to the *Whig*, he described how he had been unsupported by Ireland's northern M.P.s in his efforts to tackle Peel on the Bill in the Commons – M.P.s, 'who might be supposed to possess the confidence of the Presbyterian body'.²⁴⁰

²³⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd series vol.63, June 3 1842, 1152-3.

²³⁷ *NW*, February 1 1842.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *NW*, March 5 1842.

²⁴⁰ *NW*, March 8 1842.

In its inaugural edition, the *Banner of Ulster* attacked both Belfast Tory candidates, Tennent and Johnston, for ignoring the Scottish Church and Presbyterian Marriages crises, but it offered praise for Ross the liberal candidate, who had referred to these issues in his address to the electors. But what the paper really desired was, ‘that a Presbyterian would stand, as the great Presbyterian constituency of Belfast should be represented by someone in tune with the General Assembly’.²⁴¹ In a letter to ‘The Presbyterian Electors of Belfast’, ‘An Orthodox Presbyterian Elector’, reiterated this position and similar anger was directed at Cooke for his continued loyalty to the conservative M.P.s.²⁴²

It was not long before the *Banner’s* outspoken Presbyterian-centric politics, brought it into conflict with Belfast’s conservative, Anglican *Ulster Times*. Responding to an article in the latter attacking the significance of the *Banner’s* choice of the ‘crownless harp’ emblem, the Presbyterian organ launched an aggressive tirade against both episcopacy and conservatism. It denounced the leadership of the *Ulster Times* as the ‘High Church Party in Belfast’, and whilst admitting that their emblem, ‘was at one period the symbol of disloyalty...’, argued that it had not been adopted as a political statement against the crown or the Union, but as a ‘national emblem’, to eradicate, ‘the party spirit that has wasted this country’.²⁴³ Moreover, the *Banner* denounced the *Ulster Times’* emblem of a ‘closed Bible’ as proof that, ‘its conductors seldom open that book’, and that the crown and sceptre positioned above it was proof of, ‘the Erastianism’ of the Established Church. Concurring with comments made at the recent series of meetings held to celebrate the Bicentenary of Presbyterianism in Ireland, particularly, the claim that many members of the Church of England needed a book, ‘to say their prayers’, the *Banner* reaffirmed its critical stance of Cooke’s submission to both Tory politicians and landlords, and to the established church.²⁴⁴ On specifically political matters, the *Banner* attacked the notion that, ‘every person who claims to hold conservative principles is a friend to the country, and every individual who acknowledges different views, is its foe’. On the subject of the *Banner’s* emblem, the *Ulster Times* asked, ‘Why... adopt it now, when it may be still regarded with just suspicion as indicating that our contemporary is inclined to republican principles? We believe the “crownless harp” was a favourite device with the rebels of 1798’.²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ *BU*, June 10 1842.

²⁴² *NW*, June 11 1842.

²⁴³ *BU*, June 21 1842.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *UT*, June 23 1842.

The mounting Presbyterian feeling in Belfast against the two conservative election candidates, was emphasized in the letter to the *Banner* from 'An Observer', on the need for Presbyterians to be represented by their own co-religionists, rather than, 'ungrateful representatives' who 'overlook Presbyterian interests'. He imagined how, 'the sending of two Presbyterian Representatives from Belfast would teach Government an important lesson..'.²⁴⁶ But with no such candidates standing, the *Banner* was left to lament that Tennent would surely get re-elected, 'although his conduct is unsatisfactory to a majority of his constituents'. On the liberal candidate, D. R. Ross, the paper concluded that, although 'untried', 'his substitution for Mr. Johnson is a decided gain to Presbyterianism'.²⁴⁷ Cooke's increasingly awkward position did not appear to have dampened his political zeal, and at a conservative election meeting he described himself as, 'a conservative in a double-sense – a Conservative, not only in political views, but also as concerned and responsible for the morals and religion of the town'.²⁴⁸ The *Banner* certainly did not concur with Cooke's defence of Emerson Tennent, as having done more for Presbyterians than any other man in Parliament.²⁴⁹

The situation in Belfast in 1842 was indeed a far cry from 1841, when, in the aftermath of O'Connell's visit to the city, the liberal Presbyterians had appeared weak, and Cooke and the Tories emboldened. However, the key electoral issue in 1842 in Belfast had been the Scottish Church and Marriages questions, rather than repeal and Catholic ascendancy. Furthermore, in an environment where hostility between the two Protestant churches had bubbled back to the surface; where the hostile conduct of the Tory government had been the main focus of Presbyterian attack; and, where the movement for proper Presbyterian representation was gaining ever more ground, Cooke's efforts to forge Protestant unity appeared ever more futile. In an editorial, the *Witness* highlighted the need for all Presbyterians, but particularly Tory Presbyterians, to place their church before their politics. Indeed, Ross acknowledged in his victory speech that, 'the Tory portion of that community had rendered him little or no

²⁴⁶ *BU*, June 24 1842.

²⁴⁷ *BU*, August 5 1842. With Arthur Chichester persuaded not to stand as the second Tory candidate – to avoid the bitterness of a contested election – Emerson Tennent and Ross were elected for the conservatives and liberals respectively. Both Cooke and Montgomery and other Presbyterian liberals such as John Sinclair, had all signed a resolution in favour of such a 'compromise' result, a sign of how bitter Belfast's electoral struggle had become. Also *BU*, August 12.

²⁴⁸ *BU*, August 9 1842.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

support'.²⁵⁰ The *Banner* admitted the divisions and the 'disorganized state of the Presbyterian voters'.²⁵¹

In Coleraine, the M.P, Litton, still faced uncompromising criticism from some Presbyterians for his parliamentary conduct over the Scottish Church and Marriages issues. At a meeting to defend his conduct, Litton referred in particular to the hostility directed towards him, 'by a portion of the Coleraine Presbytery'.²⁵² In defence of his recent vocal stance on Presbyterian politics, Rev. John Brown stated, 'The Presbyterian body have reposed such confidence in their Episcopal brethren that they have left themselves without one Presbyterian representative to give effect to their wishes in Parliament. Some members of Assembly, who view this infatuated policy as I do, with regret, determined.... to rouse the Presbyterian constituencies'. Above all Brown rejected the assumption of Litton and others, 'that Episcopalians have a right to legislate for Presbyterians according to their own principles'.²⁵³ For these comments, Litton threatened the Presbyterian minister with legal action.²⁵⁴ Brown's feelings were echoed by a Presbyterian writer, 'Clericus Armachanus', who commented, 'Shame upon the renegade representatives of Protestant Ulster, that the first Member of Parliament who spoke in favour of the validity of our marriages, was Mr. O'Connell'.²⁵⁵

The excitement generated by the subsequent by-election in Coleraine, with Litton's appointment as Master of Chancery, in October 1842 was immense. The two front-running candidates, John Boyd and Sir Hervey Bruce were both conservatives, but the *Banner* offered conditional support to Boyd, the Presbyterian, in the hope that, he would, 'withdraw his confidence from the present Ministry if they do not introduce a measure for the Scottish Church'.²⁵⁶ But, the paper added a further note of caution concerning Boyd's conservative credentials, given that, 'many of the Presbyterian Electors in Coleraine are of Liberal opinions'.²⁵⁷ The *Whig*, although ideally preferring a liberal candidate, similarly made clear its intention of supporting Boyd.²⁵⁸ Rev. Brown reiterated the shameful situation that one million Presbyterians, 'have not one member in Parliament'.²⁵⁹ Brown urged caution over Boyd, lest that after the election he should, 'retire at some fitting juncture in favour of some nominee of Government,

²⁵⁰ Quoted in *BU*, August 30 1842.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² *BU*, September 6 1842.

²⁵³ *BU*, September 13 1842. Such as Litton's vote for Lord Eliot's Marriage Bill.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *BU*, September 27 1842.

²⁵⁶ *BU*, October 14 1842.

²⁵⁷ *BU*, October 21 1842.

²⁵⁸ *BU*, October 13 1842.

and so defeat the project of returning a Presbyterian'.²⁶⁰ Unsurprisingly, Brown was the pivotal force behind the establishment of the Presbyterian Church Defence Association in October 1842, which, at its first meeting in Coleraine, resolved, 'That it was the bounden duty of Presbyterian constituents to return to Parliament members who understand and will defend their rights and privileges...'.²⁶¹

A bitter attack on Prelacy, conservatism and the Protestant union was made by, 'A Black-Mouthed Presbyterian' in a letter to the *Banner* in November, expressing frustration that in Ireland, 'the least leaning towards liberal politics brings a man under suspicion of being in League with the Pope'. In such circumstances, 'it becomes every man who fears being branded as a Radical, to keep on good terms with the PROTESTANT Church – the Church established by law. Every good Tory adopts, of course, as his motto – "CHURCH AND STATE" – "THINGS AS THEY ARE;" and one of these things is Prelacy, in all its wealth and power and pride; and consequently, no good Tory Presbyterian will complain, though the successors of Peter and Paul in the House of Lords compel a Tory ministry to pass a Marriage Bill insulting and deeply injurious to Irish Presbyterians'.²⁶²

When Boyd's victory was announced, both Presbyterian newspapers accepted that, in the words of the *Banner*, 'Many of the electors of Coleraine voted for Dr. Boyd, at a great sacrifice of personal feeling, as they are politically opposed to the party with which he has hitherto been associated'.²⁶³ The *Banner* hoped that other largely Presbyterian counties could do the same as Coleraine, although in Down and Antrim, 'they would have to struggle against the immense influence of the aristocracy'.²⁶⁴ The increasing momentum of Presbyterian political assertiveness continued throughout 1843, as the Marriages and Scottish Church questions remained unresolved. In March, a meeting of Presbyterians was held in Belfast, to express sympathy with the Church of Scotland, and, more importantly, 'for considering what steps, under existing circumstances, it may be the duty of Irish Presbyterians to take, for securing a legitimate and efficient representation of Presbyterian principles and interests, in Parliament'.²⁶⁵

Rev. Dr. Edgar, the Moderator of the General Assembly referred to those numerous M.Ps in the North of Ireland who had shown apathy towards the interests of

²⁵⁹ *BU*, October 7 1842. In a letter on 'The Present Duty of Presbyterian Electors'.

²⁶⁰ *BU*, October 25 1842.

²⁶¹ *BU*, November 11 1842.

²⁶² *BU*, November 18 1842.

²⁶³ *BU*, February 21 1843; *NW*, February 16 1843.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *NW*, March 30 1843.

Presbyterianism, by voting against, or failing to vote at all on, Mr. Fox Maule's motion on behalf of the Church of Scotland. In defiant language, he stated that Tennent's vote on the matter had, 'rendered him...utterly unworthy of the confidence of a Presbyterian constituency'. The Presbyterian solicitor A. J. Macrory, moved a resolution to organize a system of registry, 'as might secure, in any future election for Ulster, an efficient support to the advocates of Presbyterian interests'. He added that, 'it was a loud and crying shame, considering the portion of the Protestant electors of Ulster that were Presbyterians, that they were not better represented.... there were nearly three hundred Members who voted on the Honourable Fox Maule's motion; and... out of one hundred and five, there were only thirteen Irish members present. Eight of these voted for and five against the motion. It was obvious that they were not represented as they ought to be; nor could they be properly represented, unless by Presbyterian Members.²⁶⁶ The *Whig* noted, doubtless with some satisfaction, that even Cooke had reluctantly admitted that Tennent had voted against the Church of Scotland. The paper was delighted to report that, 'Dr. Edgar has placed the integrity of Mr. Ross in strong contrast' with Tennent's conduct.²⁶⁷ Tennent's appointment as Governor General of Ceylon in 1845 may have extricated him from the increasingly hostile world of Belfast politics, but for Presbyterians his uncontested replacement with Lord John Chichester could not be seen as much of a gain. The *Banner* reported merely that, 'The Borough exchanges a Ministerial Conservative for an anti-Maynooth conservative', which it regarded as a marginal improvement.²⁶⁸

The growing chasm between Cooke and many of his orthodox brethren on the subject of Presbyterian representation, and the ability of Anglican landlords to represent Presbyterian constituencies, was revealed in the proceedings of the General Assembly's annual meeting in July 1843.²⁶⁹ Cooke opposed John Brown's resolution for forming a committee for Presbyterian representation, arguing that any such motion would turn the Assembly into 'an Electioneering Club', but his second objection was perhaps more telling: 'If they passed that resolution', Cooke added, '...they would destroy the good feeling that existed in that part of the country, between landlord and tenant, and turn Antrim and Down into Tipperary and Limerick'. Cooke was clearly nervous at the prospect of the largest Presbyterian body in Ireland, effectively declaring war on the

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*(my underlining)

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ See *Times*, May 29 1845; *BU*, August 19; 22 1845.

²⁶⁹ *NW*, July 11 1843.

right of the landed elites to represent them. Once again, it was Rev. Richard Dill who opposed Cooke most forcibly:

.... Had landlords' cause to be angry with them for an effort to forward the cause of Presbyterianism? What had made their lives more secure, and their estates more favourable, in this part of the country than they were in the south?... Were the people to be dragooned by their landlords as if they were serfs, or were they to be dragged forward, for the purpose of giving political influence to any man, and resign those duties which they owed to their religion...?²⁷⁰

Dill added that the Presbyterians of Ulster were 'misrepresented' and 'neglected' in Parliament and he seconded Brown's resolution. Much to Cooke's fury, Brown marvelled that despite being 'the mainstay of the British connexion in Ireland', they had barely a single Representative in Parliament:

[BROWN:]...He did not wish to make any complaints against Members of Parliament; but he thought they should have a few who agreed with them in principle, to watch over their interests, and carry their feelings and even their prejudices into the Legislature, – [DR. COOKE – Their prejudices! They have none.] – If they sent Presbyterian Representatives to Parliament, did they think that Lord Eliot's Marriage Bill, which was an insult to Presbyterians, would have passed so hastily through the House? If they had sent Presbyterian Representatives to Parliament, would it have been the case, when that Bill was brought in, that the only person from Ireland to raise his voice was one of the O'Connells?²⁷¹

The Rev. A. P. Goudy of Strabane²⁷² also spoke out in favour of Dr. Brown's resolution and he twisted Cooke's argument against him, commenting:

It had been said, that the resolution, if carried out, would array the landlords of Ulster against their tenantry, throwing out the hint to the Ministers and Elders of the Church, that if they went forward like men, in order to get their views and principles advocated in Parliament, they would array the landlords against them. Now he (Mr. Goudy) affirmed that that was a bad compliment to pay to the landed proprietors of Ulster...

Goudy addressed the crux of the question, commenting,

If it was their duty to send persons to represent them in Parliament, whom were they to send? Were they to send any stripling aristocrats, with their Commission in their pocket, to walk in, to polish the pavement in Bond Street, and cry "Aye" or "No", as Providence might direct, in Parliament. (Laughter).

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² Grandson of the executed United Irish propagandist, Rev. James Porter of Greyabbey.

But others within the Assembly, for instance Mr. Molyneux, voiced concern at the prospect of the General Assembly wilfully 'sectionizing the Protestants' and declaring war on the landlords. Moreover, he pointed to the practical impossibilities they would face: '...It would be a very desirable thing if the House of Lords and House of Commons were deeply impregnated with Presbyterianism, but how were they to get that accomplished?' he commented, and,

he would be glad to know where they would get the necessary funds to contest any Borough, County, or city. He would like to know how they were to take the representation of the County Down out of the hands of the Downshire and Londonderry families? [MR. BROWNE – There would be no necessity for that]. Well if there would be no necessity for that, then they were contented with Episcopalian Representatives. (Hear, Hear, and cries of No, no!!) He would tell them that it would take £20,000 to contest that County; and if they did not succeed, their efforts would be treated with contempt, and the very influence they might legitimately exercise over the Representatives would be lost...

However, the feeling of the majority of the Assembly was against Cooke, for the ministers voted in favour of Brown's resolution for proper Presbyterian parliamentary representation. Cooke, in a fit of pique, subsequently absented himself from the Assembly for the following four years,²⁷³ until his old friend, Robert Stewart succeeded in having the political resolution rescinded.

In 1843 the Rev. Clarke Houston produced a series of letters on the 'Enemies, Prospects, and Duties of Presbyterians'.²⁷⁴ Amongst the issues that he highlighted was the inadequacy of Presbyterian defenders in Parliament, so starkly revealed by the Marriages Crisis. 'Englishmen', he stated, 'know Irish Presbyterians only through the distorted medium of a hostile press, or the contemptuous and malignant misrepresentation of some haughty aristocrat, some paltry place-hunter, such as the late representative of Coleraine...'.²⁷⁵ Similar sentiments were expressed beyond the General Assembly. 'A Presbyterian, and Not a Serf', wrote to the Editor of the *Banner*, telling the Presbyterian voters of Derry, on the death of their M.P, Robert Bateson,²⁷⁶ that they did not have to accept his brother, Thomas, as his automatic successor to the representation. Why could a Presbyterian not be elected instead, as had happened in

²⁷³ Holmes, *Cooke*, pp.157-8.

²⁷⁴ Houston, *Letters on the Present Position, Enemies, Prospects and Duties of Presbyterians*.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.35 (my underlining)

²⁷⁶ Robert Bateson was the eldest son of Sir Robert Bateson and succeeded his father as M.P. for County Londonderry in 1842 until his death in 1844, where he was replaced by Sir Robert's second son, Thomas.

Coleraine, the writer asked, especially given that, ‘two-thirds of the electors are Presbyterians’, in Derry.²⁷⁷

In December 1843 the *Banner* reported on a new publication, entitled ‘Ireland’, written by a celebrated traveller, J.G Kohl, in which he commented, ‘...They all carry on a sort of opposition against the pretensions of England; the old Irish Catholics against everything “Saxon”, the Presbyterians against the Tories and the Establishment..’.²⁷⁸ Kohl’s observations were disputed by the *Banner*, indicating continuing sensitivity on the subject of any suggestion of latent disloyalty. This was doubtless increased by O’Connell’s recent comment in a speech at the Repeal Association, in which he praised the Presbyterian newspaper for coming forward to help the cause of Repeal.²⁷⁹

Whilst increasing numbers of orthodox Presbyterians spoke up on the necessity of proper parliamentary representation for their community,²⁸⁰ Cooke attended a meeting of the ‘Protestant Operative Society’ in Belfast. His attendance at such an avowedly Orange and Tory organisation, was denounced by the *Whig* as Cooke proving himself the ‘tool’ of Prelacy and Toryism.²⁸¹ At a meeting where banners on display included ‘Protestant Ascendancy’, Cooke’s attendance demonstrated just how far out of step he had become from his Whig colleagues in the Assembly. Indeed, in response to his conduct ‘An Ulster Presbyterian’ wrote to the *Dublin Evening Post* to announce that, ‘The Irish General Assembly....have no responsibility for Dr. Cooke’s political proceedings’.²⁸²

By 1847 Presbyterian politics was seized by a new issue in the form of the rapidly growing campaign for the legalisation of Tenant Right, which found leadership from Presbyterian ministers, journalists and tenant farmers, ready to challenge the political role of the landlords. Indeed, this chapter is concerned with the immense political significance of this new movement, culminating in the 1852 general election, and the first large-scale attempt by Presbyterians in the north to end landlord domination of electoral politics and Irish parliamentary representation. A *Banner* editorial of July 1845 had attacked the reaction of the landlord Peers to any legislation on the subject, noting that, ‘...the tenant who votes against his landlord’s son or his

²⁷⁷ *BU*, February 20 1844.

²⁷⁸ *BU*, December 1 1843.

²⁷⁹ *BU*, November 3 1843.

²⁸⁰ *Times*, April 4 1844.

²⁸¹ *NW*, April 23 1844.

²⁸² Letter reprinted in *NW*, April 25 1844.

friend, may be supposed to conduct himself Improperly; and yet the sin is not so very deadly that he should be fined the value of his tenant right in punishment'.²⁸³

The *Londonderry Standard* launched a blistering attack on the political aspects of Irish landlordism: 'The landed proprietors have notoriously in their own hands, at present, the sole power of making the laws – the bulk of the people at large have neither the voice nor vote in the matter; for, with the exception of the borough constituencies, the elective franchise is a practical mockery'.²⁸⁴ The demands for the legalization of tenant right played an increasingly important role in Presbyterian politics, as shown at the 1847 election in Belfast.²⁸⁵ The *Banner* declared the subject to be the new litmus test for prospective M.Ps of Presbyterian constituencies: only members, 'who will support justice to the tenantry' should be returned.²⁸⁶ In Belfast, Robert James Tennent was selected to contest the election for the liberals, whilst Lord John Chichester stood once more for the conservatives, alongside George Suffern, a conservative and Presbyterian. The *Newsletter's* attack on Tennent and its comment that Belfast's progress owed everything to 'Protestants,' and nothing to 'Popery and Liberalism', emphasized the continuing efforts of conservatives to stigmatize liberalism as a betrayal of Protestantism. In Tennent's case, lingering suspicions of his repeal sympathies concerned many Presbyterians, including the *Banner* and many of its correspondents. Its editorial noted that, 'A suspicion of that nature would scarcely be suitable in this quarter, where men are said to study practical advantages more than the dreamy romance that passes current for patriotism'.²⁸⁷ Conversely, the Presbyterian *Whig* declared its support for Tennent.²⁸⁸ His subsequent victory in Belfast was the result of support from Belfast's Presbyterian liberal elites and Roman Catholic population, rather than the wider Presbyterian population. In a letter to Tennent, the Rev. P.S Henry congratulated him on his election victory: 'You have fixed your native town from a bondage as base as it is illiterate and vulgar'.²⁸⁹ However, doubts about Tennent's position on the Union and, in the *Banner's* case, a desire for a thoroughly 'Presbyterian' candidate, ensured that rank and file Presbyterian votes in Belfast were directed towards Suffern. In County Down, the fledgling tenant right campaign had not yet the

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ Belfast's two Tory candidates had issued fresh electoral addresses referring specifically to the subject. *BU*, August 3 1847.

²⁸⁶ *BU*, July 9 1847. See also *BU*, August 3 1847.

²⁸⁷ *BU*, July 27 1847.

²⁸⁸ *NW*, July 27.

²⁸⁹ Rev. P Shuldham Henry to Robert James Tennent, August 13 1847, D/1748/G/265/24.

momentum or organisation to challenge the electoral strength of the Hill and Stewart candidates, who were returned uncontested.

Many of the speeches by individual Presbyterian ministers emphasized that anti-establishment tendencies were still alive and well. Rev. Henry Wallace, a Presbyterian minister from Derry, singled out the political dominance of landlords for particular attack, arguing that the legalization of tenant right, 'was essential to the political independence' of every tenant:

'The theory of the Constitution made them all electors.... The man therefore who stepped in, and, by virtue of any power which, as landlord, he might have over his tenantry, would endeavour to induce them to vote contrary to their wishes....deserved to be held up to public odium'.²⁹⁰

At a tenant right meeting held in Ballybay in early 1848, Rev. David Bell, attacked the immense power of the landlord over every aspect of a tenant's life, from his 'exorbitant rents' to his political influence:

Is it any of the rights of property, to drive a man, who has faithfully and punctually discharged his obligations, from his home and his native soil, because he dares to follow the dictates of his own conscience, and not the bidding of his landlord's agent, or his landlord's bailiff, in his religious and political views?²⁹¹

Bell added that it was the duty of Parliament, 'not to legislate for the benefit of a small class but of a whole community'. For a growing number of Presbyterians, especially some of the more strident ministers involved, tenant right clearly offered a tempting opportunity to become involved in a movement which was becoming unashamedly anti-establishment, and to enter the political fray.

As Chapters One and Three demonstrated, the ultimate catalyst for the rapidly mushrooming tenant right movement came in February 1848, with the government's proposal to settle the land question, in the form of Sir William Somerville's Bill. The apparently hostile position of the government and the majority of the House of Commons towards the claims of the tenant farming class, seemed to reinforce the belief that landlord representatives were utterly out of step with the needs of the thousands of Presbyterians in the north tied to the land. At a tenant right meeting in Dunmurry to denounce Somerville's Bill, and to prepare a petition to Parliament, the political aspect of Presbyterian resentment against landlords reared its head in the form of an attack on Down's electoral politics: '...the people were not at all represented. The landlords should have been the first to oppose this Bill. The Representatives did not speak the

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

voice of the tenants. They would not be returned, but for the united efforts of two families. The small farmers were not at all represented (Hear, hear). He would like the Members for the County would speak out on the question. Not a word was said by them, in the hustings, about tenant right'.²⁹²

Sir William Somerville's Bill and the failure of the County representatives in Parliament to convey the popular opposition to that measure across Ulster, prompted the same criticisms that had been voiced by certain Presbyterians in 1842 at the time of the Marriages and Scottish Church controversies. At a meeting in Lurgan in March, McKnight read extracts from a letter he had recently received from Crawford, warning the Presbyterians not to expect much redress from Parliament, since the Irish landlord interest have, 'a most determined hostility...to the recognition of the tenant-right of Ulster'. McKnight claimed that the landlords' endeavour to subvert any attempts to legally secure tenant right stemmed from their desire, 'to secure a sort of feudal dominion over the body, and mind, and franchise of their tenants'.²⁹³

At a Tenant Right Meeting in Dungannon attended by an estimated fifteen thousand – including a now familiar list of names, such as McKnight, and Presbyterian ministers including, Rev. Reid of Scarva, Rev. James Rentoul of Garvagh, and Rev. D.G Brown, Newtownhamilton – a bitter attack was launched on the electoral dominance of the landlords by Rev. David Bell.²⁹⁴ The *Banner of Ulster* harked back to the great scene at Dungannon at the Volunteer Convention of 1782.²⁹⁵ Bell noted,

It had already been said that the farmers of Ulster, and of Ireland, without tenant right, though they might have a nominal political franchise, were in reality the landlord's slaves....The present system of the representation of this country they complained of as great, and trying, and ruinous grievance....

He argued that the farmers '...had the credit of sending representatives to Parliament, but, most assuredly, they did not receive the benefits of representation'. Bell continued his tirade against Ulster's aristocratic representatives for failing to support Crawford's most recent bill: 'Were the men who voted in opposition to that bill, or absented themselves wilfully or carelessly, the real representatives of the farmers of Ulster? (Cries of "No, no")...Those men were not their representatives on the question of tenant right, and unless they changed, and...speedily, they would call on the farmers of Ulster

²⁹¹ *BU*, January 14 1850.

²⁹² *Ibid.* Speech of Mr. Woods at Dumurry meeting.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ *BU*, May 26 1848

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

to send to Parliament men who would do justice to their tenant's property (Great cheering)'.²⁹⁶

Sir William Somerville's Bill once more came under bitter attack, including his proposal to extend the country's franchise. Bell was scathing, arguing that any such cosmetic measure would simply aggravate the tenant's injuries:

The franchise, by which they already possessed the right of voting in 99 cases out of 100, according to the influences of their feudal superiors – (hear, hear and laughter) – would be extended to perhaps a tenfold degree, and if they could calculate the number of those who are under the power of landlords, and whom landlords can compel, under pain of eviction, to vote as they please and not as the consciences of the voters would dictate, they would find them to be increased to something like ten times their present number.²⁹⁷

For Bell, the only antidote to landlord coercion of tenant voting was a legalized tenant right which included fixity of tenure and a 'fair rent'.

In June 1848 'Omega', writing in the *Banner of Ulster*, emphasized the connection between electoral politics and tenant right. He argued that its legalization, 'would tend so much to advance the cause of rational freedom and independence, which would elevate the majority of the farmers of Ulster, from a state of subservience to their landlords in political matters'. Moreover, the landlords '...are opposed to the legalization of tenant right, not because they think the value of their properties would be thereby diminished...but because they know that...they would cease to hold in their pockets the votes of their tenants – their tenants would cease to be their political puppets'.²⁹⁸

In 1848 McKnight criticized the political bondage of tenants who,

can have no attachment to a Constitution which thus keeps them in the rank of aliens, and of practical slaves...It is the barbarous policy of the great body of Irish landlords to keep their tenants in the condition of mere dependants at will, so that they may have them at any moment in their power, either for purposes of rack-renting extortion, or of political despotism, or of passive subserviency, to every form of local dictatorship.²⁹⁹

As Lord Londonderry's dispute with his Kilmood tenants in County Down (beginning in 1849 with their presentation of a petition requesting a reduction of rents) increased, local Presbyterian ministers intervened on behalf of the tenants against their

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ *BU*, June 9 1848

²⁹⁹ McKnight, *The Ulster Tenants' Claim of Right*, p.47.

landlord. In a scathing attack on Andrews, Rev. Rogers (dubbed the orchestrator of the dispute by Londonderry) wrote, 'I have never, a Radical in politics, "whipped in" a free people to the hustings to vote for a Conservative Candidate, and that under threats of certain unmentionable penalties in case they rebelled. I have never established an espionage over a parish to watch and report on the proceedings of private parties'.³⁰⁰

The increasing political emphasis of the Presbyterian tenant right campaign was demonstrated at meetings in Holywood and Saintfield in January 1850, with the rhetoric of slavery used to condemn landlordism: 'Has the Legislature gloriously abolished slavery abroad, and shall it wink at a modified and growing vassalage, little short of slavery at home? Shall we be tantalised with the Reform Bill, and yet rendered incapable of enjoying its provisions?' The British Constitution, McKnight argued at Saintfield, 'proclaims you to be freemen....but in the exercise of its own power of unlimited renting and summary eviction, the landlord institute arrogates to itself your civil rights and Parliamentary franchise...reducing her Majesty's free subjects to a condition of experimental serfdom'. Referring to the government's plans to extend the franchise,³⁰¹ McKnight scathingly noted, 'Let Ministers, if they are really in earnest, bring in a measure making the exercise, as well as the theory, of the elective right independent of aristocratic dictation'.³⁰² The Rev. James Killen of Comber emphasized a similar point to a tenant right meeting held in the town:

Till this moment, the County Down has been a close borough, in the hands of Downshire and Londonderry – (hear, hear) – and the farmers have been nothing more than the mere puppets of the aristocracy, ready to be flogged at any time to the hustings to do their bidding...With fixity of tenure alone would your condition be otherwise, for then you could return men of your own choice to the Imperial Legislature.

In a letter to the Editor of the *Banner*, 'A Constant Reader', commented, 'I have no doubt the Presbyterian ministers will, to a man, go along with their people, in this to them life and death struggle, and I should like to see the British House of Commons that could withstand the united demands of the Presbyterian people of the North of Ireland'. Moreover, the author likened their efforts to the glory days of 1782, adding, that these men were, after all, the sons and grandsons of Volunteers.³⁰³ Responding to a presentation made to him by the Tenant Right Association in Derry, in recognition of

³⁰⁰ *BU*, December 28 1849

³⁰¹ *BU*, January 18 1850 (supplement) For details of the 1850 Irish Franchise Act, see K.T. Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: Conflict and Conformity* (London, 1989), p.86.

³⁰² *BU*, January 18 1850.

³⁰³ *BU*, February 15 1850

his efforts to their cause, James McKnight reiterated his political arguments. He wrote, ‘..we do *not* recognise as superadded perquisites of landlordism, any reserved controul [*sic*] over the civil and Parliamentary franchises nor any feudal dominion over the bodies of the tenant people’.³⁰⁴

In February 1850, the Marquis of Londonderry took his grievances against the Presbyterian clergy to the highest level, and in a number of speeches in the House of Lords, he denounced their involvement in the tenant right movement, and their open hostility to the landed class.³⁰⁵ Doubtless, the reports received from John Andrews on the increasing incendiarism in Down, and the descriptions of the Presbyterian ministers’ speeches ‘which strike at the root of the rights of property’, alarmed Londonderry enough to take such steps.³⁰⁶ On the condition of Down itself, he commented, ‘That hitherto peaceable and industrious county is in a state of dreadful excitement, by the Presbyterian ministers at the present moment exhorting the people not to pay rents, but to resist the laws; they are more rabid in their radical doctrines than the Catholic priests have ever been...’.³⁰⁷ The following week Londonderry once more launched an attack on the Presbyterian clergy, blaming the malign influence of Dobbin and his colleagues for the numerous incendiary fires across Down and Antrim: ‘that this was owing to the bad language and preaching, and to the almost advice, of some Presbyterian clergymen to resist the law, and to abstain from the payment of rent’. Most significantly, Londonderry went on to demand that Government should deprive these ministers of their *regium donum* should they continue, ‘to drive the tenants to resist the law’.³⁰⁸ The response of his fellow Peers was largely unsympathetic, and the Earl of Mountcashel censured Londonderry for casting aspersions on the entire Presbyterian clergy, based on the actions of a few. Lord Brougham agreed, though noting that, ‘he hoped that they were now a little more loyal than they were in 1798’.³⁰⁹

Lack of support for his efforts did not dampen the Marquis of Londonderry’s frenzy against the Presbyterian ministers and on March 1 in the Lords, he referred to the real object of the tenant-righters as the ‘overthrow of the rights of property’ and ‘communism and socialism’.³¹⁰ He added,

³⁰⁴ *BU*, February 8 1850.

³⁰⁵ Lord Londonderry in the Lords, *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 108, 755-8, February 14 1850; February 22, 1275-8; Vol. 109, March 1, 221-33; March 7, 458 and Lord Castlereagh in Commons, Vol. 108, 1022-3, February 18 1850.

³⁰⁶ Andrews to Londonderry, February 10 1850, DCRO, D/Lo/C 158 (60)

³⁰⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.108, February 14 1850, 757

³⁰⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.108, February 22 1850, 1276-8

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.109, March 1 1850, 221-7

The local newspapers, especially the Radical newspapers, gave full details of all their proceedings, and certainly encouraged and aided the Presbyterian ministers in their furious declamations. The doctrines which they inculcated were not alone reduction of rents and tenant right – they added to those demands a demand for fixity of tenure.... The tenants already thought the land their own, and the Presbyterian ministers assisted in encouraging that delusion...

Indeed, ‘...if every report of their speeches did not prove the fact that Presbyterian ministers were preaching up resistance to the payment of rents, he did not know by what evidence he would convince those who still remained incredulous’. Londonderry read an extract from a letter he had received from a respectable gentleman of Down, praising Londonderry for bringing the state of the county to such public attention: ‘There is a very bad spirit and feeling prevalent among the farmers, agitating tenant-right, fixity of tenure, and encouraged by free-traders, the radical press, and the calumnies heaped on the landlords by many of the Presbyterian ministers, who have preached everything wicked and rebellious to their people.’³¹¹

Regarding a threatening letter which Londonderry also read out claiming to be from the Rev. John Rutherford, the Marquis was forced into an embarrassing climb down in the Lords a few days later, when it emerged that the letter had been a forgery.³¹² Lord Castlereagh made similar allegations in a speech in the House of Commons, remarking that, ‘this question of tenant-right had taken a deep root in the county of Down...[and]..it was painful to find that the Presbyterian clergy had taken the lead in this agitation’. In particular he attacked the Rev. Rutherford’s speech at Banbridge, and alluded to a recent meeting in Comber where a minister had declared that, ‘ “God not only made his own people farmers, but gave them their farms in perpetuity: he gave them fixity of tenure, on which the success and prosperity of the farmers depended....God had permitted the present depression, in order to show the hollowness of the relation between landlord and tenant”’.³¹³

Londonderry’s comments in the House of Lords, and those of Castlereagh in the Commons, merely fuelled the hostility of the Presbyterian press, clergy and laity; the *Banner of Ulster* simply noted, ‘we hope [it] will not be forgotten at the first county election which shall occur in Down’.³¹⁴ Lord Clarendon in his private correspondence with Londonderry had warned of the danger of denouncing the Presbyterian ministers

³¹¹ *Ibid.* Although he did not identify the letter’s author in the House of Lords, it was from Robert Bateson to Londonderry, February 26 1850: see, DCRO, D/Lo/C 159 (5)

³¹² *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.109, March 1 1850, 225-6 and March 7, 458.

³¹³ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.108, February 18, 1022-3

³¹⁴ *BU*, February 22 1850. For full discussion of the incident see Chapter Three.

so publicly and he regretted, 'that you should have alluded lastnight to the *Regium Donum* as I fear it may induce the whole of the Presbyterian ministry to make common cause with the delinquents of their Body... for they will pretend their independence is attacked'.³¹⁵ But Londonderry had no such regrets, and he prepared a response to Clarendon with a list of the recent tenant right meetings and the attendance of various Presbyterian ministers at each.³¹⁶

One of the most vigorous defences of the Presbyterian clergy came from the *Derry Standard*, whose editorials against landlordism were becoming increasingly radical. The *Standard* mocked Londonderry, whose, 'vassals in the county Down have presumed to think for themselves, and to think differently from their Lord; yea, they have had the audacity to express their thoughts in public'. As for Londonderry's threat to the ministers' *regium donum*, the *Standard* was withering in its response: 'The best plan is to charge them with disloyalty in the House. That highly-consistent Peer, Lord Brougham, will rake up, by the help of the Castlereagh Memoirs, some charge against the Presbyterian ministers of the last century, so that the sins of the fathers may be visited upon the children'. The editorial added that, 'the temper of the Marquis of Londonderry would fit the tone of the government in 98' better than it fits the tone of Government in this age..'. As for Lord Downshire, the *Standard* asked,

...what has broken the silent spell which so long bound the Downshire vassals?...Ah, those Presbyterian Ministers have done it all!...But what business had they to do so? Did the landlord give them permission to speak the truth...?...Clearly not; therefore they must be punished. But how? That is the question. The Rev. Mr. Dobbin was near being caught and cast into prison for a debt which was not his own....³¹⁷

At a Tenant Right meeting in Killinchy, Rev. Rogers led the unanimous condemnation of Londonderry's recent attack on the Presbyterian clergy in the House of Lords.³¹⁸ He recalled how Castlereagh had praised the Presbyterian Church to the skies when 'the young lord's seat was not very secure', as 'he knew that the Presbyterian influence was paramount in the county', and yet now he attacks its ministers. 'I always knew', added Rogers, 'that these gentry only cared for the Presbyterian Church to the extent which she could serve them'.³¹⁹ The most significant meeting of the campaign thus far took place at Ballynahinch in March 1850, to petition parliament for the

³¹⁵ Clarendon to Londonderry, February 23 1850, DCRO, D/Lo/C 111 (15)

³¹⁶ Londonderry to Clarendon, February 24 1850, Clar. Dep. Ir. Box 18 and DCRO, Acc. 1193 (D) box 4.

³¹⁷ *LS*, February 28 1850

³¹⁸ *BU*, March 1 1850. See Chapter Three.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

legalization of tenant right.³²⁰ The Rev. Mecredy accused landlords of failing to legislate on the subject because they regarded their tenants as serfs, and he attacked the manner in which tenants were ‘whipped to the hustings’. In a direct swipe at Castlereagh, Mecredy stated: ‘The people were now beginning to see they they must have their own Representatives...and he trusted that when another election came round, the farmers would not be misrepresented, as they had too long been...and not send a man to Parliament who will vilify their ministers’. Presbyterian frustrations with the political control of the landlord class were also echoed by the Rev. McEwen who noted that in Down,

They could easily save the Noble Lords who were now their members the trouble of representing them in future [A VOICE- Misrepresenting us]...The days were gone by, he hoped forever, when one or two great families would hold the representation of the county in their hands. It was all nonsense to talk of a County being represented, unless the tenant farmers were represented, and not the aristocracy.³²¹

In March 1850 a series of meetings were held across Ulster to oppose the latest Landlord and Tenant Bill proposed by Sir William Somerville – the *Banner* warned its readers that the ‘destruction of the Ulster tenant right is determined upon’.³²² The threat of another unfavourable parliamentary bill served to further Presbyterian political discontent. At a meeting in Boardmills, McKnight attacked Somerville’s latest bill, tracing, ‘the defects in legislation on the land question to the fact that the agricultural population is not represented in Parliament’.³²³ In a similar tone, a letter to the editor of the *Banner* from ‘A Farmer’ implored tenants to, ‘wipe this brand of slavery and oppression from your brow, and stand on your feet like freemen’, by returning men to Parliament who would, ‘really represent our interests’.³²⁴

The increasing emphasis on the political aspect of Irish landlordism was shown at a tenant right meeting held in Cairncullagh Presbyterian church in Dervock.³²⁵ The theme of the meeting was articulated by one speaker, James Moore, who lamented that,

To say that the vast majority of the people of Ireland are represented is a delusion and a mockery.... The fact is the Irish people are slaves....Was the County Antrim, for instance, in which they were, represented? There were but two individuals in that county represented – the Marquis of Hertford and Lord

³²⁰ *NW*, March 2 1850

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² *BU*, February 22 1850.

³²³ *BU*, March 15 1850

³²⁴ *BU*, March 22 1850

O'Neill...as for the farmers they were no more represented there than the buffaloes of the prairies of America...

He demanded, therefore, an end to 'class legislation'. In turn, the Rev. Joseph Bellis reminded the landlords that, 'Presbyterians cannot and will not be slaves'. Also speaking at Dervock, William Hopkins declared,

as a Whig Presbyterian...he heartily approved of the conduct of those Presbyterian ministers who had come out, as citizens of a free state, and expressed their sympathy with an oppressed people.... He strongly suspected...that those noble lords who had maligned the Presbyterian ministers for taking a part in the tenant right cause, would not have objected to them had they appeared in support of aristocratic privilege and feudal tyranny.³²⁶

Referring to the Dervock meeting, and a similar gathering at Ballyclare, the *Times* contrasted the Presbyterian tenant right orators with John Mitchel, in their, 'violent advocacy of the rights of the tenantry, as opposed to those of the landlords'.³²⁷

The comparisons with Mitchel, a committed Irish separatist with a bitter hatred of British rule in Ireland, were certainly significant, not least because Mitchel himself was born an Ulster Presbyterian, and a son of the manse. A native of Newry, County Down and later a lawyer in Banbridge, Mitchel's radicalism in politics was, as Robert Mahony has demonstrated, strongly influenced by the Arian controversy he had witnessed first hand in his formative years.³²⁸ His father, the Rev. John Mitchel of Newry, was a leading minister in the new Remonstrant Synod from 1830, and some have claimed, at one time not unsympathetic to the United Irish movement. As a writer initially for the *Nation* newspaper in 1845, Mitchel's revolutionary and militant tone led ultimately to a breach with his Young Ireland colleagues, in particular with Charles Gavan Duffy, and to the establishment of his own journal in 1848, significantly titled, *United Irishman*. Flann Campbell has emphasized the significance of Mitchel, in that, 'two generations after the democratic Presbyterianism of 1798....he renewed the old emphasis on the unity of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter'. However, to regard Mitchel as the heir to the United Irish tradition is to ignore the fact that even the most radical Presbyterians denounced any association with his activities. It was Mitchel's revolutionary comments on the pages of the *United Irishman* and his involvement in the ill-fated Young Ireland rebellion in June 1848, which caused most outrage – not least because his activities had brought the Irish Presbyterian name into disrepute.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *Times*, March 25 1850

Although clearly outside the mainstream of northern Presbyterianism – his advocacy of Repeal of the Union, and above all, his countenance of physical force elicited the horror of the *Banner* and the *Londonderry Standard* – Mitchel, and his northern Presbyterian friend and colleague John Martin,³²⁹ were nonetheless significant figures. The *Banner* defended the Irish Presbyterian name from allegations in the London *Daily News* that Mitchel was, ‘a frantic Irish Presbyterian...a leveller in politics – a revolutionist on principle, only less opposed to the Irish Established Church...than to England and her empire’. The *Banner* commented, ‘...Besides John Mitchel and John Martin...none of the leaders of the Young Ireland party even professed to be Presbyterians’.³³⁰ In the House of Commons, Lord Stanley highlighted Mitchel’s seditious and provocative language in the inaugural publication of the *United Irishman*, such as the latter’s letter to Clarendon, ‘Calling Himself Her Majesty’s Lord Lieutenant...of Ireland’, ‘the official representative of foreign dominion in our enslaved island’.³³¹ Indeed, Mitchel’s hatred of British rule in Ireland,³³² and of the entire British Empire, had been confirmed by the famine, which he regarded as a crime perpetuated by the British government.³³³ As Knowlton has commented, Mitchel developed in these years from, ‘a moderate nationalist living in... Newry’, ultimately into a determined revolutionary by 1848.³³⁴ His subsequent conviction for sedition and treason led to his transportation to Van Dieman’s Land in May of that year. What is significant, is that as the tenant right campaign increased in its intensity, the most radical of the Presbyterian ministers involved, particularly Rogers of Comber, found themselves frequently likened to Mitchel, by many hostile commentators.

Having spoken at length on the economic distress of the tenantry at a meeting in Garvagh, the Rev. J.B. Rentoul urged the necessity of pressing for the legalization of tenant right, despite the fact that,

... they had but few representatives in Parliament; that those whom they sent there represented the landlords but not the tenants. He knew that in respect to elections, in times past, they had been slaves. He knew that they had been led to the hustings

³²⁸ Mahony, ‘New Light Ulster Presbyterianism and ..John Mitchel’, pp.148-158.

³²⁹ For more on Martin, see Campbell, *Dissenting Voice*, pp.243-6.

³³⁰ *BU*, September 12 1848.

³³¹ *Hansard*, 3rd series vol.96, 1242-49, February 24 1848.

³³² Knowlton, ‘The Politics of John Mitchel’, p.39.

³³³ John Newsinger, ‘John Mitchel and Irish Nationalism’, in *Literature and History*, 6 (1980), pp.182-200, at p.186.

³³⁴ Steven R. Knowlton, ‘The Quarrel Between Gavan Duffy and John Mitchel: Implications for Ireland’, in *Albion*, 21 (1989), pp.581-90, at p.582.

by their landlords to vote at their bidding without respect to their own judgement or conscience.³³⁵

Echoing the complaints of Rev. Dill and others in the General Assembly eight years earlier, he recalled the pathetic response of their so-called representatives to their interests during the Scottish Church Controversy:

He recollected being in the House of Commons on an occasion when a question of some importance, touching the Free Church of Scotland, was under discussion, and he saw there a number of their representatives, a set of young fops apparently, who, when they heard the question about to be introduced, and in which a deep interest was taken by their constituents, would take up their hats and walk out....³³⁶

The increasing denunciations of landlord representation certainly horrified the landlord interest, as seen in Andrews letter to Lord Londonderry in March 1850, commenting, 'I own I would not like a dissolution and an appeal to the constituency of Down just now. We could expect nothing but opposition from either...the Presbyterian ministers, or the disaffected tenantry'.³³⁷ At a meeting in Lisburn, the Rev. S. Dunlop urged the necessity of proper representation, since, 'a tenant right bill they never would have as long as they were driven to vote by such men as Lords Downshire, Hertford, Londonderry and O'Neill'.³³⁸ The *Banner's* persecution of certain landlords continued apace and they contrasted Londonderry's 'feudal' response to his tenants to regard tenant right as a boon, with Sharman Crawford's desire to limit the landlord's powers of eviction, 'in such a manner as to secure the practical INDEPENDENCE of the elective franchise'.³³⁹

In April 1850 a deputation of tenant right leaders from Ulster travelled to London in order to promote their cause to government.³⁴⁰ The seven-strong deputation included Dr. McKnight, Rev. John Rogers, Rev. David Bell, and William Girdwood, and at their interview with Lord John Russell, Rogers and McKnight emphasized their objections to Sir William Somerville's Bill.³⁴¹ Similarly, at their interview with Sir James Graham, Rogers described the rack-renting which had driven farmers to emigrate.³⁴² Above all, the deputation emphasized the need for legislative enactment to

³³⁵ *BU*, March 29 1850

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ Andrews to Londonderry, March 19 1850, DCRO, D/Lo/C 158 (67)

³³⁸ *BNL* and *BU*, April 5 1850

³³⁹ *BU*, April 9 1850

³⁴⁰ *BU*, April 23, 26, 30 1850

³⁴¹ *BU*, May 7 1850

³⁴² *Ibid.*

secure tenant investments in the soil. In travelling to London on behalf of the Ulster farmers, the Presbyterian-led deputation fulfilled the role, which they believed their aristocratic parliamentary representatives had failed to do. As the *Banner* reinforced,

...in no sense of the word, are the people of Ulster represented in Parliament, except in the way of constitutional mockery. The aristocracy and squirearchy...are all effectively represented by their own nominees, who are sent forward under the colour of the people's suffrages, while the people themselves are no more represented in the present House of Commons than they are in the Austrian Diet.³⁴³

In a letter to the *Banner's* editor in June 1850, the Rev. John Rutherford expressed support for James McKnight, as the only man with the confidence of the Ulster tenants, and concluded that, '...the people of Down and Ulster...will never move in company with landlords and aristocracy...'. The *Banner* called on, 'every truly patriotic mind, to, 'sympathise with the efforts of the agricultural classes to throw off that incubus of aristocratic Toryism which has hitherto neutralised every measure of social improvement in Ireland'.³⁴⁴

A monster tenant right meeting in Belfast in June 1850, brought together the leading Presbyterians of the campaign and was characterized by increasingly violent rhetoric on the economic and political 'oppression' of the tenant farmers by Irish landlords.³⁴⁵ McKnight began by reading a lengthy report of the Tenant Right deputation to London, in which they referred to the lack of support they had received from their own Ulster M.Ps, because, with one or two exceptions, most do not, 'really represent or are, in truth, elected by the people in whose names they are sent to Parliament'. The report added,

In this respect, Ulster is one vast rotten or nomination borough, in which the landed aristocracy might just as well send forward to Parliament their own nominees at once, without troubling the popular constituencies to go through the "organized hypocrisy" of a formal election. The people of Ulster, as a body, have practically no representatives in the British House of Commons.

Lord Castlereagh attacked the report's criticism of Ulster's representatives, but Rogers was undeterred, warning that, 'the... County of Down will not forget...at the next general election'.³⁴⁶ The subject of the legalization of tenant right which had occupied much of the attention of the late Synod meetings across Ulster, inevitably

³⁴³ *BU*, May 10 1850

³⁴⁴ *BU*, June 11 1850

³⁴⁵ *BU*, June 14 1850

³⁴⁶ *BU*, June 25 1850

dominated proceedings at the annual meeting of the General Assembly in July.³⁴⁷ Rev. Goudy of Strabane, who had defied Cooke in 1843 with his criticisms of the landlord representation of Ulster in Parliament, once more took the lead in challenging the 'Protestant Peace'. The Presbyterian clergy, argued Goudy, had a duty to support the tenant right cause, 'not as interested agitators, but as the representatives of the laity in Ireland'.³⁴⁸ Cooke once again faced defeat in the Assembly, as the tenant right petition was carried by a large majority.³⁴⁹

Like the marriages controversy and the Scottish Church Question had done in the early 1840s, the campaign for tenant right highlighted to Presbyterians their political impotence and their complete lack of representation in the House of Commons – it was obvious yet again, that when a matter of immense significance to their community was at stake, the landlord representatives failed to represent. James McKnight asked the audience at a tenant right meeting in Kilmoody, 'were they satisfied that a younger brother of my Lord This or my Lord That was fitted to be a Commoner because he was returned to the House of Commons?'³⁵⁰ At the same meeting, Rogers argued that the Presbyterian Church had a duty to help secure the 'emancipation' of Ireland's 'soil-bound slaves'. 'Now, as to ask a landlord M.P', he said, 'to change the law which is entirely in his favour at present, is like remonstrating at the cave's mouth of a freebooter and petitioning him to restore a plundered community that property, which...he had appropriated as his own'.³⁵¹ There is no doubt that the challenge offered to Irish landlordism by certain Presbyterians at this time was all-embracing – especially in its political emphasis. In this sense, the tenant right movement was the most radical and significant Presbyterian challenge to landlord power so far that century, for it fused together economic and political grievances into one major issue.

Speaking at the much-anticipated Tenant Conference in Dublin in August 1850,³⁵² Rev. Bell stated that, 'Not only are all the members of the House of Commons landlords, but the vast majority of them are the representatives of landlords and not of the people'. In turn, Rev. Dobbin launched a bitter attack on, 'our own dear House of Lords', which he claimed had allowed the famine to 'decimate the people', and yet still demanded increased powers of eviction.³⁵³ The *Banner* portrayed the formation of the

³⁴⁷ *BU*, July 5 1850

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.* (my underlining)

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ *BU*, July 30 1850

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² *BU*, August 9 and 13 1850; *Times*, August 7 and 9.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

Tenant League as the dawn of a new era for Ireland, predicting that, 'the days of feudal tyranny are numbered'.³⁵⁴ The *Times* on the other hand, balked at the 'predomination' of Presbyterian clergy at this, 'semi-Parliamentary Conference'.³⁵⁵ On the role of the Rev. David Bell as chairman of the Council of the Tenant League, the *Downpatrick Recorder* commented, 'Ambition...may overleap itself. History, though disparaged by some as an old almanac, has its lessons and experience. The year '98 witnessed the elevation of certain kindred, ambitious spirits of that period'.³⁵⁶ In a similar tone, a letter to the *Nation* referred to Bell and his colleagues as, 'the Young Irelanders of the Presbytery' who were, 'anxious to become martyrs'.³⁵⁷

The curbing of landlord political power was at the top of the agenda at a meeting in Rev. Munnis' Presbyterian meeting house in Dervock, where, Rev. J. L. Rentoul urged the necessity of returning to Parliament their own, 'tenant right representatives'.³⁵⁸ Speaking to a southern audience in Tipperary, the Rev. David Bell argued that, 'As far as Ulster is concerned, the vote of every tenant farmer is calculated upon by the landlord and the bailiff as the property of the lord of the soil....and there is not an election in the North of Ireland that the bailiff...does not [tell] the people who they must vote for'.³⁵⁹ Memories of 1798 once again rose to the surface at the tenant right demonstration in Enniscorthy, County Wexford, when Rev. Rogers referred to the events at Vinegar Hill in a speech full of his characteristic attacks on landlordism.³⁶⁰ The *Newsletter* imagined with horror the prospect of Bell and Rogers as liberal tenant right M.Ps in the House of Commons.³⁶¹ Similarly, the *Down Recorder* denounced Rogers', 'Mitchellite [*sic*] style of oratory', which it argued was, 'better acquainted with rebel ballads than the Psalms of David'. It dramatically predicted that, 'he will ultimately muster his gallant Ardsmen on the hill of Scrabo, and lead them to ruin, as some of his reverend predecessors in 98' did'.³⁶² A second letter from 'T.C.D' in the *Nation*, praised the activities of the Presbyterian ministers in challenging landlord authority: 'recent events have proved', he wrote, 'that the Presbyterians of the present time are as sturdy as their fathers'.³⁶³

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁵ *Times*, August 7 1850

³⁵⁶ *DR*, August 24 1850

³⁵⁷ *Nation*, September 14 1850

³⁵⁸ *BU*, September 24 1850

³⁵⁹ *BU*, October 22 1850

³⁶⁰ *BU*, September 27 1850; *NW*, September 28 1850. See also Chapter Four.

³⁶¹ *BNL*, September 27 1850

³⁶² *DR*, September 28 1850

³⁶³ *Nation*, October 5 1850

As relations between Lord Londonderry and his Presbyterian tenantry deteriorated further (see Chapter Three) with the former's refusal to concede to demands for reduced rents, the *Banner*, unsurprisingly, had little sympathy for the Londonderry family. It stirred feeling against them by reminding their readers of Lord Castlereagh's betrayal of the Presbyterians in the 1790s: on that occasion, 'the reward of ... Presbyterian patriotism was political treachery'.³⁶⁴ In November Revs. Rogers and Bell took their boldest step thus far, and attended an overtly political tenant right meeting in Limerick in support of a Roman Catholic Tenant Right candidate, Michael Ryan, running in the local by-election.³⁶⁵ In response, the *Down Recorder* commented that, 'if their Presbyteries have no power to restrain such men from disgracing themselves and their Church, it affords a strong argument for episcopacy'.³⁶⁶ According to the *Times* reporter in Ireland, 'from north to south, and from east to west, the sayings and doings of the Tenant League are familiar in men's mouths as household words. Farmers... naturally expect their clergy to speak for them and tell the world their grievances'.³⁶⁷

At a Tenant League meeting in Armagh in January 1851, Rogers launched a scathing attack on Lord Downshire's electioneering practices, informing the audience that he,

has told his tenantry that he will give them a very handsome reduction of rent if, at the next election, they vote for his brother.... His brother is at present one of the members for the County Down, and I state a fact when I tell you, that when the deputation from Ulster were in London, last spring they never could see him.... How many Queen's heads will be given in the way of votes for Lord Edwin Hill I cannot tell...³⁶⁸

The Presbyterian clergy presence was once more strong at a League meeting in Ballymoney, where thoughts of a forthcoming election battle were beginning to emerge.³⁶⁹ The Rev. James B. Rentoul declared that, with the exception of Sharman Crawford, 'they had the landlords as a class against them' and he attacked the current system of representation: 'the House of Commons, which was for the most part composed of landlords or the nominees of landlords, is against the tenant farmer, and that in order to remove that state of things, every Irish voter must require all candidates

³⁶⁴ *BU*, November 15 1850.

³⁶⁵ *Nation*, November 30 1850

³⁶⁶ *DR*, December 14 1850

³⁶⁷ *Times*, December 5 1850

³⁶⁸ *BU*, January 31 1851

³⁶⁹ *BU*, February 14 1851

for their representation to pledge themselves to support the principles of the League'.³⁷⁰ It was clear that certain Presbyterians intended to spearhead a challenge to the aristocratic monopoly, at the next general election. Speaking at a meeting of the League in Dromore in late March, William Girdwood urged the necessity of 'combining together in self-defence against the combinations of landlords', first and foremost, 'by taking care, at the approaching election, to reject landlord nominees and to return tenant right candidates.'³⁷¹

Writing to the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Clarendon, on the League agitation in and around Newtownards, Londonderry described those involved as, 'Presbyterian parsons and a few old Radical United Irishmen descendants'.³⁷² Clearly, Londonderry saw continuity with those men who had rebelled against his father, the first Marquis, in the 1790s. Londonderry rightly pointed to the significance of the failure of the majority of the General Assembly to censure their more active colleagues in the League. He inquired, 'is anything to be expected from that infernal Regium Donum Synod. Are they all in their hearts' core Roger's?'³⁷³ Londonderry raged that men paid by the State to teach the word of God should be allowed to 'continue their proceedings of disloyalty and disaffection'.³⁷⁴ However, it is more difficult to estimate how much support the Tenant League derived from the wider Presbyterian population at this time. Certainly, the Presbyterian leaders were anxious to emphasize the extent of that support, and at a meeting in Donaghadee, the Rev. Black claimed that, 'nineteenth-twentieths of the farmers of Donaghadee had subscribed to the League- (cheers)- and that even in districts where the insatiable leech of landlordism was drinking the life-blood of the people-(hear, hear)- many had come forward with their 2d. and their 3d'.³⁷⁵ There is no doubt that local landlords were alarmed at the apparent progress of the League, in the supposedly peaceful and prosperous county of Down, and Rev. Rogers mocked the efforts of Lord Londonderry's bailiff and others to prevent these meetings from taking place. The letter of Andrews to Lord Londonderry is certainly revealing, in which he comments, '...I think before the period of another election, agrarian matters will have so settled down, that tenants may again be relied upon to go with their landlords. Had

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁷¹ *BU*, March 28 1851

³⁷² Londonderry to Clarendon, January 2 1851, Clar. Dep. Ir. Box 18

³⁷³ Lord Londonderry to Lord Clarendon, January 2 1851.

³⁷⁴ Lord Londonderry to Lord Clarendon, January 9 1851.

³⁷⁵ *BU*, February 21 1851

an occasion arisen during the storm of the agitation of last year, I am persuaded that a Tenant League candidate would have carried the day'.³⁷⁶

It is significant that at the juncture when Presbyterian radicalism was taking an increasingly hostile stance towards the proprietorial and electoral power of the landlord classes – perhaps such opinion at its most radical since the days of the 1790s – the *Banner of Ulster* published an editorial appraisal of the last half century of Presbyterianism.³⁷⁷ On the rebellion itself, the newspaper's tone was surprisingly gentle. Whilst unequivocally denigrating all resort to violent measures, the *Banner* referred sympathetically to the aims of many involved, recalling how: '...the memory of the scenes which had been associated with its suppression in several districts of the North rankled in the minds of our Presbyterian forefathers. The objects after which they sought they felt were, to a great extent, patriotic and reasonable, and conceived in a spirit of perfect loyalty to the House of Hanover'. Above all, the *Banner* lavished praise on the establishment of the Belfast Academical Institute, and on its founders, for their, 'liberal policy': '...the Barnetts, Stevensons, Simms and Tennents of our town'.³⁷⁸ Notably of course, this was also a list of the most active of the Presbyterian radicals in Belfast after the Union.

The 'hard sell' of the League to the people of the north by certain Presbyterian ministers, particularly across Down, was starkly revealed at a meeting in Saintfield.³⁷⁹ The usual anti-landlord rhetoric was accompanied by a clear election agenda. 'Lord Edwin Hill', noted the Rev. Mecredy, 'could be far better employed about Hillsborough Castle than in Parliament'. Rogers, predicting a forthcoming election as early as the autumn of 1851, urged the tenants to, 'make a proper use of the elective franchise'.³⁸⁰ He echoed these statements at a meeting at Grange, Milltown, in reference to county Antrim, and attacked the county's current representatives as nobodies.³⁸¹ Similarly, Rev. Dr. Coulter added that the landlord kept the tenants, 'under his grasp, and employed them as mere tools and utensils in doing his dirty work, and sending whatever speechless blockhead he pleased into the Imperial Parliament to assist in making laws still further to crush and degrade them...'³⁸² McKnight asked a meeting of the League in Belfast,

³⁷⁶ Andrews to Lord Londonderry, February 9 1851, DCRO, D/Lo/C/158 (149)

³⁷⁷ *BU*, January 7 1851.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁹ *BU*, April 18 1851

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.* The next general election did not in fact take place until July 1852.

³⁸¹ *BU*, April 22 1851

³⁸² *Ibid.*

did any man imagine that, if the honest tenantry of the county Antrim had the free exercise of their own votes, they would be represented by the men who were at present representing the county in parliament...or that the men of county Down, if their votes were not their landlords', would allow Mr. Crawford to go take refuge in a borough in England?³⁸³

Unsurprisingly, Robert Cassidy, local solicitor and adviser to Lord Londonderry, wrote to the Marquis stating, 'I am sorry to say that the agitation of the Presbyterian ministers in County Down is doing a great deal of harm, and they are holding us all up to ridicule'.³⁸⁴

The Rev. James McCullough, defending the Tenant League in June 1851, from charges of fomenting rebellion and disloyalty, argued that its aim was simply, 'to obtain an act of parliament to secure for the benefit of the farmer his own improvements, and to guard his right to the unfettered exercise of the privileges of the elective franchise, both of which are now liable to be usurped by his landlord'. In a reference to James Porter's infamous landlord squib of 1796, McCullough stated that despite the efforts of 'all...the Billy Bluffs in the North of Ireland', support for the League would not be diminished.³⁸⁵ Speaking at a tenant right soiree at Carnmoney in County Antrim, a layman at the meeting, Dr. Hume, who described himself as a 'black-mouthed Presbyterian', launched a bitter attack on the landlord representation which prevailed across Ulster: in County Antrim,

whom did the members represent? – They represented only Lord O'Neill and the Marquis of Hertford....And, in Down, it was Lord Londonderry and Lord Downshire only who were represented. Carrickfergus was represented by young Cotton, brother-in-law of Lord Downshire... The whole House of Commons was of the same cast. There were in it six marquises, seven earls, twenty-one viscounts, thirty-four lords, twenty-five right honourables, forty-seven sons of lords, fifty-six baronets, and sixty-three placemen.³⁸⁶

At a League demonstration in Down,³⁸⁷ attacks on Londonderry were accompanied by speeches urging farmers to vote for Sharman Crawford at the next election. Rogers asked,

Is there not that old Presbyterian spirit yet alive among them that will not tamely submit to such things?....he was sure they would not lie down to be trampled upon by any Marquis or any duke in existence (cheers). The conduct of

³⁸³ *BU*, May 2 1851

³⁸⁴ Robert Cassidy to Lord Londonderry, April 21 1851, DCRO, D/Lo/C 160 (16)

³⁸⁵ *BU*, June 6 1851

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

the marquis was, however, only a piece with that of many of the other landlords of the country.

Speaking on the forthcoming general election at a meeting in Anaghlonge, Rogers implored County Down to return Crawford and also Lord Castlereagh, who, much to his father's horror, had now pledged his support for Crawford's Tenant Right Bill.

Lord Edwin Hill, being then superseded, might enter the Church, seeing he is not fitted for the army or navy.³⁸⁸ (A laugh) The Hillsborough meeting, therefore, was got up to defeat Mr. Crawford – to divide Down between the families of Hill and Stewart, as heretofore – to sacrifice the interests of the tenant farmers of the county – to offer them all up as a holocaust to the unsated [*sic*] demon of landlord rapacity and aristocratic ambition.

'Landlords', added Rogers,

are your enemies: they have hitherto made your laws. Mr. Crawford is a landlord; but he is your friend; and if the people of this county do not return him at the coming election, to represent them – if they allow a pauper aristocracy, wolfish, bloody, starved, and ravenous, who have mocked at their calamities, and who, amid unparalleled distress, have exacted all that was in the bond – if they allow them to defeat the popular candidate at the hustings....they deserve to be what their enemies have written them down, "slaves forever".³⁸⁹

Consequently, Lord Londonderry and Cassidy inquired whether they could proceed with a case for libel against the Comber minister for his Anaghlonge speech, but such a scheme was dropped on the advice of the Attorney General.³⁹⁰

Preparations for the general election scheduled for July were well under way by the beginning of 1852, and the Presbyterians who had led the tenant right charge were now canvassing on behalf of tenant right candidates, in direct defiance of local landlord interests. The months preceding the election witnessed a bitter conflict in which certain Presbyterian ministers demonstrated their total defiance of the landlord class, and relations between Presbyterian and landlord reached a new low. At a tenant right demonstration in support of Crawford's Bill (now adopted by the Irish Tenant League) in Belfast in January 1852, the Rev. Julius McCullough attacked the domination of

³⁸⁷ BU, October 24 1851

³⁸⁸ In this comment Rogers made a swipe at the calibre of the established church clergy as well as Lord Edwin Hill himself.

³⁸⁹ *The Speech of the Rev. John Rogers, Comber, at the Tenant Right Soiree at Anaghlonge, on the 9th December last, in reply to the attack of the Rev. Drs. Cooke and Montgomery, at the Hillsborough Dinner, on the Tenant Farmers of Ireland* (Belfast, 1851), pp.10-11

³⁹⁰ Robert Cassidy to Lord Londonderry, December 10 1851, enclosing a copy of the Attorney General's reply, DCRO, D/Lo/C 160 (122)

Down and Antrim's political representation by a few powerful families – an echo of the same criticisms made by Presbyterian reformers twenty and thirty years earlier.³⁹¹

Election preparation was top of the agenda at a tenant right meeting in Holywood in March, where James McKnight told the tenants of Down that, 'they must vote for no men except those who exactly represented their sentiments on the land question. If their votes were their own, the present County Down representatives would not be who they were. (Hear, hear.)...Let Mr. Sharman Crawford be returned for the County of Down'.³⁹² Rev. Julius McCullough (dubbed Rev. Julius Caesar by the landlord press) claimed that in his own neighbourhood of Newtownards the electors had already pledged to vote for Crawford if he stood for the county.³⁹³ (Results would suggest that this indeed was the case). At a meeting in Banbridge, Rev. Reid of Scarva described how 'Presbyterians and Presbyterian ministers have been champions for liberty and unerring truth'.³⁹⁴ On Down politics, Rutherford accused the landlords of 'dishonesty and oppression', and attacked, 'the hereditary incapables who misrepresented the county in Parliament'.³⁹⁵

In March, the Committee of the Newtownards Tenant Right Society gathered in the town to consider the necessary steps to be taken, 'in order to secure the return of two tenant-right Representatives for the County of Down'.³⁹⁶ Such a move was an act of open defiance to the landlord interest in Down, and represented the most concerted Presbyterian effort in radical politics since the 1790s. At the meeting, support was expressed for Crawford and also for Castlereagh.³⁹⁷

That the landlord class were well aware of the potential political strength of the tenant movement, is demonstrated in a letter to Londonderry from his cousin John Vandaleur Stewart on the subject. Stewart impressed upon the Marquis the viability of selecting Ker, as a candidate with the support of the landlord class in Down, and with the influence to, 'poll their tenants in his favour, in spite of their natural prejudices in favour of Tenant Right'. He concluded, 'If therefore the sole objective is to secure a

³⁹¹ *BU*, January 30 1852

³⁹² *NW*, March 6 1852. With the landlord class of the county against him thanks to his recent liberal stance on issues such as the grant to the catholic college of Maynooth, and particularly his support for tenant right, Lord Castlereagh had announced his retirement from Down politics. But it was Castlereagh's sympathetic stance on tenant right and his support for free trade – to the absolute horror of his father – which precipitated his breach with the landed interests of Down.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁴ *BU*, March 9 1852

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁶ *NW*, March 11 1852

³⁹⁷ It was with some disgust that the *Banner* reported that Lord Londonderry had already been instructing his tenants to vote for his nephew, David Ker, selected initially as the new Stewart family nominee. *BU*, March 2 1852.

Representative for the landed interest as opposed to the Tenant League, I am certain Ker would be the best card for the landlords to play'.³⁹⁸ However, Stewart's confidence that Castlereagh would not be selected by the Tenant Leaguers because of his, 'not going the "whole hog" for Sharman' Crawford's Bill',³⁹⁹ was clearly misplaced for a week later the *Banner* announced that the Tenant-Righters intended to ask Castlereagh to stand alongside Crawford. There was nothing inconsistent with this, for whilst Castlereagh had been a part of the very electoral junction so despised by the radical Presbyterians, his split from the Down landed interests, made him an ideal choice. As well as his influence and experience making him a politically shrewd option, the prospect of Castlereagh running as the Down Tenant Right candidate, would have been the ultimate act of revenge on Londonderry. Indeed, the level of personal animosity, like that directed towards the First Marquis of Londonderry in the 1790s, should not be underestimated. The *Banner* was well aware that Londonderry was furious with his son's 'independent' stance in the Commons on a range of issues.⁴⁰⁰ Referring to the forthcoming election, Rev. Rogers described it as, 'a political war of classes – a war of the aristocracy against the people – of the landlords against the tenantry – of Protection against Free Trade – of stupidity against intelligence – of power against patriotism'.⁴⁰¹

That so many Presbyterians were taking the lead on the side of the tenants and of patriotism, was a clear indication that Presbyterians in the county had not lost their zeal for radical politics nor for defying one of the great pillars of the establishment. Rev. Mecredy reiterated this at a speech in Saintfield, when referring to the campaign under way among the county's landlords to thwart the Tenant League: 'In so far as they were able to form an opinion, both the landlord nominees for that great and intelligent county – Lord Edwin Hill and Mr. Ker – were utterly opposed to the just claims of the tenant farmers'.⁴⁰² Speaking at a tenant right meeting in Banbridge in March 1852, the Rev. William Reid of Scarva made an explicit reference to the events of the previous century: 'Our government never do justice to the subjects of our Gracious Queen until society is rent and torn by agitation. We have reason to lament that distinguished patriots have been sacrificed, because they were in advance of national reform. Witness from '82 to '98. Be of one mind when you attend the hustings'.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁸ John Vandaleur Stewart to Lord Londonderry, February 6 1852, DCRO, D/Lo/C 166 (168).

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ *BU*, March 12 1852.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰² *BU*, March 16 1852.

⁴⁰³ *BU*, March 9 1852 (my underlining).

Indeed, it was not only in Down that Presbyterians attempted to exert their political muscle. In Coleraine, where Presbyterians composed the majority of the electorate, the *Banner of Ulster* led a vigorous campaign to return Wilson Kennedy. The Presbyterian liberal and elder of Clonmel, Kennedy was pledged to support Crawford's Bill, running against Lord Naas, the Tory government and landlord nominee in the Coleraine by-election in March 1852. The *Banner* expressed its outrage that John Boyd, the borough's Presbyterian representative, had agreed to stand down in favour of Naas, 'for the temporary use of my Lord Derby and the Protectionists'. The newspaper's fears that Boyd's conservative interests would outweigh his Presbyterianism, seemed to have been proven accurate.⁴⁰⁴ By contrast, the conservative *Belfast Newsletter* was horrified that Kennedy had agreed to become, 'the tool of the League', claiming that he had been invited to come and stand in Coleraine, not by local Presbyterians, but, by the 'Belfast clique'. The paper noted that McKnight and F.D. Finlay had met Kennedy on his arrival into Belfast.⁴⁰⁵

Having travelled to Coleraine to endorse Kennedy's candidature, Rev. Rogers attended a dinner given to the Presbyterian elder by the 'independent electors in Coleraine'. Here, plans were made for Kennedy to stand in the forthcoming general election.⁴⁰⁶ The *Down Recorder* – as ever sympathetic to the landlord interest and hostile to the League – inquired, 'What...principles, we should like to know, bring a man into close intimacy with the Rev. John Rogers of Comber? The pair canvassed together. The only positive thing that Mr. Kennedy admitted to being was a Presbyterian elder'.⁴⁰⁷ Despite their efforts, Kennedy did not get the chance to even contest the by-election on this occasion,⁴⁰⁸ but the tenant right Presbyterians reflected on the events in Coleraine for many weeks. Speaking at a meeting in Raloo, Julius McCullough attacked the, 'Government jobbing' which had been practised, whilst Rogers predicted that at the next election, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian voters would unite to return Kennedy, 'in despite of the aristocracy and their tools'.⁴⁰⁹ Similarly, the *Whig* regretted the way in which the electors of Coleraine had been treated 'as conveniences' to accommodate the 'Tory and Protectionist Administration'

⁴⁰⁴ *BU*, March 19 1852.

⁴⁰⁵ *BNL*, March 22 1852.

⁴⁰⁶ *BU*, March 26 1852.

⁴⁰⁷ *DR*, March 27 1852.

⁴⁰⁸ *BU*, March 23 1852. The *Banner* claimed that 'Every species of machinery...has been in busy requisition, while baronets, and landlords, and Government tools, and Dr. Boyd, have been zealously engaged in labouring to ratify the bargain, whereby Coleraine is henceforth to be raised to the dignity of a rotten borough'.

⁴⁰⁹ *BU*, March 30 1852.

in its hour of need. The paper maintained that despite the recent electoral result, Presbyterian Coleraine was, 'unquestionably' in support of Kennedy.⁴¹⁰

At a tenant right meeting in Portaferry in March, Rev. Hall of Greyabbey spoke of his hope that the farmers of Down would, 'have a spirit enough to return their own representatives to Parliament at the next election'.⁴¹¹ A meeting in Newtownards in April revealed the extent to which the Presbyterians of Down, and particularly certain clergymen, were involved in the electoral campaign against the landlords, in organising fund raising and rallying support.⁴¹² The *Belfast Newsletter* condemned their activities in its editorial, claiming indeed that, 'the Tenant League in Down has made common cause with the Democratic League of Cobden, Bright, and Co., in England. This is demonstrated by their reception of a certain peripatetic agent of the latter body, named McEnteer, who is now on a tour of demagoguism through the North'.⁴¹³ Lord Downshire made similar claims in a private letter to Lord Londonderry, in which he asserted that the Tenant Leaguers had funded their electoral campaign in Down with, 'not a little money I fancy from the friends of the Chartist League in Manchester'.⁴¹⁴ Such comments certainly reveal the extent of paranoia among the conservative and landlord interest, with the political activities of certain Presbyterians.

In County Down, the landlord interest itself was in a state of flux owing to Lord Londonderry's very public dispute with his nominee Ker. In his place, Lord Londonderry offered his 'family seat' to another relative and Down landowner, John Vandaleur Stewart, but this caused panic amongst Lord Downshire and the other leading conservative interests in the county, since Vandaleur's return was much less likely than Ker's.⁴¹⁵ Even Lord Derby privately warned Londonderry of the necessity of preventing any such split in conservative ranks, 'and to prevent the success, which at present seems too probable, of Sharman Crawford and the League'.⁴¹⁶ The tenant right interest were quick to attack Stewart as a landlord, when his name entered the election ring. One correspondent to the *Banner*, signing himself 'Tommy Downshire', recalled Stewart's refusal to accede to rent reductions: 'if he be serious in expecting the suffrages of his Down tenantry at the coming election, he will be miserably

⁴¹⁰ *NW*, April 10 1852.

⁴¹¹ *BU*, March 23 1852

⁴¹² *BU*, April 9 1852

⁴¹³ *BNL*, April 9 1852

⁴¹⁴ Lord Downshire to Lord Londonderry, 22 August 1852, DCRO, D/Lo/C 166 (115)

⁴¹⁵ See Lord Londonderry's correspondence and notes on the dispute, DCRO, D/Lo/C 166 and also D/Lo/C 520. For a full discussion of this, see John McCrory Cray, 'The County Down Election of 1852' (B.A. dissertation, Durham University, 1991).

⁴¹⁶ Lord Derby to Lord Londonderry, May 4 1852, D/Lo/C 102 (11).

disappointed'.⁴¹⁷ The debacle provides an intriguing insight into the landlord manoeuvrings at the level of local politics in 1852. The landlord interest in Down was prepared to waive Ker's ungentlemanly conduct against Lord Londonderry, in order to safeguard the conservative interest in the county, thus demonstrating the extent to which they genuinely feared a Tenant League victory. The machinations amongst the Down gentry during the three months prior to the election itself – Londonderry was eventually persuaded to withdraw Vandaleur from the contest to avoid a split in conservative ranks – also reveal that their victory, when it came in July, had certainly been far from easy.

The polarization of the landlord and tenant right interest was further demonstrated by a Presbyterian attendance at a Free Trade Banquet in Belfast in April. Rogers, McCullough, Crawford and McKnight joined familiar names in Belfast Presbyterian liberal circles, such as Robert Workman and Robert Grimshaw.⁴¹⁸ Similarly, writing to the Editor of the *Whig*, 'T.C.D', attacked 'Protection' as meaning 'high rents and arbitrary powers to landlords'.⁴¹⁹ Interestingly, the *Northern Whig* which had so strongly denounced the extremism of the League doctrines and those Presbyterians involved in it, offered its emphatic support to the attempts to overcome the landlord political monopoly, across the north of Ireland. After all, despite its opposition to the radicalism of the Irish League, the *Whig* had long been the Presbyterian advocate of freedom of election. Therefore, its support for Presbyterian efforts to defy landlord electoral control was entirely consistent with its traditional antipathy to the political domination of the landed classes in Ireland. In an editorial of April 15, the newspaper offered its emphatic support to Crawford's candidature.⁴²⁰ The *Whig* remarked, 'the County has had a long trial of Lord Edwin Hill; and if the Electors be satisfied with the way in which he has discharged the duties of Representative, they must be very easy to please'.⁴²¹ The paper dubbed him 'foolish', 'inconsistent', and a Lord Derby man opposed to free trade. By late May even the *Whig's* attitude to the League had softened somewhat, and it admitted that it was 'a legal Society, acting within the bounds of the law', in which 'thousands of highly respectable men, including a large proportion of the Presbyterian clergy...' were involved.⁴²² There was anger amongst the Presbyterian press at the meeting of landlords held in Belfast, led by Downshire, to secure the return of Down's two conservative candidates; the *Banner*

⁴¹⁷ *BU*, April 13 1852

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁹ *NW*, April 13 1852

⁴²⁰ *NW*, April 15 1852

⁴²¹ *NW*, April 20 1852

⁴²² *NW*, May 27 1852

commented that so far as the landed interest was concerned, ‘..the ten thousand electors of Down might as well be saved all the labour and degradation of a march to their respective polling places’.⁴²³

An address ‘To the Independent Electors of Down’ signed by the Presbyterian William Girdwood, on behalf of the Tenant Right Committee in the county, warned tenants that, ‘Your landlords are entitled to a fair rent at your hands; but they have no right to your votes...’. It concluded that, ‘the only “blow” required for the deliverance of your noble County from its chain of hereditary bondage’ was to vote for Sharman Crawford.⁴²⁴ Simultaneously, the *Whig* claimed that the ‘Liberal movement in Down’ was making excellent progress, as support for Crawford strengthened, despite efforts to intimidate tenant voters.⁴²⁵ The *Morning Chronicle* in London marvelled at the peculiar situation in Ireland, where, ‘A landlord may whistle for his rents, but...finds no difficulty about collecting his votes’; of how landlords made their tenants, ‘as much a part of the family property as gold snuffers and silver teaspoons’.⁴²⁶ However, not all Presbyterians in Down advocated the return of Crawford. For instance, ‘A County Down Blue Bonnet’ emphasized his conservative credentials and made a bitter attack on Crawford and the League. He highlighted that Crawford was a voluntary who opposed *regium donum*, had been part of O’Connell’s tail, and was a decided enemy to ‘the two great Protestant Churches’.⁴²⁷

Echoing the demands of the 1830s and 1840s for proper Presbyterian representation for Ulster, the *Banner* implored Coleraine’s Presbyterian voters to support Wilson Kennedy at the forthcoming general election:

It is an outrageous disgrace to our Northern Presbyterianism that, in despite of its numbers, its wealth, and social importance, its members have been hitherto content to play into the hands of cliques and factions both in “Church and State”, keeping their own body without a place in the Parliamentary councils of the empire, as if Presbyterians were a colony of aliens, existing in this country only through the sufferance of Prelacy and of feudal power.⁴²⁸

The frenzied activities of the Presbyterian press, primarily the *Banner*, the *Whig* and the *Londonderry Standard*, in galvanising support for the anti-landlord crusade at

⁴²³ *BU*, April 16 1852. Referring to McKnight and his colleagues, the *Newsletter* asked, ‘What right...has a Jack-land Aberdeen doctor [and] a Presbyterian minister.....to organise an opposition to a member of the house of Hill, and to trudge like pedlars, with their pack of Socialist wares on their backs, from town to town, to mislead and delude...electors?’ *BNL*, April 19 1852.

⁴²⁴ *BU*, April 22 1852

⁴²⁵ *NW*, April 29; May 11 1852.

⁴²⁶ Article reprinted in *BU*, May 21 1852.

⁴²⁷ *BNL*, May 12 1852. Extracted from the letter which had originally appeared in the *Newry Telegraph*.

the coming election reached a peak in the months of May and June 1852. They were further prompted into action by the publication of the letters which had passed between Lord Londonderry and Ker at the time of their dispute, in which the Marquis revealed his total disregard for the electoral process in Down, by referring to his 'family seat'. Commented the *Banner* in disgust, 'A stranger, on reading this marvellous history may well ask, in amazement, whether the people of County Down are living in Austria, or Russia...'. The newspaper demanded that, 'An end must be put to this aristocratic traffic in "county seats"'.⁴²⁹ The *Whig* was equally disgusted at Londonderry's attitude: 'He despises the vulgar absurdity which we call electoral independence, and looks on the constituency as a mere machine to be worked'.⁴³⁰

In a radical letter addressed 'To the Protestant Electors of Ulster', Thomas Neilson Underwood,⁴³¹ a leading Presbyterian in the Strabane Tenant Right Association, continued to persuade voters to defy the aristocratic bidding of their landlords. On the landed class he warned tenants, 'Vote for them, and when the thing is done, do they care that the devil has you, or the emigrant ship, or the ditch side..?'⁴³² Presbyterian leadership of the Tenant League continued to dominate the debate in the House of Commons on Crawford's Tenant Right Bill. Lord Naas singled out Revs. Rutherford and Dobbin for attack, arguing that their speeches, 'all pointed to the same end...that Ireland would never be prosperous and never improved until the property of the landlords was entirely handed over to the tenants'.⁴³³ Indeed, Lord Hamilton claimed that Crawford's Bill, which had the sanction of most of the tenantry and of the League itself, was not the work of Crawford at all, but of the Presbyterian minister, Rutherford.⁴³⁴ That, Lord Claud Hamilton argued, explained the Bill's 'dangerous and revolutionary character'. Moreover, he asserted that, 'the Tenant League was the remains of the old agitation with which Ireland was too familiar'.

The League was certainly active in its organisation in Down. Robert Kelly warned Lord Londonderry, 'I cannot help thinking that the tenants have been very much neglected, that they should have been canvassed long since, particularly when we find that the Leaguers are making every exertion, and are most diligent with their

⁴²⁸ *BU*, April 27 1852

⁴²⁹ *BU*, May 14 1852

⁴³⁰ *NW*, May 18 1852

⁴³¹ Duffy mentions that Underwood was a descendant of Samuel Neilson, United Irishman and editor of the *Northern Star* newspaper. See Duffy, *League*, p.51.

⁴³² *Nation*, May 22 1852

⁴³³ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.121, 271-4

⁴³⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd series vol.121, 291-6. Lord Claud Hamilton was the brother of the Marquis of Abercorn.

canvass'.⁴³⁵ Writing to the Editor of the *Whig*, 'Monops' informed readers that the local tenant right association in the Donaghadee area had already completed its first canvass of the parish by early spring, adding that 'nine-tenths of the whole electors signed a pledge to vote for Crawford'.⁴³⁶ The *Whig* deplored the fact that tenants were, 'pressed for their votes by gentlemen accompanied by bailiffs'.⁴³⁷ By contrast, the *Belfast Newsletter* remained horrified that, 'certain agitating Presbyterian ministers, the electioneering agents of League candidates', were still enjoying their *regium donum*.⁴³⁸

Attacking the two Tory candidates in Down, the Rev. Bell addressed a tenant right meeting in Newtownards, urging the necessity of not returning '...two brainless noodles'.⁴³⁹ John Andrews's alarm at the potential political revolt against the Down landlords was revealed in a private letter of June 7. He wrote, 'I am reluctantly obliged to admit to you that you are reckoning on far more power than we now possess over the tenantry, when you assume that we can keep them in hand'. Referring to the extent of Presbyterian activity against Lord Edwin Hill and Ker, he added, 'The truth cannot be concealed that the formidable exerting of the committee led by Stone and Miller⁴⁴⁰ and conducted by the energetic individuals who are associated with them, including their Presbyterian reverences and many restless spirits, have secured very general promises of one vote for Mr. Crawford'.⁴⁴¹ Similarly, the conservative landlord, J.W Maxwell recognized the electoral potential of Crawford, admitting that he was 'strong' even 'without money'.⁴⁴²

Although Down was the centre-piece of the Presbyterian campaign to overturn landlord representation, they were also active elsewhere in the north. In County Derry vigorous efforts were made to return the Presbyterian tenant-righter, Samuel Greer in opposition to the landlord candidates of Bateson and Jones, whilst in the borough of Newry, the Presbyterian William Kirk stood for election.⁴⁴³ In a strongly anti-landlord 'Appeal to the Electors of the County Derry', signed, 'An Ulster Presbyterian', Greer was hailed as the county's saviour: '*For us, the people, he bears the frowns and braves the fury of the great and titled*'. The author asked:

⁴³⁵ Robert Kelly to Lord Londonderry, May 11 1852, DCRO, D/Lo/C 161(6)

⁴³⁶ *NW*, June 12 1852

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, May 11 1852.

⁴³⁸ *BNL*, June 14 1852

⁴³⁹ *BU*, June 29 1852.

⁴⁴⁰ Guy Stone and John Miller, both of Comber.

⁴⁴¹ John Andrews to [? J.V. Stewart] June 7 1852, D/Lo/C 158(201).

⁴⁴² J.W. Maxwell to John Vandaleur Stewart, June 4 1852, PRONI, D/3244/G/1/219. In the letter Maxwell thanks Stewart for retiring from the contest in order to save the county's conservative vote, and referring to Crawford he adds, 'All our efforts must be directed to secure his defeat'.

⁴⁴³ Both men were elders of the Presbyterian Church, and Greer was the son of a minister.

Will we now be free, or do we wish still to truckle and cringe in the presence of those whom wealth alone makes our social superiors?... It is for us now to determine whether the disgraceful monopoly which the landlords have had over this fine county shall continue, or whether we will now, once and for ever, be free.⁴⁴⁴

In a similar publication of May 1852 entitled, *A Plain Appeal to the Presbyterian Electors of Newry*, Kirk stated that,

the Presbyterian interest has been used in this Borough as a political convenience, as our Church has unfortunately been throughout the Province. Your opponents are now surprised to find that the Presbyterians of Newry are likely for the future to attend to their own interests, and that they will now support an independent Candidate, without reference to Landlord influence or Clique Nomination.

Recalling the Presbyterian Marriages Crisis of the 1840s, Kirk lamented that despite those events, their church still remained wholly under-represented in Parliament.⁴⁴⁵ ‘An Ulster Presbyterian’ attacked Lord Londonderry⁴⁴⁶ in particular for addressing the farmers as, ‘“his voters” just as he would speak of his sheep, his horses, or his hounds’. He reminded the Presbyterian electors that, ‘whilst you are three-fourths or four-fifths of the population of Ulster, you have not one solitary representative in the House of Commons’.⁴⁴⁷

The *Derry Standard* made an even more bitter attack on Irish landlordism in its editorial of June 24, in which it asked,

How...does it happen to be thought a thing incredible in Ulster that a tenant should vote against his landlord? Does the landlord agree in politics with the majority of the electors? Are their interests identical? No.... The question admits only one answer. The tenants, it is believed, will not vote against their landlords, because they DARE NOT!why dares not the tenant vote according to his conscience, even though he should vote against the landlord? The latter is the lord of the soil, but not of the soul. He can claim his own rents, but not the tenant’s rights.... The tenant has not covenanted to give his conscience and his free will to the fellow-sinner whose land he cultivates.

Indeed, what else was to be expected, since, ‘your landlords are your Legislators and your Magistrates’.⁴⁴⁸ In contrast, commenting on the Presbyterian campaign for the

⁴⁴⁴ *LS*, June 24 1852

⁴⁴⁵ William Kirk, *A Plain Appeal to the Presbyterian Electors of Newry* (1852)

⁴⁴⁶ Londonderry also had estates in County Derry.

⁴⁴⁷ *LS*, June 24 1852

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

return of Sam Greer in Derry, the *Newsletter* deplored the fact, 'that certain Presbyterian ministers are to be numbered among the most active canvassers'. The paper denounced their, 'general anti-landlord crusade which really means a war against the present distribution of property'.⁴⁴⁹ 'A Presbyterian' – clearly of the Cooke school of politics – wrote to the *Newsletter* lamenting that ministers had, 'commenced a political warfare against our tried and faithful representatives'.⁴⁵⁰ In turn, the *Banner* emphasized its support for Greer, despite his non-involvement with the Tenant League, on the grounds that he supported tenant right, was an elder of the Church, and for his, 'known liberalism in politics'.⁴⁵¹ Throughout the campaign, the *Derry Standard* maintained its uncompromising hostility towards the county's two Tory candidates, describing their, 'utter want of sympathy' with the interests of the people: '.... antagonism to social progress...has marked all the legislation with which our mis-representatives have ever troubled themselves'.⁴⁵²

In Down, Presbyterians led meetings across the county in the weeks prior to the election. Rev. Rogers, speaking near Downpatrick, highlighted the ineffectual representation of Down by Lord Edwin Hill, especially his failure on issues of significance to the Presbyterian church and he predicted that despite the efforts of agents and bailiffs, Crawford would soon be one of the county's new members.⁴⁵³ Recalling emotive memories of the Famine, Rev. Mecredy asked a meeting at Boardmills, 'If the landlords were the real friends of the people, why were homesteads deserted and whole districts depopulated? Why had so many people gone to America?'.⁴⁵⁴ A ballad published in the *Banner* in July, entitled, 'Begone Dull Ker', emphasized the anti-landlord stance of the Down Presbyterians:

....But our monster meetings, our *Banner* and *Whig*,
 Now herald a brighter day –
 And the men of Down have sworn to kick
Rack-renting and *serfdom* away.⁴⁵⁵

On the conservative side, a satirical poem entitled 'The Meetings of the Leaguers', and pretending to be written by Crawford, said:

If I can return but at this time secure,
 Depend the rich landlords shall soon be made poor.

⁴⁴⁹ *BNL*, June 25 1852

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵¹ *BU*, June 29 1852.

⁴⁵² *LS*, July 1 1852.

⁴⁵³ *NW*, July 1 1852

⁴⁵⁴ *BU*, July 2 1852

⁴⁵⁵ *BU*, July 6 1852

Oh, now is your time, brave Electors of Down,
To wrest from the Tory his long-worn crown.

Then, great County Down, if you make me M.P.,
Your parsons and Preachers, soon *Hangmen* will be;
The Rutherford rabble will divide each Estate,
And all will be happy – for *I* will be great!⁴⁵⁶

whilst in another poem, the tenant right campaigners lampooned Lord Londonderry in a style reminiscent of *Billy Bluff*:

Pity the sorrows of a poor old Lord,
Who spent his cash the County seat to carry,
And still will spend whate'er he can afford,
To buy up voters for yours – Blunder-vain-derry.⁴⁵⁷

A tenant right poster demanded: 'Tenant Farmers of Ulster....SLEEP NO LONGER! Be men!!....Show the Government you are determined to be treated no longer by the Landlords like Russian Serfs.'⁴⁵⁸

The *Banner* attacked the landlord press and ministers such as Cooke, for censuring the Presbyterian ministers involved in the Tenant League and in the election campaigns. It reminded them that, 'about the year 1844, the General Assembly, in a formal resolution, declared both the necessity and duty of Presbyterian constituencies taking active measures to secure the return of Presbyterian representatives to Parliament', thus portraying the ministers of 1852 as merely fulfilling the Assembly's original pledge.⁴⁵⁹ The Presbyterian organ described the lack of Presbyterian representation in Parliament as, 'an outrageous disgrace to our Presbyterian community....its power has been habitually used by the aristocracy, and by the Established Church, as a secondary engine for the accomplishment of their own ends'.⁴⁶⁰

The *Belfast Newsletter* described the Tenant League as, 'an association...organised for the purpose of putting down all landlordism, and to use the plain language of Mr. Rogers, of giving it a "kick when down" ', and it expressed horror that for the first time since 1798, 'Irish agitation' involved not only Roman Catholics, but also Presbyterians.⁴⁶¹ Certainly, the language employed by the Presbyterian press

⁴⁵⁶ PRONI, D/3244/G/1/212

⁴⁵⁷ PRONI, D/3244/G/1/235

⁴⁵⁸ PRONI, T/3317/1A

⁴⁵⁹ *BU*, July 8 1852

⁴⁶⁰ *BU*, July 13 1852

⁴⁶¹ *BNL*, July 9 1852

and orators was at times reminiscent of the 1790s; on the eve of the Down election, the *Banner* dramatically described the contest as, ‘a struggle between popular rights and feudal usurption’.⁴⁶² At a tenant right testimonial dinner to Rev.s Rutherford and Dobbin, Dobbin spoke of ‘the intolerable yoke of landlordism’, and told tenants, ‘they now wielded power of hurling every tyrant from his seat in the House of Commons, and he trusted that, at the ensuing election, the men of Down would consign the hereditary boobyism which had so long misrepresented them to everlasting oblivion’.⁴⁶³ As if to underline the central role of radical Presbyterian ministers in the election campaign, the Rev. Dr. Coulter, former Moderator of the General Assembly, officially proposed Crawford’s candidature at the Down nominations in July 1852. Conversely, the *Newsletter* denounced the involvement of those ministers, adding, ‘Tenant Right! It is not that they want. They are soaring to far higher flights. They have already...proclaimed the Ballot. The other points of the revolutionary charter will be proclaimed in succession’.⁴⁶⁴

Yet despite the exertions and rhetoric of so many Presbyterians against the landed classes, Kirk’s return in Newry proved to be the Tenant League’s only success in the north of Ireland; and even this victory had been achieved largely due to Roman Catholic rather than Presbyterians votes.⁴⁶⁵ In Derry, Greer was defeated, and in Down, Crawford also failed to secure a seat. Tenant fear, landlord bribery, coercion and intimidation, were immediately cited by the Presbyterians as the reason for the Tenant League’s abysmal performance in the north, especially compared with the south. What the results clearly showed was the continued strength of landlord power across Ulster; as one writer to the *Banner* noted, ‘Landlordism has not lost its influence’.⁴⁶⁶ The *Whig* recorded that in Down, ‘hired bands of ruffians drove the independent voters from the polling-booths, and wretched tenants were dragged like chained slaves to vote against their consciences’. It added that, ‘gross and scandalous intimidation’ had been used by the landed proprietors.⁴⁶⁷ Significantly, William Sharman Crawford himself upheld these allegations, outlining all ‘the means used by the landlord league to conquer the people of Down’ – a move which resulted in the threat of prosecution by Down’s conservative landlords.⁴⁶⁸ Paying tribute to the efforts of Sam Greer in Derry, the

⁴⁶² *BU*, July 20 1852

⁴⁶³ *BU*, July 23 1852

⁴⁶⁴ *BNL*, July 21 1852.

⁴⁶⁵ Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society*, p.267.

⁴⁶⁶ *BU*, August 3 1852

⁴⁶⁷ *NW*, July 24 1852

⁴⁶⁸ William Sharman Crawford, ‘Observations addressed to the Friends of Tenant Right in Ireland, but especially to the Tenant Right Electors of the County of Down’, printed in *NW*, July 27 1852

Standard commented, 'he attacked the stronghold of agrarian domination, garrisoned by a race of hereditary nominees, and fortified by all the power of the aristocracy with the Established Church at its back...He unfurled the banner of freedom amidst a generation of serfs'.⁴⁶⁹ The *Banner* attacked two Presbyterian ministers in Derry who had reportedly voted for Bateson and Jones.⁴⁷⁰ In assessing the reasons for the failure of the popular cause in the north of the country, compared with the south, the *Banner* argued that the campaign had always been more difficult in the north because, 'hitherto the province of Ulster has been one vast rotten borough, under the absolute contested sway of the Tory aristocracy'.⁴⁷¹

The split within orthodox Presbyterianism surrounding the Tenant League and attitudes to landlords at the 1852 election was vividly portrayed in a letter to the editor of the *Whig* from 'A Presbyterian Elector of Down'.⁴⁷² The author defended the activities of ministers such as Rogers, and castigated Henry Cooke for his speech at the County Antrim election, in which Cooke had intervened in support of the Tory candidates, whilst accusing the tenant right ministers of advocating the principles which had led to their disgrace in 1798. On Cooke, the 'Presbyterian Elector' wrote, 'The opportunity of commending himself to the aristocracy and Lord Derby was too seasonable to be missed'. On the chasm between Cooke and the Tenant League ministers, he contrasted, 'a youth devoted to his country and the emancipation of her sons to an old age consecrated to the maintenance of corruption and injustice'. The author added that, 'Julius McCullough has done more for the best interests of his church and country in the town and parish of Newtownards than all the landlords in the County could accomplish'. The 'Presbyterian Elector' concluded: 'I now leave the landlords and *their* Representatives with the simple announcement....that the political conflict will be continued in Down till, by the blessing of God, it be either emancipated from the misrule of its "thirty year tyrants", or they and their imbecile Peers be in the Encumbered Estates Court together..'.⁴⁷³ The *Banner* vented its fury at Cooke's Antrim comments, accusing him of identifying himself with, 'the maintenance of aristocratic and Tory ascendancy' in opposition to Presbyterian interests, and in subordinating his own church to his personal politics.⁴⁷⁴ Commenting many years later on the Derry election of 1852, Lord Claud Hamilton recalled how the exertions of the,

⁴⁶⁹ *LS*, July 22 1852

⁴⁷⁰ *BU*, July 23 1852.

⁴⁷¹ *BU*, August 3 1852.

⁴⁷² *NW*, July 29 1852. Also published in pamphlet form as *The "Juvenile" Presbyterian Ministers*.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁴ *BU*, July 30 1852

‘..leading men of Dr. Cooke’s party’, had prevented the Presbyterian body from joining the tenant movement ‘en masse’, as opposed to the ‘portion’ that did.⁴⁷⁵

At a meeting of the County Down Tenants’ Committee in the aftermath of their electoral defeat, William Girdwood led the attack on the continuing ‘undue influence on the part of the landlords of that County’, whilst Rev. Dr. Coulter criticized the ‘unjustifiable means which had been employed to put down the supporters of Mr. Crawford’.⁴⁷⁶ The Rev. John Porter Dickey, a Presbyterian minister in Donegal, defended his vote for the Presbyterian candidate for that county, Mr. Johnston, and described the late election as,

a struggle betwixt landlords and their tenants. A Presbyterian Greer has been defeated in Derry, and a Presbyterian Johnston has been rejected in Donegal; but the contest in this and in other counties has aroused a spirit of independence and freedom in the breasts of Ireland’s down-trodden tenants, which will not be easily subdued.⁴⁷⁷

The Presbyterian spirit of independence against landlords did indeed continue to manifest itself after July 1852. At a banquet honouring Crawford, in Newtownards in August, Girdwood praised his, ‘noble efforts to emancipate this great county from its degradation as a “family” close borough’. ‘Had the people not been, to all practical intents and purposes, forcibly disenfranchised by the aristocracy, you would have been at this moment the legal, as you are in effect the popularly chosen, representative of this county’.⁴⁷⁸ It was certainly true, that in the Newtownards and Comber districts Lord Londonderry’s tenants had overwhelmingly defied their landlord by voting for Crawford, although it was not enough to secure his overall return for the county.⁴⁷⁹ Robert Cassidy admitted this to the Marquis, adding that, ‘we were all to the bad about Comber, every person who voted from the town of Comber having plumped for Crawford with the exception of a man called Crea, an orangeman’.⁴⁸⁰ That Crawford rallied *most* support amongst Lord Londonderry’s tenantry, reveals both the Presbyterians’ continued anti-establishment radicalism and also, as in the 1790s, the strength of local animosities. The attendance of the usual contingent of Presbyterian ministers at the Tenant League conference in September was further proof that they had

⁴⁷⁵ Lord Claud Hamilton to Lord Abercorn, January 22 1867, PRONI, T/2541/VR/128.

⁴⁷⁶ *NW*, July 31 1852

⁴⁷⁷ *NW*, August 5 1852

⁴⁷⁸ *BU*, August 31 1852

⁴⁷⁹ Trevor McCaverty, *Newtown: History of Newtownards* (Belfast, 1994), p.138.

⁴⁸⁰ Robert Cassidy to Lord Londonderry, August 30 1852, DCRO, D/Lo/C 160 (192)

no intention of conceding immediate defeat to landlordism.⁴⁸¹ Moreover, it was the series of letters by the liberal minister, Rev. A. P. Goudy, which expressed the politically liberal, anti-landlord sentiments of many Presbyterians in 1852.⁴⁸²

Goudy praised his brethren ‘who have of late so nobly occupied the front rank in vindicating the people’s cause’, attacking the landlord press for perpetuating the delusion that strong feelings in favour of tenant right were confined to merely a few ministers in the General Assembly.⁴⁸³ He lamented that, ‘at this moment, the great Presbyterian county of Down is misrepresented by a pair of aristocratic Prelatists’.⁴⁸⁴ This was just one strand of, ‘the total impotency of the Presbyterian Church in the councils of the nation....Our parliamentary influence is calculated at the respectable figure, *nil*’.⁴⁸⁵ In his third letter, Goudy continued, ‘that the present set of representatives will never grant Parliamentary sanction to a satisfactory tenant right bill is self-evident....because they are landlords, or the nominees of landlords, and have all their class sympathies, arrayed in favour of the owners, and against the occupiers of the soil’.⁴⁸⁶ On the significance of political motivations, Goudy argued that, ‘the landocracy of this country will not hear of the legislative recognition of tenant right, mainly because it would overthrow their feudal ascendancy, and prevent a single individual, who happens to be the proprietor of a certain number of acres, from converting a whole county, or important borough, into what poor Lord Londonderry calls a “family seat”’.⁴⁸⁷ The Down landlords, claimed Goudy, ‘have demonstrated that the principle of the franchise, in this country, is a chimera’.⁴⁸⁸

Again, Goudy reiterated the necessity of vote by ballot, as well as the right of he and his brethren to interfere in politics: ‘The Presbyterian ministers cannot, and, I trust, will not, tamely submit to see the consciences of their people thus periodically tampered and trafficked with’.⁴⁸⁹ In a final, bitter attack against the twin pillars of landlordism and the established church, Goudy denounced the ‘flippant aristocrats, wealthy noodles, and half-educated rural squires’ who sneered at Presbyterianism, and yet used it for their own political ends.⁴⁹⁰ Referring to the late election, he lamented that, ‘our elders are defeated in our counties and boroughs, and have been “well-whipped” by their

⁴⁸¹ *BU*, September 10 1852

⁴⁸² Goudy, *Right versus Might*.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.3

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.4; 7-8

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.6

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.12

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.13

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.17

opponents. We strain every nerve to put in lordlings and Prelatists, who despise our ministers as “laymen”’, and he attacked the members of, ‘the Episcopal parsonocracy enrolling themselves as partisans of the landlords’.⁴⁹¹ Above all, Goudy reiterated his attack on ministers such as Henry Cooke for perpetuating this Presbyterian submission, emphasising that the General Assembly, ‘utterly condemn’ his sycophancy to the aristocracy and their Tory politics.⁴⁹² In a similar attack on Cooke’s policies, the *Banner* delighted in exposing ‘the “Protestant Peace” as it is termed’, as ‘meaning a compromise between Presbyterians and Episcopalians to maintain the Established Church, the aristocracy, and political Toryism, in opposition alike to the rights of the community’.⁴⁹³

Turning to Cooke’s speech at the Antrim election on behalf of George McCartney, the conservative candidate, what is particularly interesting was his bold statements on 1798. His comparison of the tenant right agitation, with the rebellion, and in particular, the prominent role of some Presbyterian clergy in both cases, demonstrates just how concerned Cooke was with discrediting the tenant right campaign. So much so, that he in fact became one of the first Presbyterians of the century to publicly stress the extent of Presbyterian involvement in the rebellion.

The Presbyterian leaders who had so distinguished themselves as the foremost voice against landlords, in often violent style, continued to lead the tenant’s cause. At a banquet for Crawford held in Dublin during the Tenant Right Conference in September 1852, Rogers, Rentoul, Bell and McKnight listened to Crawford describe how, in County Down, ‘I was put forward...as the candidate of the people, and I was defeated by the power of the aristocracy’. As if to suggest the continuity with movements of old and new, John Sinclair (by then aged 90) addressed the meeting, describing how he had been, ‘one of the Volunteers of ’82’.⁴⁹⁴ Presbyterian radicals united for a banquet in support of free trade in Belfast the following month, attended by John Bright, the radical M.P for Manchester. Grimshaw, Workman, Kirk, Stone and Rev.s McCullough, Rogers and Nixon Porter⁴⁹⁵ were amongst those who toasted National Education, The Ballot and Freedom of Election.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.18

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.19-20

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, p.20-21

⁴⁹³ *BU*, July 30 1852.

⁴⁹⁴ *BU*, September 14 1852.

⁴⁹⁵ Rev. Nixon Porter campaigned on behalf of the liberal candidate, Colonel Firth, at the late election in Carrickfergus. See his speech at a dinner of liberal electors there, *NW*, July 17 1852.

⁴⁹⁶ *BU*, October 5 1852.

In October 1852 Rogers made a significant speech at a Tenant Right meeting in Killinchy.⁴⁹⁷ He stated that, ‘The light of political science exhibits the unnatural deformity of the system of Irish landlordism, and the reasonableness, expediency, and equity of having the system reformed’. Referring to the election in Down, he commented bitterly,

In this county we preferred the mantel-piece ornament, Lord Edwin Hill – (laughter) – and the exceedingly able and efficient Mr. Ker – (laughter) – the will, word, and honour of the county landlords – the chains, cuffs, insolence, degradation, peeling and other attentions of the rent-office – the “whips and scorns, the oppressor’s wrong, the rich man’s contumely” – to the intellectual and patriotic Crawford – (cheers) – to a secured tenant right....an independent position.⁴⁹⁸

In an extraordinary and deliberate show of defiance, Rogers told his audience at Killinchy, ‘It may not be known generally that the landlords of Down, as a class, are pre-eminently stupid’. He added,

When we lost Down, in July last, a County Down landlord – a half-educated, whole-intolerant, stolid, addle-headed English adventurer, who found in this country, a new name, a wife, and an estate...is said to have boasted that the League was put down, and with it those d___d Presbyterian ministers. Probably he meant those Presbyterian ministers in Down who supported the Tory candidates, and whom, if he condemns to all time, I can have no objection.

Not surprisingly, Rogers also expressed his hatred for Cooke’s policy of ‘Protestant Peace’ and echoing the *Northern Whig’s* campaign in the 1830s, he argued that the recent behaviour of the Down landlords had provided indisputable proof of the necessity of vote by ballot.⁴⁹⁹

Similar bitterness was expressed against the landlord class and their political monopoly, by Presbyterians at a Tenant Right dinner in Derry in honour of Samuel Greer, in December 1852.⁵⁰⁰ Greer complained that, ‘Hitherto it had been the custom of the County that a Member of Parliament should be selected out of a certain magic circle as it were, of the families, or out of a certain clique, mainly for such recommendations as wealth, and rank, and family, and birth, and kindred, irrespective of personal qualifications’. Greer described how punishments were enacted on those who had voted, ‘conscientiously’, ‘such as calling upon persons to pay their rents before the usual

⁴⁹⁷ *BU*, October 26 1852

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁰ *NW*, December 9 1852

time'.⁵⁰¹ Rev. A. P. Goudy also addressed the meeting in Derry, stating emphatically that, 'The late election – and he stood there as a Minister and as a citizen to say it – was a vast hoax, a great sham, a grand juggling exhibition got up at the sign of the bludgeon and brickbat, in which British subjects performed the part of puppets, and landlords pulled the wires'.⁵⁰²

In yet another Presbyterian attack on Irish landlordism, Greer published a series of letters in 1852 and 1853 to the electors of Londonderry.⁵⁰³ Of the 1852 electoral campaign in Derry, he described how 'a large proportion of the constituency were dragged up by the landlords and their underlings to vote for the representatives of the landlords, and not of themselves'.⁵⁰⁴ Echoing the arguments used by Presbyterian reformers throughout the previous decades, Greer maintained that a system of voting by ballot, would have the, 'advantage of making the House of Commons really and *bona fide* representative of the people. For many generations members have been returned to Parliament more or less directly by noblemen and gentlemen of great wealth and influence'.⁵⁰⁵

At a meeting in Newtownards in 1853 attended by the leading tenant right Presbyterian ministers, a resolution was passed to mark their delight at the fall of Lord Derby's Tory government. In a vitriolic speech, which was subsequently published in pamphlet form, Rev. Rogers attacked what he called, 'the great landlord swindle by which, time immemorial, a simple-minded people in this island have been fleeced, and plundered' and he deplored Lord Londonderry's threat to evict tenants in arrears who had voted for Mr. Crawford.⁵⁰⁶ Moreover, Rogers made a bitter attack on Henry Cooke's recent attendance at a demonstration at Hillsborough Castle,

... to gratify a noble patron, to prop up a falling cause, and to shew his hatred of the constitutional struggle in which nine-tenths of the members of his own communion in Ulster are this day engaged.....now we see what hatred of popular rights, and the society of aristocrats, and the love of Prelacy and Toryism can accomplish.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*

⁵⁰³ *Letters to the Electors of the County Londonderry. By Samuel M. Greer, Esq., Barrister-At-Law.* (Londonderry, 1853)

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.4

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.9-10

⁵⁰⁶ *Liberal Administration in Ireland, Popular Rights, and Presbyterian Principle, versus "Hillsborough Theatricals", Protectionist Doctors of Divinity, and Deputations to London. A Speech, Delivered at Newtownards, on Tuesday, 1st instant, By the Rev. John Rogers of Comber* (Belfast, 1853), p.6.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.10

The *Belfast Newsletter* fumed at Roger's complete lack of deference to Lord Downshire, calling the Comber minister a 'vulgar brawler' and a 'clerical buffoon'.⁵⁰⁸ At the same meeting, Rev. Robert Black denounced 'landlord despotism', whilst Rev. Moore referred to the need for vote by ballot to protect tenants from their landlords at the polls.⁵⁰⁹

In March 1853 James McKnight and John Rogers travelled to London as a Tenant Right deputation from the north of Ireland to report on the progress of the two tenant right bills being considered by a Parliamentary Select Committee. In their report to the Tenant Right Associations across Ulster, Rogers and McKnight warned that from 'the landlord influences at work' in the Committee, nothing satisfactory could be expected in its recommendations and they attacked the failure of Ulster's current representatives in forwarding the wishes of the tenant farmers.⁵¹⁰ Certainly, the *Times* encapsulated the conservative landlord position when it commented in an editorial in June 1853 that, 'the only person with any *rights* in the land is the landlord; all beyond this is a question of private bargain'.⁵¹¹ The bill ultimately accepted fell short of Crawford's proposals, but, as the *Banner* noted it was, 'the first occasion on which the tenant right principle has ever been conclusively affirmed by the House of Commons',⁵¹² and as Rev. Julius McCullough noted, it represented at least, 'an instalment of justice'.⁵¹³

At a meeting in Newtownards in September to discuss the recent tenant right debates in parliament, Rev. Robert Black noted the complete failure of most of Ulster's so-called representatives to come forward on the farmers' behalf; indeed some had actively worked against them, such as George McCartney of Antrim.⁵¹⁴ It was Rogers however who launched another onslaught on the landed classes, this time attacking the House of Peers for its rejection of the limited measure of tenant right which the Commons had acceded to: 'they are landlords, and they legislate for landlords. In hanging up the bill of the people, as they have done, they have been sacrificing the interests of the multitude on the altar of their own selfishness'.⁵¹⁵ McKnight sounded an equally angry note and referring to the spirit the Presbyterians had manifested at the last election, he stated,

⁵⁰⁸ *BNL*, February 4 1853

⁵⁰⁹ *BU*, February 4 1853

⁵¹⁰ *BU*, March 22 1853

⁵¹¹ *Times*, June 25 1853

⁵¹² *BU*, August 5 1853

⁵¹³ *BU*, September 16 1853

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Let that spirit never die out, but let them make their preparations in time, and be prepared, with candidates and funds, to fight the landlord interest in every constituency where there was the slightest ground for hope.... They should assail the landlord influence again in Down; and if they did not defeat their antagonists, they would drive them into the Encumbered Estates' Court.⁵¹⁶

But despite the anti-landlord rhetoric, the campaign for tenant right had lost considerable momentum by the end of 1853. Increasing agricultural prosperity, the collapse of the Irish Tenant League amid bitter recriminations between its northern and southern contingents, and the continuing power of the landlord class, as demonstrated at the 1852 election, assisted in diluting the land question for the foreseeable future.

Nonetheless, the core issues did *not* disappear. In 1857 the Rev. John Brown of Aghadowey launched a vehement attack on Irish landlords and their political power.⁵¹⁷ His pamphlet celebrated the eventual electoral victory of Sam Greer in Londonderry in 1857 and lamented how, 'Frequently scions of noble families are returned to represent men of whose wants and wishes they are ignorant, and such men, by their elevation and haughtiness are prevented from gaining much knowledge of their wants'.⁵¹⁸ He referred to those landlords who, 'endeavour by coercion and threats to reduce their tenants to a state of vassalage as degrading as that held of old by the Helots of Greece, or now by the Serfs of Russia... Such men grant no leases, and when disobeyed increase rents, withhold bog...[and] persecute their dependents until they fly to the wilds of America'. Moreover, Brown attacked the clergymen of the Established Church who, 'wield not only their power but also employ the influence which arises from their position, and from aristocratic connexions, to bring the electors into a state of serfdom and submission to the great'.⁵¹⁹ On Greer's subsequent success in 1857, Brown praised the Presbyterian electors of Derry, 'who have set an example to all Ireland. Many of them have done so to their cost, and are being visited with loss of bog, with increased rents, and other annoyances'.⁵²⁰

In a series of letters *To the Presbyterians of Ulster on the General Election of 1865*, signed 'Orthodox', the arguments and battlelines of the earlier part of the century were reiterated.⁵²¹ The author lamented that, 'out of the thirty-two gentlemen who

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁷ *The Elective Franchise, A Sacred Trust. A Tract for the Times, By the Rev. John Brown, D.D., Aghadowey (Coleraine, 1857)*

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.8-9

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.10-12.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.14-16.

⁵²¹ *Letters to the Presbyterians of Ulster on the General Election of 1865. By "Orthodox". Reprinted from the Belfast Daily "Northern Whig" (Belfast, 1865)*

profess to represent the province in the House of Commons, not one is a Presbyterian'.⁵²²

There is no Irish Presbyterian peer in the House of Lords, because, when Presbyterian families sought to join the ranks of the aristocracy, they forsook the "Meeting-house" and drove their carriages to "Church" The smaller denomination of Episcopalians inhabiting the province have monopolised all honours.....

....here in your own ancient settlements, where your power and influence ought to be predominant, you are held and disposed of, politically like chattels, by a few Episcopalian peers and their sons, and by the untitled landlords with whom they are associated by matrimonial and other ties. For aught you can tell, the Parliamentary seats enter into their matrimonial arrangements. The votes of the Presbyterian electors are transferred to the credit of this or the other proprietor, whom your lords have agreed to nominate for the next vacancy, just like stock in the bank.⁵²³

The author lamented that, 'the Anglican aristocracy managed to establish a sort of prelatial ascendancy in political affairs', in order to keep Presbyterians, 'down in the condition of political serfs'.⁵²⁴ Echoing the words of Rev. Goudy in 1852, 'Orthodox' launched a blistering attack on Cooke and his policy of 'Protestant Peace'.⁵²⁵ Recalling the efforts of those Presbyterian reformers in the 1820s and 1830s, 'Orthodox' recalled bitterly how, 'Thirty-three years after the passing of the Reform Bill....we find a certain number of families nominating the representatives of the most enlightened province in Ireland. Is not this system iniquitous and disgraceful?....⁵²⁶

The author's critique of landlord coercion of tenant voting highlighted that the role of the landed aristocracy in politics which preoccupied liberal Presbyterians in 1809, 1812, 1830, 1842, and 1852, was still just as potent an issue in 1865. In a pamphlet of 1886 entitled *Ulster and Home Rule. By an Irish Presbyterian*, the tenant right campaign was hailed as the moment when 'Ulster liberalism' had reared its head against the, 'potent engine of oppression....of unprincipled landlords and agents'.⁵²⁷ To this economic and political oppression '...more than any other one cause, must be attributed the non-election of Liberal members during the earlier part of the century'. Whilst landlord control was clearly a pivotal factor in the consistent re-election of Tory M.P.s in the north of Ireland during the period covered by this thesis and beyond, even in counties such as Down, it does not however tell the entire story. In Belfast, for

⁵²² *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, pp.5-6.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.10

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.19

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.32.

⁵²⁷ *Ulster and Home Rule. By an Irish Presbyterian* (Belfast, 1886), p.7.

instance, the situation was quite different. In 1852 the city had experienced its first serious rioting, and the intimidation of families from mixed areas of the city⁵²⁸ – such sectarian polarization a stark contrast to the situation in the confidently Presbyterian areas such as north Down. The sectarian situation – or more precisely fear of Roman Catholicism – played a significant part in encouraging many rank and file Presbyterians, in the capital for instance, to be influenced by the ‘Protestantism under threat’ rhetoric of conservative candidates.⁵²⁹ However, as S.J. Connolly has rightly highlighted, whilst, ‘Poorer Presbyterians were more likely to respond to the claims of Protestant unity and vote Conservative’, during this period, voting patterns should *not* be taken completely at face value. As he argues, ‘this does not mean that they had lost their truculent independence, combined with dislike of an Anglican-dominated establishment, that had earlier made them such willing recruits to the radical cause’.⁵³⁰ At the same time, wealthier Presbyterians and indeed, the majority of Presbyterian ministers, as represented by its two largest Synods – the General Assembly and the Remonstrant Synod – remained committed to the Presbyterian tradition of liberal politics, still translating their anti-establishment rejection of Tory and landlord political domination into liberal votes at election time.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the political sympathies of many Presbyterians remained liberal and reforming after 1800, despite the efforts of those such as Henry Cooke to forge a conservative political alliance between Irish Presbyterianism and the Protestant establishment. The control of the landlord class, of both political representation and the entire electoral system, remained the most significant grievance of Presbyterian radicals *both* before and after 1798. The scale of popular involvement in the tenant right campaign in the early 1850s, and the extent of Presbyterian mobilization in that movement, constituted the most significant constitutional challenge to the political establishment, from which so many Presbyterians still felt utterly excluded. On the eve of the 1852 general election, the *Banner*, defending the Tenant League and those Presbyterians involved in it from charges of fomenting rebellion, had this to say on its ancestors of the 1790s: ‘Parliamentary Reform, and other great alterations of our political system, which are now the law of Britain, were the main

⁵²⁸ Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, p.325.

⁵²⁹ See Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society*, p.267; Miller, *Queen’s Rebels*, p. 59.

⁵³⁰ S.J. Connolly, ‘Ulster Presbyterians’, p.39. Similarly, Frank Wright, in reference to the defeat of so many tenant right candidates in the north at the election of 1852 also talked of the likelihood that, ‘the scale of support for the popular candidates was considerably greater than the final voting figures suggested’, emphasising the significance of, ‘the coercive powers of the landlords as a whole’.(*Two Lands on one Soil*, p.204.)

objects for which, towards the close of the last century, the society of “United Irishmen” was originally established, and had its members repudiated the sword....their agitation would have been strictly constitutional, as their primary objects are now demonstrated to have been praiseworthy’.⁵³¹ Although the Presbyterian organ was careful to add that, ‘We of course, speak of the society before its fraternity with the democracy of the Continent’, (and thus its move towards revolution and Irish separation), the *Banner* was clearly proud of the Presbyterian heritage of political progress. It was indeed an acknowledgement of the righteousness of the original political aims of the United Irishmen of 1791, if not the eventual ‘means’ they employed.

⁵³¹ *BU*, June 22 1852.

CONCLUSION

If one element emerges strongly from this analysis of Presbyterian attitudes in the first half of the nineteenth century, it is the strong sense of continuity with much of the fundamental beliefs and ideals of the preceding century. What defined Presbyterian communities in the north of Ireland both before and after the Union, was a sense of alienation from, and resentment towards, the institutions of the 'Protestant Ascendancy' combined with an unmitigated hostility to the doctrines of 'Popery'. In areas where Presbyterians lived in close proximity to a Catholic population, this latter element could be translated into a conservative and defensive political stance, and in this sense changed little between the 1790s and the 1830s or 1850s. Where Presbyterians felt secure – most notably, as this thesis has demonstrated, in north Down and Antrim – anti-Popery remained more of an abstract. It is certainly no coincidence that Presbyterian Down produced the radicalism of 1798 and the radicalism of the tenant right campaign fifty years later. Presbyterian grievances continued to encompass the social, economic and political, whether this was opposition to tithe payments, or demands for political representation. The other element of continuity which emerges strongly in this work were the many divisions – often deep, bitter and public – within the Presbyterian community itself. These have played a significant role in the Church and wider community's relations with Anglicans, Catholics and the British state. Henry Cooke – so often regarded as a central and pivotal figure in the development and growth of conservatism and pan-Protestant unity – was, as this thesis has endeavoured to show, a figure who remained marginal and at times isolated among the very Synod he ventured to dominate. His wider political and social stance failed to command the respect and support felt for his theological contributions.

William Drennan, writing a letter to his wife Sarah in 1805, commented, 'My political principles have as yet remained as before, bending indeed beneath the blast of the times but never broken'. However, the lessons of the 1790s had taught him, in his own words, 'not to blindfold my common sense and run my neck into a noose'.¹ As this thesis has demonstrated, for many Presbyterians such sentiments did indeed apply. In the aftermath of 1798, there were few in the Presbyterian community who did not feel the impact of the ill-fated rebellion and the power of British military might. However, the idea that after 1800 Presbyterians inexorably and inevitably turned their face against political agitation and against their Roman Catholic countrymen, in movement towards

closer integration with the state and the Protestant establishment has merited serious clarification. Undoubtedly Presbyterians feared submergence into a Catholic dominated and Catholic ruled state – and certainly the Union with Britain offered security against this threat. As such, ‘Unionism’ in its most simple definition became a *fait accompli*.

However, as Chapter One demonstrated, relations with successive British governments could be far from amicable and increasingly defiant clashes with the state confirmed that the *regium donum* had failed to cool Presbyterian spirits in the way it had been hoped. If anything, the advent of time had hardened Presbyterian militancy, as the events of the 1840s and 1850s testify. Chapters Two and Three again emphasized that many Presbyterians remained outside the ‘establishment’ fold despite the efforts of conservatives such as Henry Cooke. The utter repudiation of his vision of ‘Protestant Peace’ underlines the important point that the combined fears of O’Connell, repeal and of Catholic electoral strength, did not frighten mainstream Presbyterian opinion into a pan-Protestant bloc. Indeed, as Chapter Four demonstrated, Presbyterians still shared common ground with Irish Catholics on the subject of tithes and agrarian reform, although firmly divided on the constitutional question of the Union. The Irish landlord, whether fairly or not, remained a figure at the centre of the anti-establishment feelings of the Presbyterian community, and the violent rhetoric employed to denounce many of them in the aftermath of the famine and during the tenant right campaign is highly significant. Indeed, the tenant right agitation demonstrated just how potent a mixture traditional economic grievances combined with political resentments could be. The denunciations of landlord electoral power were a consistent feature of Presbyterian radicalism both before and after 1798. The ‘fragmentation’ of Presbyterian politics remained a constant both before and after 1800. Whilst some Presbyterians responded to Protestant propaganda and fears of Catholic aggression with electoral support for the conservatives from the 1830s, many more continued to vote for and support liberal and reforming candidates.

The fact that armed rebellion and Irish separatism were no longer part of the agenda for the majority of Presbyterians during this period, should not be accepted as evidence of a ‘transformation’; arguably neither of these strands had necessarily been inherent elements of Presbyterian radicalism. As has been noted, Presbyterian radicals pursued a path towards rebellion and separation in the latter 1790s propelled by a particular variety of external forces. The natural essence of ‘Presbyterian radicalism’ was opposition to the ‘Protestant Ascendancy’, suspicion of government, support for

¹ William Drennan to Sarah Drennan [June 1805], PRONI, T/2884/41.

political reform and the cautious support of many for Roman Catholic rights (whilst regarding Catholicism itself as superstitious and incompatible with liberty). Presbyterian resentments, most significantly on the subject of the political monopoly of the north's powerful land-owning families, remained a core vision of both the remnants of the United Irish movement, in the work of Drennan and Tennent in the *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, and in the denunciations of leading Presbyterian reformers, such as Rev. Henry Montgomery in 1832. In the 1840s many within even the General Assembly began to mobilize in expressing anger at the failure of the north's so-called parliamentary representatives. In this sense, Presbyterian 'radicalism' continued alive and well during the first half of the nineteenth century, even if it was not until the agrarian radicalism of the tenant right campaign in the early 1850s that the rhetoric and language of 1798 came once again strongly to the fore. Likewise, the suspicion concerning the Presbyterian community in the north amongst landlords and the government throughout the period covered by this thesis, remained strong. As late as 1830, a memo received by Earl Grey on the Repeal movement and Ireland's unsettled condition, referred to 'the republican tendencies of the Presbyterians of every class'.² At the declaration of the poll in the Down election in 1852, the relief among the county's Tory landlords at Crawford's defeat was palpable. J.W. Maxwell, recollecting 1798, spoke of the 'discontent on the Tenant-right question which had been ripening into rebellion'.³ It was clear that fears of the potential of Presbyterian radicalism remained strong, even by the mid-nineteenth century.

How then does this fit into wider Presbyterian historiography? It is hoped that by demonstrating such continuities, 1798 can be regarded less as the moment when Presbyterian radicalism withered, but rather the external parameters within which it operated were altered. If a significant section of the Presbyterian community had not been converted to conservatism by 1852, when did 'Unionism' become synonymous with that political creed? When did Irish Protestantism unify more tightly? Have Ulster Presbyterians ever become a monolithic force for conservatism? Most modern commentators recognise that the 'point of no return' for Irish Presbyterians came, not in 1798, nor in 1800, but began in 1886. William Gladstone's espousal of Home Rule for Ireland clearly marked a decisive moment, for the constitutional matter of the Act of Union, within which Presbyterian radicalism had safely flexed its wings after 1800, seemed under threat. The possibility of being abandoned to 'Rome Rule' was sufficient

² 'Extract of a letter written in November 1830' on the 'mischiefs' of the Repeal agitation, amongst the Irish papers of the 2nd Earl Grey, Durham University Library Archives, GRE/B/36/3/5.

to drive many Presbyterians away from Liberalism and into the conservative camp; arguably their Liberal hero's conversion to the measure forced the hand of many liberal and pro-reforming Presbyterians. But as ever the story was far from simple. A minority of Presbyterians, notably men such as the Rev. A.B Armour, defied the majority and supported the prospect of Home Rule. However, as James Loughlin has emphasized, this support was borne largely out of a commitment to 'Gladstonianism' which regarded home rule as another liberal reform to be granted for Ireland, rather than the nationalist Catholic position that self-government was a right to be claimed.⁴ Furthermore, even those Liberal Presbyterians who came out publicly and forcefully against Home Rule in 1886 endeavoured to remain distinct from conservatism and pan-Protestantism. Although the stage was increasingly set for greater Protestant unity, denominational distinctions remained significant. Indeed, Alvin Jackson has highlighted the somewhat ambiguous position of many Presbyterians within Unionist party circles in his study of local Unionism in Mid-Armagh at this time. He emphasizes that various Presbyterians, clergy, farmers and those of the commercial classes, remained 'suspicious of Anglican domination within organized Unionism'.⁵ In essence then, Irish Unionism – the successor to the Irish conservative party – found it difficult to encourage much active support from Presbyterian ranks. Indeed, 'Presbyterians had a stronger bond with Irish Liberalism'.⁶

As Graham Walker has demonstrated in his study of Thomas Sinclair⁷, Presbyterian liberals were at pains to demonstrate their position as distinct from the Anglican ascendancy, conservatives, and the Orange Order. The age-old Presbyterian complaints of political under-representation and exclusion from public office, continued well beyond the mid-nineteenth century. So too did Presbyterian cynicism concerning 'Tory' efforts to woo Presbyterians, whilst issues such as land and agrarian reform still offered some common ground with Roman Catholics. The disestablishment of the Church of Ireland was supported by the majority of Presbyterians, but ironically removed one significant bone of contention that had kept Protestantism denominationally opposed. As Walker has argued, liberal Presbyterians such as Sinclair

³ *BNL*, July 28 1852.

⁴ James Loughlin, 'The Irish Protestant Home Rule Association and nationalist politics, 1886-93', in *IHS*, xxiv No. 95 (May, 1985).

⁵ Alvin Jackson, 'Unionist Politics and Protestant Society in Edwardian Ireland', in *The Historical Journal*, vol.33, No.4. (December 1990), p.850.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.864.

⁷ Graham Walker, 'Thomas Sinclair: Presbyterian Liberal Unionist', in Richard English and Graham Walker (eds.), *Unionism in Modern Ireland: New Perspectives on Politics and Culture* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp.19-40.

and Thomas Andrews of Comber, strove to rally 'liberal Unionism' in the face of the second Home Rule crisis of the 1890s. Their line of argument, that the Roman Catholic Church was fundamentally enslaving, and their fears of Catholic Ascendancy, were the same as those which had preoccupied men such as Drennan in the years after the Union. By the time of the Third Home Rule crisis in the early twentieth century, although on increasingly narrow ground, liberal Presbyterians still endeavoured to emphasize their distinctiveness within the Unionist camp. Interestingly, Walker identifies as late as 1912, 'an expression of the Presbyterian pride in their own cultural distinctiveness and of the sense of moral righteousness which had long characterized the Presbyterian community in Ulster', from the time of the United Irishmen.

Whilst Home Rule and the popular Unionist movement did ultimately unify 'Protestant Ulster', and whilst the political divisions amongst today's Protestant population are those of class rather than denomination, the distinctly Presbyterian influence in Ulster's politics has remained an important force. For many years its anti-establishment stance could not have been more forcefully demonstrated than by the controversial figure of Rev. Dr. Ian Paisley. Encompassing a paradoxical mix of anti-Catholicism, ultra conservative religious orthodoxy and socialist sympathies – with open antagonism towards the British state and perpetual suspicion of its intentions – the political party which he founded from within his Free Presbyterian followers now commands the majority support in contemporary Ulster politics. Indeed, the electoral demise of mainstream traditional Ulster Unionism since 2000 is an interesting development, as the Ulster Unionist Party has appeared increasingly out-of-touch with majority Protestantism, and above all, too closely associated with a political agreement (Good Friday) which has become the symbol of growing Protestant disillusionment. Ironically, the role of the state remains a controversial and ambiguous matter for Unionists, marred by feelings of mistrust and alienation at the intentions of successive British administrations and anger at the notion of Catholics gains exceeding those of the 'loyal' Protestants. Although under very different circumstances, rendering any direct comparison irrelevant, it remains an interesting irony that so many Presbyterian ministers, both in the Remonstrant Synod and the General Assembly, led campaigns in the 1840s and 1850s to increase specifically Presbyterian political representation, and today, for the first time in Northern Ireland's history, the party which holds the largest number of parliamentary seats is *not* traditional Unionism, born out of Ulster's landed gentry and Anglican population, but Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party. In theory, the province's new First Minister-in-waiting is not a Terence O'Neill, or a David Trimble,

but a figure at the other end of the Ulster Protestant spectrum, none other than a fundamentally maverick and radical Presbyterian clergyman.

As the Rev. A.P. Goudy wrote of political representation in 1852, 'The idea of a Presbyterian – a plain man – one of the people – not an Episcopalian – not an aristocrat – standing... was, till the last few months a piece of presumption unheard of, undreamt of'.⁸

⁸ Goudy, *Right versus Might*, p.8.

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