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**BRIGHTENING THE COUNTRYSIDE - THE LIBRARY SERVICE  
IN RURAL IRELAND, 1902 - 1935.**

**by**

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## SUMMARY

The thesis traces the development of the rural library service in Ireland between 1902 and 1935, with particular reference to the part played by Andrew Carnegie and the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, which he established in 1913, in that development.

The first chapters explore the nineteenth century background. The variety of library facilities that existed in Britain and Ireland - ranging from Mechanics' Institutes to parish libraries, are described. In Ireland the belief that books could rehabilitate the countryside and revive the national spirit gained rural libraries the support of agricultural co-operators and cultural nationalists. The Public Library Act of 1902 enabled Rural District Councils to raise a library rate. Between 1902 and 1914 a number of organisations promoted rural libraries, while others expressed scepticism. These opposing groups are described, and the difficulties of providing a rural library service is shown by a study of one such service in Rathkeale rural district, County Limerick.

In 1915 the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust appointed Lennox Robinson as organiser of libraries in County Limerick. His work is described, and the extension of his responsibilities to become the Trust's Irish representative is traced. In 1917 the trustees established an Irish advisory committee, and from 1921

financed experimental county library schemes. The first two schemes, in Counties Donegal and Antrim, are described in detail.

Acts of parliament passed in 1924 and 1925 made County Councils the library authorities in Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State. This encouraged the Carnegie trustees to change their library policy, a decision precipitated by a public controversy caused by a short story written by Robinson. This incident is described, together with its consequences.

The final chapter follows the fortunes of the county library service from 1925 to 1935 and describes how libraries were affected by the political and moral climate of the time. The thesis concludes with the Carnegie trustees' decision to cease funding county library services from 1935.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used throughout the text

CTS = Catholic Truth Society

CUKT = Carnegie United Kingdom Trust

IAOS = Irish Agricultural Organisation Society

ICLS = Irish Central Library for Students

IRA = Irish Republican Army

IRLA = Irish Rural Libraries Association

RDC = Rural District Council

UDC = Urban District Council

## INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF SOURCES

(i)

The scope of this thesis is to chart the development of the county library service in Ireland between the years 1902 and 1935. These dates have not been selected at random. 1902 marks the legislative beginning of the service, since the public libraries act of that year enabled rural district councils to raise a rate for library purposes, a power hitherto confined to urban areas. As this thesis will show, the county library service was generously assisted from 1915 by grants from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. These grants enabled county councils to provide library facilities which they could not otherwise have afforded. From the late 1920s the trustees broadened their interests to include community services, and in 1935 they ceased significant support to the public library movement. Therefore, 1935 marks the end of the first phase of the development of the county library service, and is a suitable date to conclude the scope of this study.

Of course the county library movement cannot be strictly bound by such parametres and this thesis also includes a consideration of the nineteenth century background. The act of 1902 was but one of a series of public libraries acts passed at Westminster from 1850. The first public libraries act, passed in 1850, did not apply to Ireland, but from 1853, successive acts extended library powers from Britain to

Ireland. Thus the Irish public library service was not the product of circumstances peculiar to Ireland, but of the concern of English reformers with issues such as illiteracy, public health and working conditions.

These early reformers were attracted to the idea of the public library by the success of the Mechanics' Institutes. They saw public libraries as exerting a civilising influence on the working class. James Silk Buckingham, M.P. for Sheffield made this connection in 1834 when, in his speech moving the appointment of a select committee on the liquor trade, he called for the development of parish libraries and district reading rooms as a counter to the public house.<sup>1</sup> The essayist Thomas Carlyle envisaged a similar effect, as, apropos of the lack of library facilities in rural Dumfriesshire, he noted in his journal 'Why is there not a majesty's library in every country town?...There is a majesty's jail and gallows in every one'.<sup>2</sup> It was assumed that people would be uplifted through using their local free public library. This laudable belief gained the public library movement many supporters, but it also aroused the suspicion of those who feared the results of such unrestricted access to knowledge.

In the course of an article on popular lending libraries of the eighteenth century, Paul Kaufman has remarked on the 'too often neglected fact that library history perforce is a fascinating image of the complete social history of a particular community or nation'.<sup>3</sup> The truth of this assertion is proved by the events described in this thesis,

which will reveal a continuous interaction between the fortunes of the library service and the social, political, and economic milieu of the day.

A survey of Irish history during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries will identify a number of forces at work whose interaction created Irish society as it exists today. These forces can be seen influencing the development of the county library service, although they might seem at first glance to have little connection with libraries.

The remarkable change in land ownership that followed the various land acts was perhaps the most significant development of the period. This focused attention on all aspects of rural life, highlighting not simply the need for agricultural instruction, but also for improved social facilities for rural dwellers. It was this concern with 'brightening the countryside' that ensured that the rural library would play a part in the co-operative philosophy as promoted by Horace Plunkett through the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society. Plunkett's advocacy of co-operatives made him an international figure and brought him into contact with Andrew Carnegie, that epitome of Victorian philanthropists. From this contact, Plunkett became a member of the Trust which Carnegie established, and was able to influence its policy to promote the county library service.

The Irish literary renaissance that exercised such a potent influence on the national consciousness also affected the county library service. When William Butler Yeats set about reviving the national culture he turned to

libraries as a means of spreading a knowledge of Ireland's Celtic heritage. Hence among the advocates of the rural library service may be found many individuals usually associated with the world of literature, such as Lennox Robinson, Lady Augusta Gregory and George Russell.

No consideration of the period would ignore the influence of the Catholic Church. Here again, this thesis will describe how the influence of the Church made itself felt on the development of the county library service. A fear of possible secularist influences made many Catholic priests (and their Church of Ireland colleagues), suspicious of the public library movement. Ultimately this suspicion led to the introduction of state censorship in the Irish Free State. On occasion this suspicion allied with the Gaelic self-consciousness that was the creation of the literary revival to the detriment of the library service, as in the case of the Mayo library boycott of 1931.

The county library movement did not exist in a vacuum, and the political events of the day also impacted on the service and on those who worked in it. Sometimes the impact was physical, as when library buildings were destroyed, or librarians found themselves under fire. Sometimes the impact was more personal, as the changing political ethos influenced the private lives of those involved in the library service.

Thus the history of any nation is made up of many strands, of which library history is but one. This thesis is an attempt to unravel this strand and to trace its triumphs and failures.

(ii)

A variety of sources were used for information relating to the subject of the thesis. The most important included the following:

The most significant manuscript collection consulted was the papers of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust which are held in the Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh. This collection includes numerous correspondence files concerning the Trust's dealings with the Irish public library service from 1913. Files relating to building grants made by Andrew Carnegie between 1890 and 1913 are also included, as are the printed minutes of the various committees of the Trust and its annual reports.

Other manuscript collections consulted were the papers of Thomas McGreevy and Dr Bernard, both of which are held in Trinity College, Dublin. The latter collection contains only those papers relating to Dr Bernard's position as Provost of the college. The rest of his papers, which are in the British Library, were not consulted. Nor was it possible to consult the papers of Lennox Robinson, which are in the Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. However, correspondence with the college librarian implies that these may not have proved significant. In the National Archives, Dublin, I consulted a number of files of the Department of Local Government, the most useful of which was a file dealing with the controversy that followed the appointment of Laetitia Dunbar-Harrison as county librarian



of Mayo in 1930.

Newspapers were a useful source of information for tracing the fortunes of the library services run by rural district councils and the early county library schemes. The detailed reports of council meetings, which were a feature of newspapers of the time, throw much light on contemporary attitudes to the public library service. Thus the Limerick Leader, the Ballymena Observer, and similar papers were consulted extensively.

More specialised newspapers consulted included the Irish Homestead, the journal of the co-operative movement. This provided information on the methods whereby co-operatives were encouraged to establish libraries to provide educational and recreational facilities for their members.

The early struggles of the rural library service can be traced through the issues of An Leabharlann, which was published by Cumann na Leabharlann from 1905-1909. The new series of this journal, published from 1930, reflects similarly on the service's later history. The Library Association Record, journal of the Library Association contains considerable coverage of Irish library developments up to 1914.

For contemporary opinions on rate-supported libraries, I consulted the annual reports of the Catholic Truth Society, and the biennial records of the Church of Ireland conference. The Church of Ireland Gazette, in the years 1902-1914, contains articles critical of public libraries, while the Catholic Bulletin, although mainly reflecting its editor's

prejudices, likewise mirrors the opinions of Catholics on the topic.

A number of parliamentary papers were consulted for details of the public library service. The 1849 Report from the select committee on public libraries includes submissions on the extent of library facilities in Ireland, while the parliamentary Returns showing the names of all places in England, in Scotland and in Ireland that have adopted the public libraries act, which were issued in 1885, 1891 and 1913 contain statistics on library buildings, staffing, bookstock and usage for the years concerned. Twentieth century parliamentary papers consulted include the 1929 Report of the departmental committee on libraries in Northern Ireland, which contains a brief survey of the public library service.

A range of other published works were consulted. The standard works on British library history, Early public libraries: a history of public libraries in Great Britain before 1850 and History of the public library movement in Great Britain, 1845-1935, both by Thomas Kelly, exclude all mention of Ireland. Earlier studies, such as Ogle's The free library, and Minto's History of the public library movement in Great Britain and Ireland include some coverage of the development of the Irish service. Two specialised studies have been written by Irish authors. Public libraries in Ireland, by Neylon and Henchy, is primarily intended for students of librarianship, while A history of literacy and librarianship in Ireland, by Castelyn, covers a broad canvas.

The more specialised libraries have attracted greater interest from historians. The official histories of the Royal Irish Academy and the Royal Dublin Society treat of their respective libraries, while McCarthy's All graduates and gentlemen gives a lively account of Marsh's library. Two unpublished theses were consulted for information on the Mechanics' Institutes, namely 'Mechanics' Institutes in Ireland before 1855', by Byrne, and 'Mechanics' and similar Institutes in Counties Antrim, Armagh and Down, 1820-1870', by Duffy. In addition, a number of periodical articles dealing with various aspects of library history were consulted.

Many of the individuals whose contribution to the development of the rural library service is described in this thesis, have been the subject of biographies, or have written their autobiographies. In this regard Robinson's Curtain up, Lady Gregory's Journals, and Digby's biography Horace Plunkett, an Anglo American Irishman, were particularly useful. Shorter recollections were also useful, as for example, Foley's article 'A minstrel boy with a satchel of books', which describes vividly the few rewards and many tribulations of a county librarian in the 1930s and 1940s.

Finally, in this brief survey of sources, the political and social background against which the county library service developed was filled in from a range of works, both contemporary and secondary.

Full references to all these works are given in the bibliography.

## CHAPTER ONE

A moral and educational force,  
- a review of library provision, 1800-1890.

(1)

In his book A history of the public library movement in Scotland to 1955, W.R. Aitken has argued that:

The public library was largely the work of philanthropists and reformers, who saw in it an ameliorating moral and educational force, which they were devotedly willing to further.

This statement is equally apposite to the development of the Irish public library system, particularly the county library service. It is undeniable that the Scottish-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie did more to provide library facilities in Ireland, than the combined efforts of the various pressure groups that espoused the library cause. It was finance granted by Carnegie, either directly, or through his creation the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, that bridged the gap between the funds that were raised by library rates and those that were needed to administer an effective library service.

The successive public library acts that were passed between 1853 and 1920 were, in fact, no more than the extension to Ireland of legislation already in existence in the rest of the United Kingdom. The earlier acts, in particular, took no account of the differences of population distribution, wealth, or education that existed between the two kingdoms. Even where the existence of these differences

was recognised, the public library was seen as a means of removing them, by bringing about a conformity of outlook between Ireland and Britain. Such a view was expressed, although facetiously, by one M.P. during the commons debate on the 1894 public libraries bill, when he stated that if Irish people had access to books they would become convinced of the disadvantages of home rule<sup>2</sup>. Forty four years previously, the Report of the Select Committee on Public Libraries included similar sentiments, although they were couched in loftier terms:

Libraries are not only needed for the increasing intelligence of the Irish people. The social habits, which such institutions would engender, the approximation of persons of different parties and of different creeds, which they would promote, are...of great importance to the manners, habits and repose of the nation.<sup>3</sup>

In complete contrast, Irish nationalists saw public libraries as weapons with which to challenge this very process of anglicisation. Thus the public library movement gained the support of groups with markedly divergent aspirations, and became entangled in social and political developments in Ireland from 1850. As a result, the library question had become an issue of popular concern by the end of the nineteenth century. Successive acts extended library powers, until the Public Libraries Act of 1902 enabled rural district councils to establish rate-supported libraries. But, as following chapters will show, without the intervention of the philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie, this legislative facility would not have developed into the modern

county library system within a short space of time.

(ii)

Although the Public Libraries Act of 1850,<sup>4</sup> - an act which is still the basis of British library legislation, - was not passed in response to a great popular demand, it cannot be regarded as an isolated development, or merely the work of a few enthusiasts. It was part of the 'national advance against the fortress of ignorance'<sup>5</sup> which produced parliamentary reform, regulation of working hours and compulsory elementary education.

The return of the Conservative Party to power in 1841, under the leadership of Robert Peel, was an important turning point in the history of nineteenth century Britain. The achievements of the Industrial Revolution led to a period of increasing economic prosperity. By 1850 Britain was exporting twice as much as she imported.<sup>6</sup> The population steadily increased, but there was a marked change in population distribution, as the great industrial cities, such as Manchester and Birmingham, increased in size at the expense of the countryside. Even the so called 'golden age' of agriculture ushered in by the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1853, with its consequent increase in prices of agricultural products, could not halt the decay of village life that characterised the era after Waterloo.<sup>7</sup> Between 1851 and 1871 the numbers employed in agriculture fell from 1,904,687 to 1,423,854.<sup>8</sup> Most of these former farm labourers found employment in mills and factories where

conditions of work were still harsh. The first faltering steps towards improvement had, however, already been taken, beginning with the Factory Act of 1833, which limited the working hours of children and young adults, and continuing with successive acts, such as the 'ten hours' act of 1847, which established a legal limit to the working day. The Saturday half-day, applying at first to textile workers, was legalised in 1850.<sup>9</sup> In addition to a shortening of the working week, an increase of factory wages by 17% between 1850 and 1865<sup>10</sup> enabled many workers to look beyond a mere struggle for survival.

Illiteracy was still widespread, both in urban and rural areas. Compulsory elementary education was not introduced in Britain until 1870, and, as late as 1867, the vice president of the Council of Education estimated that up to a million children of schoolgoing age were receiving no regular instruction.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, there was a continuous improvement throughout the century. Between 1825 and 1834 the number of children receiving some form of elementary education doubled<sup>12</sup>. Official statistics showed a clear connection between the reduction of working hours for children and the increase in attendance figures at city schools. Even in rural areas the battle against illiteracy was being won. Hundreds of voluntary schools, often supported by non-conformist congregations, were established in villages around the middle decades of the century<sup>13</sup>. The regime in these schools whether urban or rural was harsh, and the curriculum was unimaginative, but they created the

literate working class that both philanthropists and politicians saw as the intended beneficiary of free public libraries.

Reformers who advocated improvements in the social condition of the poor were, no doubt, partly influenced by a fear of the consequences of a large uneducated working class. The spectre of Chartism cast long shadows through the nineteenth century. But more altruistic influences were also at work. Speaking in support of the ten hours bill in 1844, Lord Ashley elaborated on the need for industrial workers to enjoy 'a slight relaxation of toil, a time to live...a time for those comforts that sweeten life, and those duties that adorn it'.<sup>14</sup> In this he expressed, not only the somewhat patronising tone of the nineteenth century philanthropist, but also the firm belief, equally typical of the nineteenth century, in the connection between private virtue and public good. This belief, a powerful motivation for social reform, can be traced to the writings of the philosopher Jeremy Bentham and his disciples, for whom John Stuart Mill coined the name 'Utilitarians'. In works such as Deontology,<sup>15</sup> published in 1834, Bentham characterised the ideal man as one who

not only pursues the happiness of all sentient beings intelligently, but does so out of love and concern for them. In Bentham's words he is a man to whom the spectacle of another's happiness is 'delightful'.<sup>16</sup>

Bentham's ideas became extremely influential. As one commentator has put it: 'Benthamism 'was in the air'.



Politicians and publicists absorbed it, mixed, at very different levels of concentration, with ideas of many different kinds'.<sup>17</sup>

Enlightened self interest became the order of the day, epitomised by the oft-quoted remark of Robert Lowe: 'We must educate our masters'.<sup>18</sup> If the power of the people had to be recognised, it should be controlled. The extension of the United Kingdom franchise from 814,000 in 1832 to 5,707,531 in 1886<sup>19</sup> was as much a response to popular agitation at home, and the growth of democracy abroad, as to an acceptance by the ruling classes of the justice of universal suffrage. This concept of social control was even influential in promoting the public library movement. Many early advocates of rate-supported libraries lauded them as alternatives to the public house and even the gaol, rather than as sources of intellectual satisfaction.

Bentham shared this utilitarian view of learning. To him it was a tool that would enable an individual to feel at home at any level of society. This concept was shared by Samuel Smiles, who coined the phrase 'self help'. His book Self Help, published in 1859, became one of the major best-sellers of the Victorian age.<sup>20</sup> Through a series of success stories, Smiles argued that, with hard work and sobriety, any man could win his way to the top. Smiles also had a message for the ruling classes:

The highest patriotism and philanthropy consists not so much in altering laws and modifying institutions, as in helping and stimulating men to elevate and improve themselves by their own free and independent individual action.<sup>21</sup>

Promoting the public library movement accorded well with this advice.

(iii)

Just as those who advocated state support for education could point to a rise in the number of children attending elementary or parish schools as justification for their arguments, so those who sought to justify the expenditure of rate-payers' money on free public libraries could cite the network of libraries that covered the United Kingdom, as evidence of the existence of a demand for books. Writing of the half century preceding the 1850 act, Thomas Kelly has stated:

We find libraries associated with Oddfellows' Institutes, benefit societies, farmers' clubs, Y.M.C.A. s, - all kinds of Institutions. The simple fact is that, at a time when there was a great and increasing public demand for books, and when there was no public library service, almost every political, economic, religious, social, and educational group regarded it as a duty to make some library provision for its members.<sup>22</sup>

This 'great and increasing demand for books' came partly from the urban working class, now more literate and with increased leisure at its disposal. But all levels of society used libraries. The increased interest in science, - cause and effect of the Industrial Revolution, - the reduction of taxes on newspapers, the rise of the modern popular novel, the beginning of the trade union movement, and the ideal of self help, all combined to produce a proliferation of literary and scientific institutions. Typical of these was

the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, which was founded in 1820 for the

promotion of Science and Literature by the reading of papers, the delivering of lectures, the formation of a museum, the collection of a library and the establishment of a laboratory<sup>23</sup>.

The membership of these institutes was drawn from the upper and middle classes. The same groups patronised the subscription libraries, which were established at the same time. By the middle of the nineteenth century, most towns of any size in Britain had a least one subscription library. These supplied 'polite literature' to readers who paid an entrance fee and an annual subscription that averaged five guineas and ten shillings respectively.<sup>24</sup> Many of these libraries developed substantial holdings. In 1850 the Liverpool Lyceum had 36,760 volumes in stock<sup>25</sup>, but due to the subscription rates, access was beyond the reach of the average worker.

Residents of country areas, and those whose reading tastes did not run to self improvement, were catered for by circulating libraries. These were very numerous. In 1803 John Feltham, a writer of popular topographical books, declared that 'every intelligent village throughout the nation now possesses a circulating library'.<sup>26</sup> Such libraries naturally varied in the size and range of material they supplied. The Minerva Library in London was patronised by fashionable society in search of romances and 'Gothic' melodramas. At the other end of the scale many village stationers called a shelf of books a circulating library.

The book club was another response to the desire for reading material. In these enterprises, a group of friends banded together and pooled a subscription to buy a selection of books. These were eventually auctioned off when each member had read all the books and the whole process then began again. Parish libraries were set up in many rural districts, by both established and non-conformist clergy. These libraries were assisted by the establishment in the early 1800s of a number of Evangelical organisations, of which the most prominent was the Religious Tracts Society, whose principal aim was to disseminate religious literature among the poor. The Religious Tracts Society supplied parish libraries with boxes of books, an idea later adopted by the Catholic Truth Society in Ireland.

A limited range of library facilities catered for the urban worker. A number of working class subscription libraries were founded, but most soon ran into debt and collapsed. There were some exceptions, such as the Sheffield Mechanics' and Apprentices' Library, founded in 1823. This lasted until 1860, when it was amalgamated with the Free Public Library, but its longevity was due to the patronage of the Sheffield Independent, rather than the support of the working class.<sup>27</sup> Most workers had to rely on the smaller circulating libraries or on the libraries that many coffee houses, particularly in London, maintained for their patrons. William Lovett, the founder of Chartism, told the Select Committee that preceded the 1850 act that the coffee house

libraries were the main source of working class reading.<sup>28</sup>

More concrete evidence of the existence of a reading public than the establishment of libraries in coffee houses, factories and even omnibuses, was the development at the start of the nineteenth century of Mechanics' Institutes, founded and run (at least partially, and in some cases wholly), by the newly literate skilled and semi-skilled artisans. Both by their achievements and their failures, these Institutes provided the telling evidence necessary to persuade the government to take the step that led to the passing of the 1850 Public Libraries Act.

The Mechanics' Institutes<sup>29</sup> grew out of a course of evening lectures given between 1800 and 1804 at the Andersonian Institute in Glasgow by the professor of Chemistry, George Birbeck. These lectures were specifically for the mechanics<sup>30</sup> who made the scientific instruments used by Birbeck in his laboratory. From the beginning these mechanics gathered a technical library for their own use, and it was a dispute with the Andersonian over the use of this library that led to the foundation of the Glasgow Mechanics' Institute in 1823. The movement spread rapidly, and by 1826 over a hundred Institutes had been established throughout the United Kingdom. Their aims were lofty. Speaking to the Manchester Mechanics' Institute in 1827, the banker Benjamin Heywood said:

the object of this Institution is to teach the workman (be his trade what it may), those principles of science on which his work depends; to show him their practical application and how he may make his knowledge of them profitable; to enable him thoroughly to understand his

business, and to qualify him for making improvements in it; to teach him how he may advance himself in the world, and to give him an<sup>31</sup> honourable and delightful enjoyment for his leisure.

An unrealistic expectation, perhaps, for a voluntary enterprise, and the economic depression of the late 1830s and early 1840s swept away all but a few. Still, the desire for self improvement was strong, and improved conditions in the late 1840s saw a revival of the Mechanics' Institutes, until they reached a second peak of 689 in 1851.<sup>32</sup>

The first Mechanics' Institutes were strictly educational. Classes and lectures were offered on scientific and technical subjects, with some Institutes establishing museums. Therefore, it is not surprising that the library was an essential part of each Institute. The Institute at Keighley, West Yorkshire, owed its existence to a joiner, a tailor, a painter and a reedmaker, who combined 'for mutual instruction, and to establish a library for that purpose'.<sup>33</sup> Some Mechanics' Institutes built up large libraries, - the Manchester Institutes' library numbered 13,000 volumes in 1850. This was exceptional. The average Institute would have no more than two or three hundred books in its library.<sup>34</sup> Small though they were, it was generally accepted that it was these libraries which kept the Mechanics' Institutes in existence, and accounted for their continued refusal to simply fade away.

It was a valid criticism of the Mechanics' Institutes that their facilities were not freely available to all workers. Although their subscription rate was low, - varying

between one and five shillings a quarter, - it nevertheless was beyond the means of the unskilled or unemployed. It is significant that the founders of the Keighley Institute were craftsmen, not factory workers. Hence, in times of economic depression, when enforced idleness offered opportunities for self improvement, the Mechanics' Institutes were effectively closed to those who needed them most. As J. W. Hudson, their first historian, wrote in 1851:

The requirements of the age demand for the unlettered classes not only free public libraries, free public news-rooms, free public lectures, but evening classes free to the<sup>35</sup> half-educated shop boy and the unlettered apprentice.

This was the philosophy that animated the first promoters of the public library movement.

Credit for the introduction of the public libraries bill to the house of commons must be given to William Ewart and Edward Edwards, - one a leading radical M.P., the other an assistant librarian at the British Museum. Ewart had been an advocate of social reform since his election in 1828. He had sponsored the Museums Act of 1845,<sup>36</sup> which established the principle of rate supported cultural institutions, and which resembled in many respects the Public Libraries Act of 1850. While he was collecting information about museums, Ewart came into contact with Edwards, who was a prominent member of the Art Union. Edwards was highly critical of the standard of library facilities in Britain. In March 1848, he read a paper to the Statistical Society of London in which he drew unfavourable comparisons between libraries in Britain and on the continent. This paper was subsequently published as a

pamphlet,<sup>37</sup> and the publicity it attracted strengthened the case for free public libraries, which was already being advocated by those who had been impressed by the Mechanics' Institutes.

Following some effective lobbying, Ewart succeeded in getting government support for the appointment of a Select Committee to investigate 'the best means of extending the establishment of libraries freely open to the public, especially in large towns in Great Britain and Ireland'. Edwards chaired this committee, which met for the first time on 23 March 1849. Its membership included one Irish M.P. - G.A. Hamilton<sup>38</sup>, who represented Dublin University. The recommendations of this committee were presented to parliament in the spring session of 1850, and passed all stages to receive the royal assent on 14 August under the title Public Libraries Act (1850). By the terms of this act municipalities in England and Wales with a population of 10,000 or more were empowered to raise a rate of not more than one half penny for library purposes. This modest act marks the beginning of the public library movement.

(iv)

The Select Committee's terms of reference indicated that Ewart's vision of public libraries included Ireland as well as Britain. In addition to the presence of one Irish M.P. among its members, the Select Committee heard evidence on



library conditions in Ireland from the Irish scholar Eugene O'Curry, and from William Jones, the chief secretary of the Religious Tracts Society which was also active in Ireland. Although the terms of the bill did not extend to Ireland, Ewart assured the house of commons that he was prepared to introduce an amendment to that effect. 'He believed that many hon. gentlemen connected with that country were anxious that Ireland should be included in its provisions.'<sup>39</sup>

The same network of library facilities which inspired the concept of a rate-supported library service in Britain existed in Ireland, although on a reduced scale. In late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britain, social and economic factors produced the readers that frequented subscription libraries, Mechanics' Institutes, and circulating libraries. In Ireland, this period was also a time of change. From the middle of the eighteenth century, the Protestant middle classes allied with the landed gentry, to challenge Britain's control of Irish trade and manufacture. During the final quarter of the century, the Irish parliament enjoyed a measure of legislative independence which co-incided with a period of economic prosperity. A cultural renaissance took place among the Anglo-Irish ascendancy, expressing itself not only in architectural elegance, but also in intellectual activity.

This activity created a natural demand for reading matter. In fact, Dublin already had a 'public' library, incorporated as such by an act of parliament of 1707. This

was Marsh's library,<sup>40</sup> located in the precincts of St. Patrick's Cathedral. It had been built by Archbishop Narcissus Marsh, who stocked it with standard works in theology, history law and classics. Although its charter stated that 'all graduates and gentlemen shall have free access to the library',<sup>41</sup> it never attracted many readers. Nevertheless, it was the only library in Dublin freely open to the public prior to the public library acts.

The Royal Irish Academy founded in 1785 to 'promote the study of science, polite literature and antiquities',<sup>42</sup> built up a library from the start. Access was, however, limited to the scholars who were nominated members of the Academy. Readers who could not aspire to this distinction, but who still wanted access to serious literature were catered for, as in Britain, by subscription libraries. Inevitably, these developed more slowly in Ireland, but, by the second decade of the nineteenth century, the larger towns all had at least one such institution. The oldest of these subscription libraries was the rather misleadingly titled Armagh Public Library. This library was established in 1774 through the efforts of Richard Robinson, the Archbishop of Armagh. The library stock was mainly scientific and theological, and the requirement that would-be readers deposit the cost of any book they wished to borrow excluded the lower-middle and working classes. Not suprisingly analysis carried out by R.C. Cole on the borrowers' register showed that the landed gentry and army officers made most use of the library.<sup>43</sup> The Cork Library Society, founded in 1792 attracted a membership

of 'merchants, shopkeepers, bankers, established clergy, and landed gentry'<sup>44</sup>, who were not deterred by the annual subscription of one guinea. The Dublin Library Society developed from a group which met at John Archer's bookshop in Dame Street to read newspapers and scientific journals. In May 1791 the group formalised itself into a society for

the acquisition of expensive books beyond the reach of the private individual and the purchase of any works with "just pretensions<sup>45</sup> to merit in any branch of literature or science".

Until 1817 books were available for reference use only. Wisely, at a time when the doctrines of Revolutionary France were radicalising Belfast Presbyterians and Dublin Catholics<sup>46</sup> alike, the Society prohibited religious or political discussion on its premises<sup>47</sup>. Nor were these library societies unique. Similar societies were established in Limerick, Kilkenny, Derry, Waterford and Belfast. The latter, founded in 1788 as the Belfast Reading Society, exists today as The Linen Hall Library, the sole survivor of these lay controlled subscription libraries.

The library societies did not, in general, stock fiction. The Belfast Reading Society specifically banned the purchase of 'any common novel or farce or other book of trivial amusement'<sup>48</sup>, although the works of 'serious' writers such as Johnson or Goldsmith were purchased by most societies. As was the case in Britain, novel readers were catered for by circulating libraries. R.C. Cole reports having come across 'numerous references to circulating libraries'<sup>49</sup> among the advertisements in eighteenth century

newspapers. Some had holdings to rival their London counterparts. The Universal Circulating Library in Dublin had 10,000 volumes, mostly popular novels, in stock in 1784<sup>50</sup>. Paul Kaufman describes the contents of the catalogue of the English, French and Italian Circulating Library which was run by D. Jacotin, a Cork bookseller. In spite of its cosmopolitan title, Jacotin's library stocked exclusively novels with titles like Embrace on the grave and The castle of Villeroy<sup>51</sup>. Doubtless these were the books which gave circulating libraries such notoriety.<sup>52</sup>

The passing of the act of union in 1800 turned Dublin from a political capital to a provincial city. The departure of the Irish members of parliament did not materially affect the library societies. Learned societies continued to expand their library facilities. The Royal Irish Academy's 1822 catalogue listed 1,360 titles.<sup>53</sup> The Royal Dublin Society, which had been founded in 1731 for 'improving husbandry, manufacture and the useful arts'<sup>54</sup>, included a library in its premises at Leinster House. Despite the intimidating nature of the surroundings, use of the library grew dramatically from 'a mere few hundred [readers] in 1836 to 4,860 in 1844'<sup>55</sup> - all clear evidence of the existence of a reading public.

Nor had circulating libraries disappeared. Slater's Directory for 1846 lists no less than thirty-seven such establishments in Dublin, and most towns of any size had a least one circulating library, usually run by a bookseller. Contemporary evidence indicates that the standard of these

libraries had changed little since Jacotin's catalogue had been issued. George Dugan of Church Street, Ballymena advertised himself in Slater's Directory as not only a bookseller and stationer, but also 'newspaper agent, patent medicine vendor, book binder, and circulating library proprietor'<sup>56</sup>. Such an establishment was unlikely to stock more than a few novels.

A pseudonymous pamphlet published by the Belfast Rhetorical Society in 1841 entitled An essay towards investigating the causes that have retarded the progress of literature in Ireland,<sup>57</sup> provides further information about library facilities in Ireland in the years before the Public Libraries Act. The author of this pamphlet was Henry Montgomery, a prominent Presbyterian controversialist. He attributed the lack of a native literature to the low number of books in circulation in Ireland. There were, he maintained, no more than 220,000 volumes in all the libraries in Ireland, less than the bookstock of the British Museum library. Although he noted that the previous decade had seen the establishment of subscription libraries in Downpatrick, Bandon, Youghal, Wexford, Coleraine, Sligo, and Mallow, he considered that 'there are perhaps a hundred towns in Ireland that should have public libraries'<sup>58</sup>, and yet have none'.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore he criticised the contents of these libraries, in particular their deficiency of works relating to 'our history, literature and antiquities'<sup>60</sup>.

Although Montgomery did not mention it, some of the older subscription libraries were already running into

difficulties. William Makepeace Thackeray called to the Cork Library Society during his visit to the city in 1842, and was not impressed.

Opposite this is another institution, called the Cork Library, where there are plenty of books, and plenty of kindness to the stranger; but the shabbiness and faded splendour of the place is quite painful<sup>61</sup>

The Kilkenny Library Society, which Montgomery recorded as having 4,000 volumes in stock, existed in a perpetual state of financial crisis;<sup>62</sup> while the Dublin Library Society had failed to exclude politics, and was riven by disputes.<sup>63</sup>

Montgomery reserved his harshest criticism for rural library facilities. He castigated village libraries as little more than novel-reading clubs, whose members 'have selfishly sacrificed what might have become worthwhile institutions, for the prospect of having a few volumes in their possession'.<sup>64</sup> Circulating libraries, were damned for the same reason:

the young, unwarily led to the poisoned fountain [of novels] had their minds debilitated and rendered totally unfitted for receiving solid and substantial aliment<sup>65</sup>

The members of the 1849 Select Committee avoided the perennial controversy of novel reading, but their evidence of the lack of rural library facilities supported Montgomery's arguments. Eugene O'Curry lamented that 'there are no books in the country', and added, in words that were to be re-echoed throughout the century, :

In some of the small and rising villages, and rising they still are in Ireland, if there were a library placed under proper control, I think it would instruct the people, and make them become better townsmen than they are.<sup>66</sup>

A further comment by O'Curry alluded to what was the most common source of reading material in rural areas, not just at the time of the Select Committee, but up to the establishment of the county library service, namely the parish library. When asked by Ewart if the landed gentry or clergy took an interest in the formation of lending libraries, he replied that some Protestant clergymen had established small libraries of books which they distributed among their own flocks.<sup>67</sup> The Religious Tracts Society was also involved in promoting parish libraries. William Jones assured the Select Committee that he was 'by correspondence seeking to form libraries in Ireland'.<sup>68</sup> Many evangelising Bible Societies operated subscription libraries which aimed at refuting the doctrines of the Catholic Church. The Society for the Promotion of the Education of the Poor in Ireland, usually known as the Kildare Place Society, laid especial emphasis on the establishment of libraries in connection with their schools. A pamphlet, Hints on the formation of lending libraries, issued in 1824 advised that the Society was prepared to give two copies of their publications gratis to anyone willing to establish a library. By 1831, 11,000 of these libraries had been established.<sup>69</sup>

The Catholic response to this was the establishment of similar libraries, usually in conjunction with branches of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. These were lay apostolic societies, whose members assisted the priests in teaching Christian doctrine and preparing children for

reception of the sacraments. The Confraternity libraries were not confined to members only, but were open to all parishioners on payment of a subscription. The effectiveness of these libraries depended on the enthusiasm of the parish priest, and also on the support of the bishop of each diocese. Thus, during the episcopacy of Dr. Doyle (1819-1834), highly successful parish libraries existed throughout the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin, which included much of south west Leinster. In evidence to the 1825 Parliamentary Commission on Education, Dr. Doyle outlined the spread of these libraries:

I have established in every parish parochial libraries stocked with books of religious and moral instruction exclusively. The books are given out to heads of families upon their paying a penny a week for the use of them. To the poor they are given gratis. When a man has read one of the books he returns it to the librarian; he then gets another, and thus every class are <sup>70</sup> instructed in their moral, social and religious duties.

The largest libraries existed in the towns. Carlow parochial library contained 280 volumes in 1829, and the Tullow library, which was located in the Brigidine convent, had a stock of 100.<sup>71</sup> Villages too had quite substantial libraries, or book societies, as they were named by Dr. Doyle. The account book of one such has survived in the National Library of Ireland.<sup>72</sup> This was the Killeigh book society, which flourished in a completely rural area of County Offaly from at least 1837 until 1868. The society was run by a committee with the parish priest as president. Members, whose numbers fluctuated, paid a shilling subscription each month. Details of the actual contents of



the library are sparse. In January 1842, 252 books were returned to the secretary, while ninety eight were 'in the book chest'. Unfortunately, no titles are given. The devotional nature of the enterprise is shown by the frequent payment of Mass offerings for members, while the precarious existence of such a library is clearly indicated by the carelessness of the entries following the death, in 1860, of Fr. Kinsella, the parish priest, who may have established the society.

Dr. Doyle was also an active supporter of the Catholic Book Society, founded in Dublin in 1827, as a counterbalance to the Evangelical Bible Societies of the time.<sup>73</sup> This Society, which lasted until 1846, aimed at distributing prayer books and religious tracts, either gratis or at nominal cost, to form the nucleus of parish libraries. Its most significant publication was the Catholic Directory, which was issued annually from 1836. The first issue claimed that the Society had distributed thousands of books to every parish in Ireland and the English-speaking world. Although the Society collapsed in 1846, publication of the Directory was taken over by W.H. Battersby. Throughout the 1850s, the Directory carried advertisements from publishers offering discounts to parochial and temperance libraries. The latter were an off-shoot of the temperance crusade conducted by the Capuchin friar Fr. Theobald Matthew, which enjoyed great popular support in pre-Famine Ireland.<sup>74</sup> Catholic parochial libraries spread to other dioceses with the Confraternity of

Christian Doctrine. They were especially numerous in the south and west of Ireland.<sup>75</sup>

Just as the British learned societies, subscription libraries, and parish libraries had their Irish equivalents, so too did the Mechanics' Institutes.<sup>76</sup> In 1824, only one year after the establishment of the Glasgow Institute, an abortive attempt was made to start a Mechanics' Institute in Dublin. The following year saw the foundation of Institutes in Belfast and Cork, both of which enjoyed a more permanent existence. Between 1825 and 1852 Mechanics' Institutes were established in Dublin, Limerick, Galway, Waterford, Carrick on Suir, Clonmel, Cahir, Youghal, Drogheda, Dundalk, Carrickmacross, Tipperary and Wexford.<sup>77</sup>

As had been the case in Britain, the Irish Mechanics' Institutes enjoyed the patronage of the business classes, who were concerned in case workers would not be able to meet the challenges of the Industrial Revolution. The proposal to found a Mechanics' Institute in Cork was first discussed at the Literary and Scientific Society, - an institution frequented by the professional and business classes. Once established, the Cork Mechanics' Institute enjoyed the patronage of the city merchants, including the Beamish brewing family.<sup>78</sup> With this support the Institute was able to engage the Reverend Dionysius Lardner, a graduate of Dublin University, to deliver a course of lectures on 'mechanical and experimental physics' in 1826.<sup>79</sup>

Like their British counterparts, the Irish Mechanics' Institutes developed libraries for the use of their members.

A surviving catalogue<sup>80</sup> of the Cork Mechanics' Institute's library, dating from 1837, is probably typical. Standard works in history, science, and belle-lettres are included, as are specialised works for craftsmen. Novels also feature in the catalogue, but these are confined to the works of authors like Scott and Maria Edgeworth. Controversial books do not appear.

By the late 1830s, when this catalogue was issued, the Irish Mechanics' Institutes were already in a state of decline. A number of factors hastened this process. The absence of a sufficiently large working class base outside of a few urban areas weakened them from the beginning. The economic recession of the 1830s, which reduced the numbers engaged in manufacturing industries, also worked against their success. The increase in sectarian tensions, which was an inevitable by-product of Daniel O'Connell's campaign for Catholic Emancipation, made it difficult to sustain a non-controversial organisation in a country where controversy permeated all levels of society.

When the Mechanics' Institutes re-emerged in the 1840s, - and here again they followed the example set in Britain, - they concentrated more on social activities. The library became increasingly important. The minute book of the Dundalk Mechanics' Institute, which was founded in 1844, stated 'a good stock of books must form the chief foundation of instruction'.<sup>81</sup> The Mechanics' Institutes came to be seen as a means of controlling undesirable social habits. The

1848 annual report of the Drogheda Institute boasted of its reading room where

the working man after his day's toil may spend an hour in reading something that may amuse, interest or instruct, instead of resorting, as is so often his habit, to places of vice<sup>82</sup>

The Galway Mechanics' Institute was re-titled The Galway Trades' Temperance Society and Mechanics' Institute, and membership was confined to those who had taken a pledge of total abstinence.<sup>83</sup> The Dublin Mechanics' Institute, which had been successfully established in 1837, stated its object to be 'the scientific and literary improvement of the operative classes', and offered evening classes in dancing, drawing, singing, French and Italian, as well as a library.<sup>84</sup> In Clonmel the Mechanics' Institute erected its own building containing a library, lecture hall and classrooms. In 1858 the members organised a decorative arts exhibition including examples of local crafts as well as objects loaned by the newly opened South Kensington Museum.<sup>85</sup> It was not surprising that Hudson's History of adult education, published in 1851 includes Mechanics' Institutes and Literary Societies in Ireland in one table<sup>86</sup>, since by then they were largely indistinguishable.

The revival of the Mechanics' Institutes in the 1840s co-incided with the appearance of other urban reading facilities, this time inspired by motives far removed from Smilesian self-improvement. The Young Irelanders, a group of radical intellectuals, who joined with O'Connell in his agitation for repeal of the act of union, realised the

political possibilities of libraries in a society that was becoming increasingly literate. Thomas Davis, a poet and writer of considerable power, was their principal spokesman, and his articles in the Young Irelanders' newspaper the Nation captured the popular imagination. His aim was nothing less than the revival of the national spirit,- and books were the means he would use to this end. As he wrote in the Nation of 5 October, 1844:

The first want of the people was knowledge, long withheld by a jealous master. England shut up Ireland...in a dungeon and told her what she thought proper for herself...The depression of Ireland did not flow from resources undeveloped, so much as from men without information and discipline. From ignorance comes<sup>87</sup> slavery and sycophancy...Educate that you may be free.

Repeal reading rooms were established in many of the large towns, where people would gather to read the Nation and books which celebrated Ireland's heroic past.

Not that all reading rooms which subscribed to the Nation were hot-beds of radicalism. The Repeal reading room in Carlow was frequented by Liberals rather than O'Connellites, while those in Tullow and Youghal existed through financial support from the Duke of Devonshire.<sup>88</sup> But, radical or not, few of these reading rooms survived the Famine and the split between Young Irelanders and O'Connellites.<sup>89</sup> Some did continue, to be re-activated by the revival of national consciousness that took place at the end of the century.

Thus, when G.A. Hamilton assured the 1849 Select Committee that 'a large proportion of the population [in

Ireland] could read, but the supply of libraries which can afford to persons the opportunity of reading is extremely limited',<sup>90</sup> he was taking perhaps too pessimistic a view. When the differences between the two countries are taken into account, Ireland did not lag too far behind Britain in the provision of library facilities. The main difference, - and it was a crucial one, - was that whereas in Britain the concentration of library facilities in the cities corresponded with the density of population, in Ireland the opposite applied, and the bulk of the population lived in the rural areas which were most starved of reading matter.

(v)

The omission of Ireland from the terms of the 1850 act was due to little more than a parliamentary whim. During the course of the debate on the bill, James C. Chatterton, M.P. for Cork, twice asked Ewart if he intended to extend its terms to Ireland. The question was not prompted by any enthusiasm for libraries. On the contrary, Chatterton,<sup>91</sup> was strongly opposed to increased taxation, and it was on this basis that he launched his attack during the third reading of the bill.

As regards Ireland [he declared], I object to the principle of this bill, as tending to impose a new tax on an already pauperised people...and, although no person can be more anxious than I am for every fair opportunity being given to the working classes to gain useful knowledge, still I can never consent to the method of procuring it, by<sup>92</sup> taxing the many for the supposed advantage of the few

He therefore proposed an amendment to the bill which would specifically exclude Ireland from its terms. In spite

of Hamilton's protests, and in the absence of Ewart, the amendment was carried. Ireland had to wait for a further three years to be brought within the scope of public library legislation.

The Public Libraries Act (Ireland and Scotland) of 1853<sup>93</sup> extended the terms of the 1850 act to Ireland. [For a list of the principal library acts to apply to Ireland during the period of this study, see Appendix One]. Towns with a population of 10,000 or over could now adopt the public libraries act and raise a library rate of one half penny. But this act had no impact in Ireland, where only nineteen towns had returned a population of over 10,000 in the 1841 census. Thus the real beginning of the public library movement in Ireland was the passing of the Public Libraries Act of 1855.<sup>94</sup> This act empowered the councils of boroughs and towns with a population of more than 5,000 to establish free public libraries, museums and schools of science and art. As the half penny maximum for the library rate had already proved inadequate, the 1855 act increased the level in Ireland, as in Britain, to one penny.

Those who drafted the early public libraries acts took great care to ensure that a public library system would not be forced on the reluctant ratepayers of towns or cities, and strict guidelines were laid down as to the procedure that had to be followed. A public meeting of rate payers had to be called, at which a two thirds majority vote had to be in favour of the establishment of a free public library. Only

when this had happened, could the corporation, or town council, strike a library rate, or, as the procedure came to be known, 'adopt the public libraries act'. This requirement, which was not repealed until 1894, hindered the spread of the public library movement even in England, where local groups of ratepayers 'packed' meetings, and held up adoptions in such large cities as Birmingham and Leeds. In Hull, no less than five meetings were held before the principle of the establishment of a city library was accepted.<sup>95</sup>

The early public library acts also embodied some principles that were to influence the further development of the library service. The concept of a library committee to look after administration, book selection, etc., was first introduced by the 1850 act. The principle of access to all, free of charge, still the sine qua non of the rate-supported library service, was meant to overcome the barrier that had kept the urban poor from the Mechanics' Institutes. This principle, embodied in the phrase 'free public library' kept the middle classes away from the rate-supported libraries for years, since to them 'free' had overtones of 'charity'. It also aroused the suspicion of those who, for social or religious reasons, opposed the idea of uncontrolled access to knowledge. At its most extreme this fear produced vigilante organisations, such as the Committee for the Suppression of Noxious Literature,<sup>96</sup> in England, or the Irish Vigilance Association<sup>97</sup> in Ireland.

An aspect of the early public library acts that proved



particularly tenacious was the limit of one penny to the pound imposed on the library rate. This penny rate became a millstone around the neck of the fledgling public library movement, condemning it, in all but a few large urban areas, to a precarious existence. The cramping affect of the penny rate was shown by the number of local authorities in England that were forced to ask for voluntary donations, or to charge for books borrowed, while allowing free reading on the library premises. Other local authorities, - thirty in all by 1900<sup>98</sup>, - used clauses in local acts to evade the rate restriction. Since large centres of population like Birmingham and Oldham were forced to take such measures to maintain their library services, it is not surprising that Irish local authorities might hesitate to embark on a public library programme. Hence the progress of the public library movement in Ireland was painfully slow. By 1885, when the Westminster parliament issued statistics of places in the two kingdoms that had adopted the public libraries act, only eight Irish towns were included (see table one). Of these towns only four, Dundalk, Ennis, Sligo, and Coleraine, could be said to serve a rural area, and only two: Ennis and Coleraine, had a population of less than 10,000. In addition, a weakness of early public library legislation was that by adopting the public libraries act corporations and urban district councils were not bound to actually put the act into operation. Thus Ennis Urban District Council [hereafter UDC] adopted the public libraries act with great

Table One

Adoption of the Public Libraries Act, 1853-1890.<sup>99</sup>

CORK CORPORATION	1855
DUNDALK UDC	1856
ENNIS UDC	1860
DUBLIN CORPORATION	1877
SLIGO UDC	1880
COLERAINE UDC	1881
BELFAST CORPORATION	1882
KINGSTOWN UDC	1884
RATHMINES UDC	1887
LIMERICK CORPORATION	1889

enthusiasm in 1860, but the Ennis public library was not opened until 1932. Progress in Ireland, as recorded in the Parliamentary Returns, of 1885, compared unfavourably with Wales where five towns, three of which had a population of less than 11,000, had opened public libraries. It is significant that one of the most successful of these early public libraries was in Dundalk, where there was already a flourishing Mechanics' Institute, known from 1853 as The Dundalk Literary and Scientific Institute. The Institute had a library of 1,600 books, which was passed over to the rate-supported library, pointedly titled the 'Dundalk Free Library', which opened in January 1858. By 1885 this library had a stock of 6,000 books,<sup>100</sup> and reported that 300 borrowers were enrolled, while an average of sixty persons used the reading rooms each night.<sup>101</sup>

After a slow start, the pace of public library adoptions in Britain quickened until by 1889, 153 local authorities had adopted the act.<sup>102</sup> Many of these adoptions were facilitated by assistance from local benefactors who had made their fortunes during the Victorian economic boom. Benthamite ideals, or a desire for self glorification, encouraged a variety of individuals to endow public libraries. Thus a brewer financed Derby's city library in 1875, while Preston's free library was built with money willed by a local solicitor in 1877.<sup>103</sup> One of the most generous of these early philanthropists was the newspaper magnate James Passmore Edwards, who financed more than twenty library buildings in Cornwall and London.<sup>104</sup>

Ireland's public libraries did not enjoy such largesse. William Crawford, a Cork brewer, who endowed a School of Art which was to include a public library,<sup>105</sup> was an exception. Such Irish industrialists as existed were content to leave the provision of reading facilities to local authorities. This was an insecure foundation, as Irish local and municipal government, before the passing of the 1898 Local Government Act, was unwieldy and inefficient. The Grand Juries that administered the country areas were principally representative of the Anglo-Irish landed classes, and their meetings tended to resemble those of a gentleman's club.<sup>106</sup>

Nor were the landed classes likely to have time for concern about rural libraries. Eugene O'Curry had assured the Select Committee that the landed gentry of the 1840s took little interest in the provision of lending libraries.<sup>107</sup> As the century progressed the position of the landed class was increasingly undermined. The agricultural depression of the 1870s was followed by the land war of the 1880s. 'External attacks and internal malaise'<sup>108</sup> produced a feeling of alienation among the Anglo-Irish. As L.P. Curtis jnr. has written

the gulf between Anglo-Ireland and the Celtic masses loomed larger in the 1880s and 1890s than ever before. On many estates the land war had served to burn the bridges however wooden and fragile between landlords and tenants which had taken generations to build<sup>109</sup>

Even in normal conditions the Anglo-Irish were not generally noted for an interest in intellectual pursuits. It was believed that 'decent men hunted and shot, and eschewed

ferbible intellectualism'.<sup>110</sup> Nora Robertson, writing of her Anglo-Irish childhood at the end of the nineteenth century, remarked that:

The heads of the leading Protestant country families were, generally speaking, less intellectually minded than their grandfathers had been. In the country house libraries the best books were the old ones.<sup>111</sup>

Illiteracy acted as a further barrier, particularly in rural areas. As late as 1881 over twenty five per cent of the population were unable to read or write,<sup>112</sup> and the rudimentary nature of the national school programme did little to cultivate a taste for knowledge, a fact lamented by schools' inspectors in successive official reports.<sup>113</sup>

But, even if these obstacles were overcome, there remained the perennial problem of the penny rate, which condemned most town libraries to a cash-starved existence. Not only did the penny rate work against the development of the library system in Ireland, where there were few large centres of population, but differences in the rateable value of property as between Ireland and England compounded the problem. James Wilkinson, librarian of the Cork free library, arguing the case against the penny rate in the New Ireland Review for 1902,<sup>114</sup> took a theoretical case. From a penny rate Waterford would gain an income of £190, while the English town, Wednesbury, with a comparable population, would get a return of £342. The Parliamentary Returns of 1885<sup>115</sup> gave stark evidence of what this meant in practice for a town library. Dundalk free library existed precariously with an income of £130 11s 3d, and an expenditure of £120 3s 6d.

Five years later, when a new batch of official statistics listed two additional adoptions (see table one), Dundalk library had increased its bookstock to 6,500 volumes, but its financial position had deteriorated, and the balance of expenditure over income was £16. 8s.3d. These statistics provide some justification for the reluctance of Irish towns to establish rate-supported public libraries.

Yet in spite of these handicaps, the 1890s were to witness an improvement in the fortunes of the rate-supported library in Ireland. The first significant piece of library legislation to apply to Ireland since the act of 1855 was passed during the decade, as was the Local Government Act, which created the administrative network on which the rural library service was built. But, more fundamentally, the decade saw the emergence of advocates of the library movement among leaders of public opinion in Ireland. The next chapter will look in detail at these promoters of the library ideal.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A question of mind and character, - the library as regenerator of rural Ireland, 1890-1902.

(i)

In Britain, libraries were seen as resources for self education, personal development or social control. Such views were also current in Ireland but, particularly as the end of the nineteenth century approached, another perception of libraries appeared. They came to be seen not just as resources of useful knowledge, but as repositories of the long neglected literary heritage of Ireland. Thus libraries became channels through which a revival of national consciousness would emerge.

The ideals of Thomas Davis continued to exercise a hold on the imagination of Irish nationalists, long after his untimely death in 1845, and the failure of the Young Irelanders' rebellion in 1848. The writings of Davis and his circle continued in print, and were read by a population that was, even in rural areas, increasingly literate. Most repeal reading rooms had collapsed during the Famine, but the Land League revived the concept during the 1880s, and many branches of the League had small lending libraries. J. Pope Hennessy, writing in Nineteenth Century in 1884 quoted a country priest as saying:

The Land League Rooms or National League rooms, as they are now, of 1883, are the true heirs-at-law of Thomas Davis's reading rooms of forty years ago, with this difference, that they have plenty of readers, - readers of pure vigorous national literature, - readers

such as Davis yearned for.<sup>1</sup>

An interest in 'vigorous national literature' was not confined to Irishmen at home. In 1883 a group of young Irish exiles in London founded the Southwark Irish Literary Club (later the Irish Literary Society), to 'cultivate Irish history, art and literature'.<sup>2</sup> At first the members, many of whom were aspiring writers, confined themselves to organising debates and lectures, but later they became more ambitious and planned to revive a scheme once suggested by Davis for publishing and circulating standard works of Irish nationalist interest in a cheap format. This proposal aroused the interest of the young Irish poet William Butler Yeats, who came into contact with members of the Club when he attended a lecture on Fanny Parnell<sup>3</sup> in 1886.<sup>4</sup>

Although still in his early twenties, Yeats had already acquired some prominence on the Dublin literary stage. A play, The island of statues, and a number of poems published in the Dublin University Review, had attracted favourable comment. His friend, George Russell,<sup>5</sup> had introduced Yeats to Eastern mysticism and spiritualism. Now he was to encounter a contrasting, but equally potent, influence, the literature of Gaelic Ireland, from which his Anglo-Irish background had separated him. In 1885 he met the veteran Fenian John O'Leary, who had just returned from exile in Paris. O'Leary must have seemed the very embodiment of Irish nationalism. The son of a prosperous Tipperary merchant, O'Leary had been destined for a professional career, until the works of Thomas Davis, which he read in 1846, while he



was still at school, pushed him in a different direction. 'For all that is Irish in me', he later wrote, 'the fountain and the origin must always be sought in Davis'.<sup>6</sup> This led to a life-long commitment to republicanism and revolution, involving imprisonment and exile. O'Leary's impact on Yeats was profound. As late as 1937, he would write to Ethel Mannin that he was 'an Irish nationalist of the school of O'Leary'.<sup>7</sup> He determined to regenerate Ireland's sense of nationality through her literature.

O'Leary, too, was aware of the power of the printed word. A bibliophile as well as a revolutionary, he understood the value of circulating libraries as a means of spreading republican ideals. This was the theme of his inaugural address to the Young Ireland League, an association of nationalists of different hues, inspired by the approach of the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Nation. The object of the League was somewhat vague, - to take up the work of the Young Irelanders and carry it down to 1892. Speaking in the Rotunda assembly rooms, Dublin, on 18 September 1891, O'Leary urged the League to promote the establishment of public libraries and reading rooms in connection with all nationalist organisations.<sup>8</sup> Yeats, who possessed considerable organising ability, threw himself enthusiastically into this scheme. In spite of the depression he felt after the death of Parnell in October 1891, he travelled widely throughout Ireland establishing branches of the League. In order to supply these with books,

he planned to join with the Irish Literary Society, in publishing works that would rekindle the imagination of the Irish people. Maud Gonne, with whom Yeats had become infatuated, promised to raise finance through her friends in London and Paris.<sup>9</sup> But, before the scheme began, a dispute with Charles Gavan Duffy, the last survivor of the original Young Irelanders, led Yeats to withdraw from the League.<sup>10</sup>

The League was interested in encouraging the spread of the public library movement, and its efforts were stimulated by the passing of a further public library act in 1894. This act<sup>11</sup> marked an important advance in library legislation, as it abolished the population limit, which had restricted library powers to towns with a population of over 5,000 persons, and extended the authority to raise a library rate to all towns administered by UDCs or town commissioners. It also repealed the section of the 1853 act requiring a public meeting of ratepayers prior to adoption of the public libraries act. Another clause could have greatly improved library provisions, had it been availed of: two or more districts could now amalgamate their library rate and form a joint library service. But rural districts were still excluded, and the penny rate remained unaltered.

The original bill had attempted to provide a rural library service (lobbied for by the Young Ireland League in a submission), by allowing polling districts to act as library districts, the rate to be struck by the Rural Sanitary Authority. This was opposed in committee by Sir Henry Robinson, head of the Local Government Board, who pointed out

that, since some polling districts included several Rural Sanitary Authorities, such a scheme would be impractical.<sup>12</sup> As a result, rural districts had to wait until the reorganisation of local government made it possible, at least theoretically, to provide a library service.

This reorganisation was achieved by the Local Government Act of 1898.<sup>13</sup> This act swept away the multiplicity of local administrative units and replaced them with thirty three county councils, one for each geographical county, and two for County Tipperary, - North and South Ridings. Each administrative county was divided into smaller units, called urban and rural districts, each with its own elected district council. A feature of the reformed system was that the county councils did not have much power, their duties being confined to the collection of rates and maintenance of roads. The main business of local administration was carried out by the district councils, and by the Boards of Guardians, which had survived the reorganisation and continued to deal with poor law relief.

In common with the various public library acts passed during the nineteenth century, the impetus for the Local Government Act came from a desire to harmonise British and Irish institutions, and mirrored reforms introduced in Britain in 1888. Although there was no popular demand for local government reform, the 1898 act had a marked impact on Irish society. 'It ranks', Andrew Gailey has written', as one of the few pieces of British legislation that profoundly shaped

the Irish nation that was to emerge after 1921'.<sup>14</sup> Its significance was not lost on contemporaries. Louis Paul-Dubois, a French sociologist who visited Ireland in 1906, hailed it as 'the exit of the garrison and the entrance of the people'.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, only a limited section of the people did enter, and, although the councils were elected on a broad franchise, including women and peers, they were soon dominated by a new elite of publicans, shop keepers and large farmers. They were no more favourably disposed to public libraries than their predecessors had been, and were principally concerned with patronage.

(ii)

At the time the Local Government Act became law, a change that was equally significant and much more dramatic, was taking place in Ireland. Gladstone's land act of 1870 presaged changes in the ownership of the land of Ireland, a process accelerated by the Land War of 1879-82. The cumulative effect of a series of land acts passed by successive administrations from 1881 was to create a vast new class of peasant proprietors - over 60,000 tenants purchased their holdings by 1900.<sup>16</sup> Ireland was transformed into a country of small holdings, - a long lasting change, since even in the 1980s over a half of all Irish farms contained less than thirty acres. This rural population, which comprised the majority of the population of Ireland, became increasingly dependent on agriculture, as local crafts and

industries continued to decline in the face of cheap imports from the industrial cities of Britain. At the same time the break up of the old estates, as well as the beginning of mechanisation, lessened the need for farm labourers and domestic servants. As a result, the flight from the land continued unabated, even after 1895 when social and economic conditions began to improve.<sup>17</sup> Between 1891 and 1901 Ireland's population decreased by 5.3%. This drift from the land was not confined to Ireland, a similar development disturbed observers of the British rural scene.<sup>18</sup> But, whereas in Britain this drift was in most cases to the industrial cities, in Ireland the majority of those leaving rural areas emigrated, typically to America, but also to Britain.

Searching for a reason for this rural exodus, many commentators fixed on the lack of social opportunities in the countryside, and in the small towns and villages. The stagnation of rural life was a theme that ran through the writings of contemporaries, both Irish and foreign. Paul-Dubois wrote of the dreariness of life in rural Ireland and its affect on the national character.

The Irish question is, above all, a question of mind and character...If Ireland is in a condition of decadence, the true reason is the moral and mental decadence of the nation. The fatalism, the lethargy, the moral inertia and intellectual passivity, the general absence of energy and character, of method and discipline are caused by this.<sup>19</sup>

Moritz J. Bonn, a German economist who visited Ireland shortly before Paul-Dubois, was also impressed by the dreariness of rural Ireland:

Many of these small Irish towns are the most depressing sight that one could see in Western Europe. The misery of the open country is at least softened by the impression of distance. Here the dirty cabins, planted close against each other, line neglected streets to which a few houses of several storeys seek in vain to impart an urban character. There is scarcely any urban society with cultivated interests. The clergy of the different denominations, a couple of officials, a land agent or two, the manager of the local branch bank, a doctor, a lawyer; that is all the culture-bringing element which is to be found; there is perhaps a convent in the neighbourhood, and one or two grammar schools not calculated to advance the mind in any excessive degree.<sup>20</sup>

The vision of rural Ireland in contemporary fiction was no less critical. Father Ralph - the hero of Gerald O'Donovan's semi-autobiographical novel of the same name<sup>21</sup> - presents a similar picture of the archetypical town of Bunnahone, a squalid, dreary place, where young men lounge at street corners by day and socialise in public houses at night, while women gossip, or peer from behind lace curtains, where there is no industry, no initiative, and no intellectual entertainment. Canon Patrick Sheehan, the most popular Irish novelist of the time, wrote in My new curate, published in 1898 'Nothing on earth can cure the inertia of Ireland. It weighs down like the weeping clouds on the damp heavy earth, and there's no lifting it'.<sup>22</sup>

Unconsciously paralleling the views of Samuel Smiles and the advocates of Mechanics' Institutes, these commentators saw the provision of rural libraries as a means of counteracting the attraction of 'the far off hills'. In addition, there was the urgent need to disseminate up to date scientific and technological information among the newly

created peasant proprietors. This view was particularly widespread among advocates of the co-operative movement. This movement had its roots in writings of Quaker philanthropists of the early eighteenth century, but its chief advocate was Robert Owen (1771-1858), whose workshops and community institutions at New Lanark, in Scotland, and later at New Harmony, in the United States, attracted widespread interest among philanthropists and radicals alike.<sup>23</sup> Apart from a few shortlived experiments, this ideal was not attempted in Ireland, until the appearance of an effective organiser in the person of Sir Horace Plunkett.<sup>24</sup>

Plunkett was born in 1854, the third son of Lord Edward Dunsany of Dunsany Castle, Co. Meath. Following education at Eton he went to Oxford, where he read modern history, graduating in 1877. He later wrote of his days as an undergraduate 'It was at this period of my life that I took a strange, somewhat vague idealism'.<sup>25</sup> Observing the havoc that the Industrial Revolution had wrought on rural life in England, he determined to save the Irish countryside from the same fate. Contemporaneous events suggested to him that this might be achieved through the co-operative movement. This movement had been revitalised by the establishment of the Co-operative Union in 1870. One of the leading personalities in this revitalisation was Goldwin Smith, who had been professor of modern history at Oxford from 1858 - 1866, and whose influence would still have been felt during Plunkett's student days. Goldwin Smith had even written a book - Irish History and Irish character, published in 1861,<sup>26</sup> in

which he advocated agricultural reform as a solution for Ireland's problems.

Events nearer to home would have impelled Plunkett towards an interest in rural problems. Although born in England, Plunkett was always conscious of his position as a member of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy. As such he was not immune from nineteenth century paternalism, as is hinted by the title of a pamphlet he wrote in 1908: Noblesse oblige: an Irish rendering.<sup>27</sup> It was this belief that helps to explain his life-long dedication to Ireland, when ill health and disappointments would have deterred less resolute spirits. Also, although an eminently practical man, he would have been infected by the ruralism which, in the words of Hoppen:

was shared by landlords, priests, romantic nationalists and men of letters, and constituted a unifying thread among the many splinterings of Irish life<sup>28</sup>

Plunkett's early conversion to co-operative thinking can be seen by his establishment of a co-operative store in Dunsany, when he returned there after graduation. The following year ill health forced him to seek a warmer climate and he spent ten years in Wyoming as a rancher. In 1889, on the death of his father, he returned to Dunsany and at once began to promote agricultural co-operation. His first aim was to establish co-operative creameries where farmers could reap the benefits of their own industry, rather than having their profits pocketed by middlemen. At first Plunkett worked through the British based Co-operative Union, but in 1894 he established the Irish Agricultural Organisation



Society, (hereafter IAOS), to co-ordinate Irish co-operative policy. Such was its success that, by 1899, 374 co-operative societies were affiliated to the parent body. The same year one of Plunkett's main ambitions was realised, when the government established a Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, Plunkett himself being its first vice-president.

In 1908 Plunkett's admirers purchased No. 84 Merrion Square in the heart of Georgian Dublin. This became the headquarters of the IAOS, replacing their old offices at 22 Lincoln Place, and was christened Plunkett House. It became the powerhouse, not only of co-operative ideals, but also of the many projects Plunkett was involved in throughout his life. The phrase 'Plunkett House' became synonymous with a certain political attitude - basically Anglo-Irish, but firmly dedicated to the welfare of Ireland. Thus it was viewed with suspicion, if not dislike, at various stages by most strands of Irish public opinion.

Although not a physically impressive man, Plunkett was possessed of a forceful and charismatic personality and quickly gathered around him a group of fellow enthusiasts for rural reform. Some of these played a prominent part in the spread of the county library service, which is the subject of this study. Fr. Thomas A. Finlay SJ, professor of political economy at the Royal University, was an early ally.<sup>29</sup> He had come into contact with the co-operative philosophy while studying in Germany, and had been convinced of its relevance for Ireland. A newspaper account of a speech by Plunkett, led

Fr Finlay to seek his acquaintance in 1889. A long association followed. Fr. Finlay was present at the inaugural meeting of the IAOS in 1894, and became its first vice-president, a position he held until his death in 1940. As a Catholic priest and an avowed nationalist, his advocacy of the co-operative movement helped to counteract the misgivings many Catholic priests felt about the concept.<sup>30</sup> It was Fr. Finlay who suggested that the IAOS establish a newspaper to propagate its ideals, and when the Irish Homestead was established in 1895, he became its first editor. He was succeeded in 1906 by George Russell, Yeats's theosophist friend. Russell had joined the IAOS on Plunkett's invitation in 1898, an unlikely, but successful, organiser of agricultural co-operatives in County Galway, and later assistant secretary of the IAOS. Thomas Spring Rice, Second Baron Monteagle, was also present at the establishment of the IAOS and was its president from 1902-1904. Plunkett was a frequent visitor to Mount Trenchard, Monteagle's family seat near Foynes, in County Limerick. Plunkett himself maintained that the idea of a co-operative movement which grew into the IAOS came to him following a discussion that he had with some of Lord Monteagle's tenants at Mount Trenchard in September 1889.<sup>31</sup> Monteagle had established a number of co-operative enterprises on his estate, including the first co-operative creamery at Ardagh, and the first co-operative conference was held in the nearby Newcastle West in 1891. Later this part of County Limerick was to be the scene of the

Carnegie United Kingdom Trust's first rural library experiment.

Plunkett's vision of Ireland was not simply an economic one. His famous slogan - 'better farming, better business, better living' - was a trinity of equal parts. In his book Ireland in the New Century, he stressed the need for the regeneration of the soul of Ireland. He believed that it was necessary to provide farmers with access to information on up-to-date agricultural methods. But he realised that something more was needed to give new life to the Irish countryside. He was pleased to note that:

the desire that, together with material amelioration, there should be a corresponding intellectual advancement and a greater beauty in life, has prompted many farmers' societies to use their organisation for higher ends. A considerable number of them have started village libraries, and by an admirable selection of books have brought to their members, not only the means of educating themselves in the more difficult technical problems of their industry, but also a means of access to that enchanted world of Irish thought which inspires the Gaelic Revival.<sup>32</sup>

A similar view was expressed by Fr. Finlay, when he told delegates to the society's annual conference in 1900 that they should do more to make Ireland 'a pleasant place for boys and girls to live in' because 'the more pleasant life was for them the more firmly they would attach themselves to their own country'.<sup>33</sup>

Thus the rural library became an important element in the co-operative philosophy, and was strongly advocated in the Irish Homestead. In 1899 the Irish Homestead sponsored a competition offering a prize of two pounds for the best list of a hundred books suitable for inclusion in a village

library, - competitors being warned that 'books of a strongly religious or political character must be rigidly excluded'.<sup>34</sup> The competition attracted thirty entries, first prize being awarded to W.P.Coyne, Fr. Finlay's predecessor at the Royal University. The second prize was awarded to Father Gerald O'Donovan of Loughrea, County Galway, who was an active co-operative supporter. Fr. O'Donovan was appointed chairman of a special IAOS sub-committee on village libraries, which reported to the fourth annual conference, in December 1899. The sub-committee recommended that every co-operative society should establish a library of books suitable for agricultural communities and should, moreover, utilise its committee rooms as reading rooms and social centres. In proposing the report, O'Donovan outlined the advantages of village libraries both for supplying technical books, and for 'placing in the hands of the reading public in country districts a better class of literature than they now obtain'. 'There were' he concluded 'very few amusements of any kind in the country, and it was hoped that circulating libraries and reading rooms would form the basis of a better social life'.<sup>35</sup> In spite of this argument, fears of disputes about book selection made the delegates reluctant to adopt the report, and it was put back for consideration.

An amalgamation of both prize winning lists was published in the Irish Homestead on 20 January 1900. In an accompanying article, O'Donovan reiterated the advantages to be gained from village libraries, and urged co-operative

societies to donate ten pounds towards their foundation. He also outlined some library rules that societies might follow. These showed that O'Donovan did not envisage free access to all, as a subscription of 1d to 3d was to be paid for each book borrowed.

Although the annual conference had not endorsed the principle of the co-operative library, a number of individual societies did listen to O'Donovan's urgings, and the IAOS annual report for 1901 listed thirty societies with libraries attached. The most successful of these was at Tissara, in County Roscommon. This co-operative library owed its origins to the interest of Violet and Rachel Mangan, whose brother Arthur was the Roscommon IAOS organiser. A description of the inaugural meeting that appeared in the Irish Homestead on 25 November 1899 captures an atmosphere of enthusiasm and co-operation that must have pleased Plunkett.

An important meeting was held in the school room, Four Roads, Tissara, Co. Roscommon on 16th inst. as a step towards the foundation of a village library for the parish. A large and appreciative audience filled the house... The Rev. Fr. D. Gaffney C.C. occupied the chair and opened the proceedings by a short, but eloquent address, dealing with the object in view and the pleasure and profit to be derived from such an institution in the locality. Mr. A. T. S. Mangan briefly addressed the meeting wishing before long every society should have its little village library allied, as a healthy and refining recreation for its members. A set of carefully drafted rules were read and explained, and a committee of five, with an hon. secretary, duly elected. After a few suitable words in conclusion from the chairman, the meeting dispersed, amid expressions of satisfaction and pleasure from those present.

The enthusiasm seems to have been sustained. In a letter to the Irish Homestead of 1 April 1900, Violet Mangan

described the library as containing eighty books, with sixty five borrowers on the roll. Irish history, poetry and novels were popular, titles mentioned included Yeats's Irish fairy and folktales, and the detective novels of Arthur Conan Doyle. Flourishing co-operative libraries also existed at Enniscorthy, County Wexford and Caltra, County Galway.

Village libraries also featured in the 'Stop Emigration Competition' organised by the Irish Homestead in 1901, Plunkett donated fifty pounds in prizes to the society that did most to improve the quality of life in its area over a six month period. Among possible projects suggested was the establishment of village libraries. Societies were reminded of the recent decision of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction to grant three pounds to libraries for the purchase of books on technical subjects. A number of societies did establish village libraries as part of their work for the competition, although dances and concerts were the most popular cultural activities. The society at Began, County Mayo, claimed to have 'three libraries in the parish all circulating splendidly,<sup>36</sup> while the report from Foynes, County Limerick that the society had taken over the library of the Workingmens' Club, was a further indication of the continued existence throughout the country of reading rooms.<sup>37</sup>

(iii)

Despite Plunkett's involvement, at a later stage of his

life, with the rate-supported county library service, there is no evidence that he took an interest in public libraries in the years before 1902. The campaign to extend library powers to RDCs was carried out, not by the co-operative movement, but by the library profession. As the library profession expanded to keep pace with the adoption of the libraries act in British urban areas, its character changed, and the academic librarians from the universities, who had initially dominated, came to be outnumbered by librarians from the free public libraries. In 1877 the profession established its own organisation, the Library Association, which was active in promoting the interests of its members. Annual conferences were held from an early stage, and a journal, the Library Association Record, was issued from 1899. Since many librarians entered the profession as school leavers, the association established its own examination system leading to associateship and fellowship. The Library Association was not simply concerned with the status of the profession. Its objects included 'promoting the best possible administration of libraries, and the formation of new ones where possible'.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, the Association acted as a pressure group to obtain whatever changes in library legislation were felt desirable.

The position of rural areas in England was a cause for concern and the Association sought to have them included in library legislation. Partial success was achieved by the Public Libraries Act of 1892,<sup>39</sup> which provided that 'every

urban district, and every parish...which is not in an urban district shall be a library district'.<sup>40</sup> Parishes were permitted to combine and amalgamate their library rate to provide a library service. This act, which applied to England and Wales only, made little impact, due to the fact that the penny rate did not produce sufficient income. The impact was further weakened by the clause that required a poll of ratepayers be held before adoption of the act. This requirement was altered to a resolution of the town council by the Public Libraries Act of 1893.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, however, the older requirement remained for rural areas. The county councils, which had been established in Britain by the 1888 Local Government Act, offered a more viable basis for a rural library service than the parish, and by the end of the century it had become Library Association policy that these councils should be given library powers. This remained a distant objective, and Kelly has thus described the rural library service in Britain prior to 1914:

As to rural areas, when they had any service at all they had still to be content with impoverished schemes, usually under private auspices,<sup>42</sup> and based on the periodical exchange of book boxes

Although mostly concerned with the library service in Britain, the Library Association also took an interest in the progress of the service in Ireland. Their annual conference was held in Dublin in October 1884, to coincide with the opening of Dublin corporation's first public libraries at Thomas Street and Capel Street. By the 1890s the Association had a number of Irish members, mostly from the rate-supported



urban public libraries, which were beginning to offer a service to readers. Free public libraries opened in Belfast and Limerick in 1888 and 1893 respectively. Cork corporation, which had adopted the libraries act in 1855, did not provide a library service (and only then in temporary premises), until 1892. The first librarian, James Wilkinson,<sup>43</sup> was a member of the Library Association who was also active in promoting the cause of the free library in Ireland. The Library Association's most noteworthy Irish member was Thomas Lyster, who had joined the staff of the Royal Dublin Society on graduating from Trinity College in 1878.<sup>44</sup> Lyster's arrival at the Royal Dublin Society coincided with the Science and Art Museum Act of 1877, which transferred the Society's library to government control where it became the nucleus of the National Library of Ireland.<sup>45</sup> In 1895 Lyster became librarian of the National Library, a position he held until 1920. He also joined the Library Association and was vice president for a number of years from 1899. This was an honorary position, which seems to have been conferred on Lyster as a recognition by the Association of its Irish members.

The passing of the Local Government Act in 1898 encouraged the Library Association to lobby for the extension to rural districts in Ireland of the same library facilities that existed in England and Wales. In 1899 the Association's legislative committee succeeded in having an amendment to the 1894 public libraries act introduced in the house of lords by Lord Monteagle, but it was withdrawn due to pressure of

parliamentary business.<sup>46</sup> However, it was obvious that the bill was not likely to prove controversial, and, when the Library Association obtained the support of the Irish Parliamentary Party (now re-united after the Parnellite split), its success was assured. John Dillon, the ablest of the nationalist M.P.s, introduced a bill drafted by the Library Association in the house of commons in July 1902. This bill proposed to extend the power to adopt the libraries act to RDCs and to raise the limit for the library rate to 2d. Unfortunately, the penny rate was still sacrosanct, and this provision was withdrawn. Apart from this amendment, the bill attracted no comment in either house and received the royal assent on 8 August, 1902.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Enthusiasts and sceptics,

#### - the rate-supported rural library, 1902-1913.

##### (i)

Under the terms of this new public libraries act<sup>1</sup>, RDCs could become library authorities simply by passing a resolution to adopt the public libraries act of 1855, and by raising the appropriate rate. While the rate was still fixed at a maximum of one penny, a provision of the act could have been used to overcome the consequent difficulties. County councils were empowered to make grants to library authorities out of funds available to them for technical education. However, this provision was not used until 1923, when Donegal county council financed its library scheme by means of it.<sup>2</sup> In law, the barriers to the establishment of a countrywide public library service had been removed. In fact, there was little change, and the RDCs showed the same reluctance to adopt the public libraries act as their urban counterparts had shown since 1855.

The Local Government Board, which was responsible for the administration of locally elected bodies, did not seem anxious to tell RDCs about their newly acquired power, and delayed informing them of the act, and how it might be adopted, until February 1904.<sup>3</sup> The Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, in spite of its connection with the co-operative movement, was niggardly in its support of

public libraries. Whereas in Britain libraries received grants of up to £1,000 to purchase technical books, in Ireland this grant amounted to no more than three pounds.

John Dillon, who had introduced the bill in the house of commons, received some credit for its success, both during and after its passage through parliament. James Wilkinson, who, as a librarian should have been well informed, wrote in the New Ireland Review of 'Mr Dillon's amendment to the Public Libraries (Ireland) Act recently introduced in the house of commons'.<sup>4</sup> This misapprehension must have been widespread, since it provoked the Library Association to include a paragraph in the Library Association Record stating that:

Credit for initiating the measure rests with the Library Association...It has been assumed that it is entirely the work of the Irish Party, and, in justice to the Library Association we venture to state the facts of the case<sup>5</sup>

The Association was not being ungenerous in this statement. Dillon's support seems to have been confined to parliamentary procedure, and there is no evidence that he showed further interest in public libraries.<sup>6</sup> In any event, he was out of the country for most of 1903, and on his return became embroiled in the perennial land question.<sup>7</sup>

Only two members of the Irish Parliamentary Party championed the cause of rural libraries. Although they were of different backgrounds, both represented Kerry constituencies at Westminster, and both were active in the resurgence of interest in Irish culture which characterised the early 1900s, itself the fruit of the spadework of Yeats

and others during the 1890s. Thomas O'Donnell, who represented the western part of Kerry, had been a national school teacher before entering parliament, and his support for the public library movement was based on his appreciation of its educational value. In 1901, while on a fund raising tour of America, he met Andrew Carnegie, and obtained a promise of £1,500 for a library, which was to be built in Tralee.<sup>8</sup> Shortly after the passing of the library act of 1902, he wrote a pamphlet entitled Parish Libraries, which he circularised to each member of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, then numbering over 1,000 teachers. In this pamphlet he called on all branches of the organisation to contact their local councillors, and urge them to adopt the public libraries act. He expressed confidence that, if this happened, 'there will be few nationalist councils in our country that will not have put the act into operation before the end of 1903'<sup>9</sup> Although O'Donnell was sincere in his support for the public library movement, a reading of his pamphlet shows that he had not grasped the difference between the rate-supported public library, which was open to all, and the parish library, which was, by its nature, confined to those of a particular religious persuasion. This is shown by the fact that his pamphlet was titled Parish Libraries, and also by his statement that councils could now 'levy a rate for the purpose of establishing parish libraries', which was a complete misinterpretation of the public libraries act.

This pamphlet did not mark the end of O'Donnell's interest in libraries. A decade later he was actively lobbying the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust for finance, as will be described in Chapter Four.

As a former national teacher O'Donnell naturally directed his propaganda towards the teaching profession. John Boland, on the other hand, who came from a wealthy Dublin industrial family,<sup>10</sup> (although he represented South Kerry from 1900 to 1918), attempted to win the support of Catholic public opinion for rural libraries. Boland was a man of literary tastes, and contributed articles to the New Ireland Review, a quarterly founded in 1894, with Fr. Finlay as editor. The Review aimed to promote 'a healthy activity of thought among our readers, and a larger knowledge of things which Irishmen ought to know', while keeping 'within the limits which a rigorous respect for the religious faith of our countrymen proposes'.<sup>11</sup> It circulated among middle class Catholics, both lay and clerical, and this was the audience that Boland addressed in the June 1902 issue. He argued for the establishment of free public libraries throughout Ireland as an urgent necessity to counteract the 'cheap, ephemeral, and too often degrading, literature that finds its way over from England',<sup>12</sup> - a moral argument likely to win favour. Boland's article was subsequently issued as a pamphlet by the Irish Literary Society of London, which was still campaigning for rural libraries, even after the collapse of Yeats's library scheme.

Boland was also involved in an organisation founded

specifically to encourage RDCs to adopt the public libraries act. This was the Irish Rural Libraries Association [hereafter IRLA], which was founded at a public meeting in the Dublin Mansion House on 26 April 1904. An account of this meeting given in the Library Association Record, outlined the objects of the IRLA as follows:

- (i) to disseminate information, by leaflets, lectures or otherwise, as to the facilities for establishing libraries now enjoyed by Rural District Councils.
- (ii) to study the working of such libraries where they exist, to draw up schemes for their organisation, and generally to aid Local Government bodies in putting the libraries act into operation.
- (iii) to draw up a suitable list of books for rural libraries.<sup>13</sup>

The IRLA attracted the interest of individuals who were generally concerned with the rural question, and as a result the first committee had a decidedly heterogeneous appearance. There was a strong co-operative element. Gerald O'Donovan was president, and George Russell acted as secretary. Politics were represented by John Boland and Hugh Law M.P., while the publishers M.J. Gill, and D.J. O'Donoghue might have had a vested interest in the promotion of libraries. Lyster was the sole representative of the library profession.

The main achievement of the IRLA was the issuing of a pamphlet The organisation of rural libraries in Ireland, which was printed towards the end of 1904. This pamphlet, subtitled A memorandum for the use of district councils and

voluntary library associations, aimed at providing a manual for the establishment of a public library system in a rural area. It indicated the legal steps to be taken, described the correct type of person to have on the library committee, and outlined a possible system for circulating books. As an encouragement, it included the rules and regulations of the free public library recently established in Rathkeale RDC, County Limerick.<sup>14</sup>

The IRLA did not see itself as a permanent body, but rather as a pressure group. Indeed a resolution, passed at the inaugural meeting, proposed that the association be constituted for three years only. In their pamphlet the committee confidently predicted that 'after three or four years' active work, the association will have largely accomplished its object.'<sup>15</sup> With this goal in mind, the association, in the words of the Irish Homestead, 'hurled information' at the RDCs,<sup>16</sup> circularising them with details of how to establish a rural library system, but without bringing about the widespread adoptions of the act that the members had anticipated.

Perhaps those involved in the association became disheartened by the lack of response. Perhaps the members of the first committee were too involved in other organisations to devote sufficient time to promoting the public library ideal among apathetic district councillors. For whatever reason, the IRLA seems to have disbanded around 1907, its objects largely unfulfilled.

The interest which the co-operative movement had shown



in the ideal of the village library did not end with the passing of the act of 1902, as is shown by the prominence of co-operative enthusiasts in the IRLA. George Russell had become editor of the Irish Homestead in 1904, and, through its columns, he urged co-operators to influence their local councillors to adopt the public libraries act. An article he wrote describing the ideal co-operative village placed the free library in a prominent position. In a shrewd appeal to the self interest of farmers, Russell told the 1909 annual conference of the IAOS that rural libraries would 'fill up the vacant and unemployed hours of agricultural labourers'.<sup>17</sup>

The co-operative libraries, which had come into being following Plunkett's competitions, still continued in existence. From time to time, the Irish Homestead noted the establishment of new libraries, as at Dunfanaghy, County Donegal in April 1909. There was, however, a certain shift of emphasis away from the village library to the encouragement of a community spirit by the provision of village halls. Once again, the Tissara society was at the forefront of this development. The Tissara co-operative hall was opened in 1905, and the village library was re-located there.<sup>18</sup> In the Inishowen peninsula, County Donegal, Fr. Philip O'Doherty built a number of halls for the use of villagers of all religious persuasions.<sup>19</sup>

The IAOS sought to encourage co-operative societies to build halls, by promising six grants of £200 to societies for this purpose, the only condition being that each society

would raise an additional fifty pounds from the local community. These grants were facilitated by a bequest received from the Pembroke Charitable Trust, The grant was first announced in the Irish Homestead of 19 December 1908 and, although the grants were all allocated by the end of the following April,<sup>20</sup> it appears that applications were slow to reach Plunkett House. Perhaps the prospect of raising fifty pounds daunted the societies, especially by contrast with the prospect (to be outlined below), of obtaining a hall without cost, by means of a grant from Andrew Carnegie.

By 1913 promotion of village libraries had been handed over to the United Irishwomen - the womens' branch of the IAOS, which had been founded in 1910. The founders of the United Irishwomen were inspired by the 'better living' part of Plunkett's slogan, and aimed at the social and intellectual development of country women. One of the first members, Ellice Pilkington thus outlined their programme:

The United Irishwomen will endeavour to procure and make good use of village halls, where they will organise classes, give lectures, concerts, get up plays, have debates and open libraries to circulate between branches.<sup>21</sup>

In order to obtain books for these libraries, the United Irishwomen proposed that a central library be established at Plunkett House, from which books would be despatched to branches for a small subscription, (a system that was followed at a later stage by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust).

The libraries organised by the United Irishwomen had a strong educational basis. An appeal published in the Irish

Homestead in 1913 asked for gifts of books on gardening and home economics, but declined 'society novels', on the grounds that they were unsuitable for rural readers.<sup>22</sup> The same year a fresh appeal was made for books, as the numbers in the central library could not meet the demand of the various United Irishwomen branches.

(ii)

Those who were involved in promoting village libraries through the IRLA or the co-operative movement saw these libraries as just one aspect of a complete regeneration of Irish society. Their interest in libraries was philosophical, and few worked in libraries either in a full time or voluntary capacity. In 1904, a further organisation was founded to encourage the development of public libraries which, in contrast, attracted a number of full time librarians to its ranks. This was Cumann na Leabharlann, founded at a meeting held, significantly, in a Dublin corporation library, on 2 June 1904. In the first issue of its journal, An Leabharlann, the aims of the Cumann were outlined as follows:

- (i) to promote the establishment of public libraries and reading rooms.
- (ii) to influence those engaged in library work to recognise the opportunities for good which their positions afford, and the importance of the duties and obligations attached to such positions.
- (iii) to promote the study of bibliography.

(iv) to improve library administration and method.<sup>23</sup>

Thus the Cumann had broader aims than the British Library Association. It saw itself as being a cultural, as well as a professional, organisation, and adopted as its motto Thomas Davis's aphorism "Educate that you may be free". In spite of its name, a literal translation of 'library association', Cumann na Leabharlann attracted a more diverse membership than the British association. Unlike the IRLA there was no obvious co-operative influence, and the membership, which grew to 169 in 1906, was predominantly Dublin based.<sup>24</sup> Literature, politics and librarianship mixed on the first committee. The ubiquitous Thomas Lyster was one of the four vice-presidents. The others were John Kells Ingram, who had been librarian at Trinity College, and was a past president of the Library Association, the novelist Seamus MacManus, and Edward Martyn, who was associated with W.B. Yeats in the founding of the Irish Literary Theatre, later the Abbey Theatre. The Cumann did attract a number of librarians from the rate-supported city libraries. John Whelan, one of the two secretaries, was on the staff of the Dublin corporation branch library at Kevin Street. Henry Dixon, the other secretary, was director of the Sinn Fein Printing Company.<sup>25</sup> His fellow director, Arthur Griffith, who was also on the committee of Cumann na Leabharlann, had coined the phrase 'Sinn Fein' meaning 'ourselves' to epitomise his policy of political, economic and cultural independence for Ireland, which he pursued through the Sinn Fein League, founded in 1905.<sup>26</sup>

With such a membership it is not surprising that cultural concerns featured more strongly than the mechanics of library administration in the Cumann's journal, An Leabharlann which was published from 1905 to 1909. The public library was put forward as a panacea for all the ills afflicting Ireland. It would act as a counter attraction to the bright lights of foreign cities, but would also prepare emigrants to succeed abroad. It would preserve the Irish language by spreading books in Irish among the people, while at the same time counteracting the anglicising influence of the national school curriculum. Some commentators even praised the public library as an encouragement to temperance, as in the following extract:

It may easily be believed that had Irish country towns and villages been furnished with libraries half a century ago, Ireland would not have<sup>27</sup> much more than half as many drunkards as she has today.

In summary, the Cumann lauded the public library as indispensable to every village, on the grounds that it was the property of the inhabitants, rate-supported, and freely accessible to all.

The Cumann did not confine its propaganda on behalf of public libraries to the pages of An Leabharlann. Members of its council actively lobbied organisations which they felt would be useful allies in their campaign to have the public libraries act adopted in more urban and rural districts. As their members were mainly Dublin residents, they especially sought the support of organisations which were influential in the small towns and villages, in particular the Gaelic

League, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, and various Trades Councils.

The Gaelic League had been established in 1893 by Douglas Hyde with the object of preserving and, if possible, reviving all aspects of Gaelic culture. By 1905, when the Cumann attempted to enlist its support, the Gaelic League was at the height of its popularity, with over 500 branches spread throughout the country.<sup>28</sup> It seemed likely that the members of these branches and the champions of rural libraries would be mutually supportive. As members of the Gaelic League were intent on propagating everything that was Irish, whether language, literature or music, they were likely to appreciate the value of a public library, not only for its book stock, but also as a venue for the evening classes and social events that played an important part in the League's success. The independence of the rate-supported library from clerical influence would also have attracted the Gaelic League, which was, at least initially, a determinedly non sectarian organisation. From the Cumann's point of view the fact that League activists tended to be well educated, with a high proportion of teachers,<sup>29</sup> made them useful allies. These were the potential leaders of their communities, who could influence RDCs to adopt the public libraries act.

Sean T. O'Ceallaigh, an assistant in the National Library, who was also an enthusiastic Gaelic Leaguer,<sup>30</sup> argued the close connection between the revival of the Irish

language and the rural library question in An Leabharlann.<sup>31</sup> Ignorance and apathy among country people were the reasons why it was difficult to establish branches of the Gaelic League in rural areas, he maintained. Country dwellers had to be taught to appreciate their native heritage, and the only way to do this was to establish, as O Ceallaigh put it, 'libraries of the right sort', in every village in Ireland. He urged language enthusiasts to publicise the advantages of libraries, to send resolutions to RDCs, and to organise deputations in support of adoption of the public libraries act. In pursuance of the Cumann's policy, Thomas Lyster and Seamus MacManus attended the Gaelic League's 1905 Ard Fheis. In an address to the delegates, they explained the object of the Cumann, and outlined the legal steps that had to be followed before a rate-supported library could be established. They appealed to their audience to take up the cause of the public library, especially in rural areas.<sup>32</sup> At least one branch of the League took this appeal to heart. The first attempt to have the public libraries act adopted in Newcastle West, County Limerick in 1906, originated with the Knockaderry branch of the Gaelic League.<sup>33</sup>

The Cumann sought more directly to gain the support of teachers by sending another delegation, this time to the Irish National Teachers' Organisation's Congress at Easter 1905. Teachers were urged to influence their local district councillors to adopt the public libraries act, and to become voluntary librarians, should branch libraries be established in their schools.<sup>34</sup> The same year deputations from the Cumann

attended the Trades Congress in Wexford, and the Poor Law Officers' Association meeting in Cork.<sup>35</sup> They also addressed a number of RDCs, and supplied them with copies of John Boland's article from the New Ireland Review. Among the councils they addressed was Balrothery RDC, which covered most of north County Dublin. The council had adopted the public libraries act in 1904, but limited the library rate to a half penny in the pound. Lyster and Henry Dixon attended the first meeting of the district library committee on 30 November. Their arguments persuaded the committee to accept a resolution calling on the RDC to raise the library rate to one penny, which was passed at a subsequent meeting of the council. Of equal significance was their decision, again prompted by Lyster, to write to Andrew Carnegie for a building grant.<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately, this enthusiastic reaction was exceptional and, in 1906, no RDC adopted the public libraries act. In its annual report, published in An Leabharlann, the Cumann complained of the lack of practical support from the Gaelic League and the other bodies that had promised to further the cause of public libraries: 'although of first educational importance, their value seems to be but little appreciated, else such apathy would not be known'.<sup>37</sup>

Although the members of the Cumann, particularly those who were full time librarians, were well aware of the weakness of public library legislation, especially with regard to the penny rate, they seem to have had no



legislative policy, and did not lobby M.P.s, or promote private member's bills, as the Library Association did in Britain. The Cumann only expressed opinions on library legislation when this was felt to be detrimental to Ireland, a policy that brought them into conflict with the Library Association over the question of the library rate.

As has been indicated in the previous chapter, the members of the Library Association were aware of the need for a county based rural library service, rather than the parish based service provided by the 1892 act. But, pragmatically, they concentrated on lobbying for the removal of the penny rate limitation, which they identified as the principal barrier to the development of an effective library service, whether urban or rural. In the early years of the twentieth century the Association redoubled its efforts to obtain the desired legislation, the frustration of the members being expressed in a motion passed at its 1902 annual conference which 'instructed the executive to take immediate steps to secure the removal of the rate limit'.<sup>38</sup> The Association's legislative committee drafted a private member's bill which was introduced in the house of commons in 1905 by J. Tennant, a sympathetic M.P.<sup>39</sup> Although this bill would have marked a considerable improvement in library legislation, Cumann an Leabharlann opposed it. Through Lyster, an officer of both associations, the Cumann asked the legislative committee to redraft the bill so as to exclude Ireland from its terms.<sup>40</sup> In part, this opposition was based on a misunderstanding of the bill. It was believed that it was intended to abolish

the library powers of urban districts, a misconception refuted by H.W. Forvargue, the Library Association's legal adviser.<sup>41</sup> Circumstances prevented this dispute from developing further. Tennant's bill suffered the fate of many private member's bills, in that it was repeatedly 'talked out' by M.P.s opposed to any increases in local rates, and it failed to achieve a first reading until March 1913,<sup>42</sup> by which time the Cumann had ceased to exist. The Cumann's other involvement with library legislation also saw it opposing an increase in the penny rate. In 1906 the Cumann opposed a local government bill promoted by the Chief Secretary, Augustine Birrell. This bill, which was a response to a cash crisis in the Dublin corporation library service, would have enabled the Local Government Board to raise the library rate to two pence, if the majority of the members of a local authority, urban or rural, requested it. The Cumann was vehemently opposed to this bill, which it saw as an undesirable increase in the power of the Local Government Board. A petition was organised to complain about acts of parliament which sought to limit 'the powers of elected bodies and deprive them of rights already possessed.'<sup>43</sup> The Cumann claimed that thousands of people signed this petition, but all its anxiety was unnecessary, since the bill was withdrawn in 1908, following opposition from Dublin corporation.

The attitude of the Cumann to both these measures suggests that the development of the library service was not

the main concern of its leading members. Both measures would have removed the penny rate limitation, which the Cumann acknowledged, in its correspondence with the Library Association, was the principal barrier to the provision of an adequate library service. Evidently the nationalist opinions of the Cumann's members overrode their concern for improvements in library legislation. In one case, they opposed 'foreign' interference in Irish affairs; in the other, they opposed any increase in the power of the Local Government Board which, in the eyes of many nationalists, was the agent of a foreign power. This explanation for the Cumann's actions can only be speculative since, apart from what was published in An Leabharlann, no records of the Cumann's proceedings appear to have survived. Nor is it possible to say why, following the appearance of its 1910 journal (a purely bibliographic supplement), the association seems to have abruptly disbanded, leaving the rural library service to await support, not from within Ireland, but from the philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie.

(iii)

In a tribute to Andrew Carnegie, published in the Library Association Record shortly after his death, in August 1919, A.L. Hetherington wrote

no public movement owes so much' [as the public library movement], to the generosity of one who counted it a privilege to help those prepared to help themselves<sup>44</sup>

As an indication of the library profession's indebtedness to Carnegie, the Record marked his death with the black - bordered mourning notice usually reserved for the death of the sovereign. Nor was this expression of respect exaggerated. At the time of Carnegie's death, over half of the local authorities in the United Kingdom that possessed rate-supported public libraries had benefited from his generosity. In Ireland, forty-seven of the fifty eight public libraries (including all those in rural districts), had been helped financially by Carnegie. In total, \$891,922 had been granted towards the erection of ninety public library buildings in the north, east, and south of the country.<sup>45</sup>

Although the basis of this wealth was the American steel industry, Andrew Carnegie was a Scotsman, born in Dunfermline in 1835. When Carnegie was thirteen, his family emigrated to Allegheny, Pennsylvania, where he went to work, first in a cotton mill, and later as a messenger boy with the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. Carnegie's passion for public libraries, and his profound belief in their ability to elevate the masses, can be traced to an incident in his teenage years. A retired Allegheny industrialist, Colonel Anderson, opened his large private library to ambitious boys, like Andrew Carnegie, who were allowed to borrow books for home reading. In his essay The Gospel of Wealth, Carnegie described how he anticipated his weekly visits to Anderson's library 'with intense longing', and how he resolved

if ever wealth came to me it should be used to

establish free libraries so that other poor boys might receive opportunities similar to those for which we were indebted to that noble man.<sup>46</sup>

From an early age Carnegie proved to have a shrewd head for business, and by the time he was twenty seven he had an annual income of \$50,000. At forty six he was the acknowledged leader of the American steel industry with business interests worth over \$2,000,000.<sup>47</sup> He had not forgotten the resolution of his youth and, in a private memo written in 1868, he pledged that once he had achieved an annual income of \$80,000 he would use any excess income for benevolent purposes. By 1881 he felt able to carry out this pledge, and he returned in triumph to his native Dunfermline, where he presided at the laying of the foundation stone of the town's free library, his first gift of this kind.

If Carnegie seemed the embodiment of the self-made man, idealised by the Mechanics' Institutes, his philosophy too had its roots in the ideas of Samuel Smiles and the utilitarian writers. Ignorance, he believed, was the chief obstacle to human progress. Libraries would dispel this ignorance by placing books within the reach of all. Books would provide the masses with accurate information and intellectual stimulation and enable all to achieve their true place in society. As a concrete expression of his belief in the power of the written word, Carnegie insisted that the architectural plans of libraries built by his early benefactions include the representation of an open book with the motto 'let there be light'.<sup>48</sup> He wanted these libraries

to be called 'free public libraries', and insisted that they belonged, through the ratepayers, to the people. Speaking in Waterford, on the occasion of his 1903 visit to Ireland, he expressed this belief as follows:

not even his worship the mayor, nor his lordship the bishop, have one privilege within these walls, which is not the <sup>49</sup>birthright of the humblest citizen of Waterford.

Carnegie insisted that money he granted be used for building expenses only. He steadfastly refused to give money for the purchase of books or the payment of salaries. He regarded his grants as bribes, encouraging local authorities to do their duty. 'I do not wish to be remembered for what I have given' he once said, 'but for what I have persuaded others to give'.<sup>50</sup> He took steps to discourage local authorities from building elaborate edifices, and issued a pamphlet containing suggestions for suitable designs. He urged, for example, that the site of a library building should 'admit light on all sides and be large enough to allow extension'.<sup>51</sup> (Like Melvil Dewey, the pioneer of library classification, Carnegie was an enthusiast for phonetic spelling).

Carnegie did not personally deal with the merits of each request for money; such minutiae did not interest him. His biographer, Burton Hendrick, describes Carnegie's method of grant allocation:

James Bertram [Carnegie's personal secretary], would walk into the room, his arms full of papers. "Here are forty or fifty more libraries, Mr. Carnegie", he would say "they need your O.K." Carnegie would look up, perhaps from a newspaper he was reading.

"Have you examined them all, my boy"? he would ask

"Yes"

Carnegie would peel a few from the heap and ask penetrating questions. This test having shown that the preliminary work had been done, he would wave the others away.

"Alright, go ahead with them."

The stipulated number of libraries would presently take the form of bricks and mortar.<sup>52</sup>

Most of this 'preliminary work' was undertaken by Bertram and involved not only gathering information about each application to ensure that it was based upon a genuine desire for a public library which would be assured of continuous support from the rates, but also dealing with the requests and complaints of disaffected councillors, who felt that their particular district was not getting its fair share of Carnegie's largesse. When these complainants were persistent, they usually succeeded in getting their own way, as the following incidents show.

The Balrothery RDC wanted to build a two storey library with a bicycle shed in the seaside village of Malahide (see plate I). Bertram initially rejected this plan with the caustic comment that 'in a competition on how to spend the most money and have the most building work done for the least accommodation this would win the prize'<sup>53</sup> but eventually, after several letters from the district clerk explaining why, in the opinion of the district council this building was essential, he gave in.

The plans are not what we would have chosen, but, as the community has decided, through its representatives that they give the kind of building wanted, so be it.<sup>54</sup>

In July 1912, Carnegie agreed to give £3,900 to the RDC in Newcastle West, County Limerick, which had adopted the public

Carnegie library, Malahide, County Dublin.





libraries act the previous February. Bertram's letter of confirmation envisaged a central library and six branch libraries in the larger villages of the rural district. But councillors from areas that had not been selected by Bertram persuaded the RDC to pass a resolution asking Carnegie to increase his grant so that three additional branch libraries could be built. At first, Carnegie refused to agree to this, but, following further resolutions and a direct appeal, from which it was clear that unless permission was given for ten libraries the whole scheme would be sabotaged, he capitulated. Again Bertram's letter included some advice for the councillors:

allow me to call your attention to the necessity to exercise care, so that the £3,900 will cover the <sup>55</sup>cost of the ten buildings, complete and ready to occupy

- a warning that was to be ignored.

In 1902, the Library Association Record noted that Carnegie, 'sighing perhaps for more worlds to conquer...has turned his attention to Ireland'. But Carnegie's interest in Ireland went back to the 1880's, when he had formed a friendship with John Morley, who had been for a time Chief Secretary for Ireland under Gladstone. In speeches which he gave during his 1903 visit to Ireland Carnegie emphasised the affection he felt for the country. 'To no other country', he declared, on accepting the freedom of the city of Cork, 'do I respond with deeper satisfaction than to applications from Ireland'.<sup>56</sup> As proof of this, the purpose of his visit was to lay the foundation stones of public libraries he had

endowed in Waterford, Limerick and Cork. His visit was something of a triumphal progress. In each city he was met at the railway station by brass bands, and escorted through elaborately decorated streets to the city hall, where he was conferred with the freedom of the city. He was fulsomely praised by the respective mayors for his philanthropy. 'Libraries', declared the mayor of Waterford, 'have sprung up in hundreds by your almost magic hand'.<sup>57</sup> Carnegie responded graciously to these tributes, showing that he had a good grasp of contemporary events in Ireland. Among current developments that he singled out for praise was the co-operative movement, and, in fact, he had already made Plunkett's acquaintance. In all his speeches, Carnegie stressed that the libraries he had endowed were for rich and poor alike. 'Unless the free library reaches the masses of the people it has failed' he told his distinguished audience at a civic banquet in Limerick. Here he also defended the inclusion of fiction in a free library as a first step to lead readers on to a higher type of literature.<sup>58</sup> Carnegie also saw libraries as helping to overcome religious antagonisms, and, in an interview he gave to the Cork Examiner, he expressed gratification that both Catholic and Protestant bishops had attended the functions organised in his honour. In all, he was thoroughly pleased with his visit, and wrote to Morley shortly afterwards 'I had an ovation in your dear old Ireland'.<sup>59</sup>

The years between the passing of the public libraries act of 1902 and the outbreak of the first world war saw considerable propaganda by the IRLA, Cumann na Leabharlann, and the co-operative movement to bring the benefits of libraries before the public mind. The response to such library systems as were established showed that they were meeting a popular demand. Financial assistance was available from Carnegie to supplement funds raised through the library rate. Yet, despite all these factors, only twenty two RDCs adopted the public libraries act in that period (see table two), and in a sizeable minority adoption was not followed by any attempt to raise a rate or provide a library service.

This failure can be accounted for in a number of ways. The administrative structure of local government made it difficult for RDCs to provide an effective library service. The Local Government Act of 1898 had established no less than 213 rural districts, varying greatly in size, population and prosperity. Some, such as Newcastle West in County Limerick, or Kinsale in County Cork, included small towns; others, such as Belmullet in County Mayo, were almost completely rural. Many rural districts were no more than the hinterland of urban areas, as Belfast rural district, which was, in reality, only a suburb of Belfast city, and yet was separated from it administratively. The high number of rural districts meant that counties were divided into small areas, each with its separate local administration. County Limerick had no

Table Two

Rural District Councils - Adoption of the Public  
Libraries Act, 1902 - 1913<sup>80</sup>

Rural District Council	County	Act Adopted
Rathdown No.1	Co. Dublin	1902
Newry No.2	Co. Down	"
Cloneygowan	Co. Offaly	1903
Dundalk	Co. Louth	"
Navan	Co. Meath	"
Kinsale	Co. Cork	"
Rathkeale	Co. Limerick	"
Balrothery	Co. Dublin	1904
Mallow	Co. Cork	"
Dublin North	Co. Dublin	"
Dublin South	Co. Dublin	"
Youghal No.1	Co. Cork	"
Wexford	Co. Wexford	1905
Rathdown No.2	Co. Wicklow	"
Kenmare	Co. Kerry	"
Lismore	Co. Waterford	1905
Cahirciveen	Co. Kerry	1906
Killarney	Co. Kerry	1906
Millstreet	Co. Cork	1909
Dingle	Co. Kerry	"
Tralee	Co. Kerry	"
Newcastle West	Co. Limerick	1912

less than eight rural districts, as well as the city borough.<sup>61</sup>

The small size of most rural districts compounded the difficulties caused by the penny rate. Statistics collected in 1913 by W.G.S. Adams for the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust showed how inadequate the return of the penny rate was in poorer districts. Cahirciveen RDC in County Kerry, which had a population of 20,785, could raise £115 on a penny rate, while Rathdown No.2 RDC, in County Wicklow, with a population of only 5,450, was attempting to provide a library service on an income of thirty six pounds.<sup>62</sup> Adams noted that only four of the RDCs that had adopted the public libraries act received a return from the penny rate of £100 or more. As Lyster wrote in An Leabharlann:

the penny rate produces dreadfully small sums in our little Irish towns. This is sufficient answer to the inquiry why the public library movement has been slow in Ireland.<sup>63</sup>

When Lyster advanced the penny rate as the principal reason why RDCs did not establish library systems on a wide scale, he was not carefully analysing the complex influences at work in Ireland at the start of the twentieth century. The penny rate was not an insuperable obstacle in all rural districts. It was possible to provide a rudimentary library service for £100 a year, and the rateable valuations of rural districts given in the census' of 1901 and 1911 indicate that many could have raised a library rate in excess of this figure had they levied the maximum of one penny. These were often in areas that expressed no interest in rate-supported

libraries until the 1920s, such as Loughrea RDC in County Galway, which included the cathedral town of Clonfert diocese where Gerald O'Donovan had ministered before he left the priesthood in 1904, or Armagh RDC whose councillors should have known of the 'public' cathedral library in Armagh town. In reality most RDCs ignored the library question, and circulars from the Local Government Board, or appeals from the IRLA were simply marked 'read', or postponed for discussion until the next meeting.<sup>64</sup>

J. S. Powell, writing on social and political influences on library provision in Ireland<sup>65</sup>, attributes this lack of interest to a strong streak of anti-intellectualism in the contemporary Irish psyche. But this is surely too subtle an analysis of the type of person elected to RDCs after the Local Government Act. In the main they were no different from the people that elected them. Undoubtedly the level of educational attainment was rising in rural areas as well as in the towns. As Francis Hackett observed, every year 'from 1878 on, six or seven thousand middle class youths pushed further out of illiteracy than ever before'.<sup>66</sup> The success of the Gaelic League and the demand for rural libraries is evidence of this. But the first rural district councillors were of an older generation, and most would have received only an elementary education. Even those who had attended an intermediate school would have followed a curriculum that was rigid, and dominated by a system that paid school grants in proportion to examination results. Foreign observers, such as Paul-Dubois, united with Gaelic League enthusiasts in

condemning the Irish education system for forming neither intellect nor character. The same conservatism and ignorance that Plunkett fought against among farmers, produced councillors who simply found libraries irrelevant. It was not that they considered free libraries to be a bad thing; they simply did not consider them at all.

What councillors did find relevant was the distribution of patronage, in the form of labourers' cottages, building or drainage contracts, or the location of water pumps. When libraries offered the possibility of patronage, they attracted the interest of councillors who fought passionately for their own electorate. Otherwise, the majority lost interest. Politics, both local and national, also agitated the councillors and Paul-Dubois, who visited Ireland in 1906, wrote of the unruly scenes of insult calling and even fisticuffs that frequently interrupted council meetings.<sup>67</sup> Equally harsh criticism was levelled at the councillors during the parliamentary debates on the Local Government Act of 1925. Senator Mac Lysaght's comment 'Generally speaking, local government in Ireland has been carried out on a basis half party politics and half graft',<sup>68</sup> was a typical contribution.

'Will a citizen who pays on a valuation of twenty pounds grudge 1/8d a year towards a library?' was the rhetorical question put by Lyster in an article published in the Irish Builder<sup>69</sup>. The answer was that they did. Councillors and ratepayers were at one in resenting this expense. When a

motion to adopt the public libraries act came up for discussion at Ennis RDC in 1904, opposition was based mainly on financial arguments. As one councillor put it 'the ratepayers were already well taxed by the Technical Instruction Act, and that has done no good at all'.<sup>70</sup> The discussion was adjourned to an unspecified date. Similar financial concerns weighed with the members of Waterford RDC who defeated the motion to adopt the public libraries act by eleven votes to four in the same year.<sup>71</sup> At Kilmallock RDC a discussion on the libraries act in September 1903, provoked strong opposition, once again in defence of the overburdened ratepayers.<sup>72</sup> As George Russell put it in the Irish Homestead:

was it likely that men who swore when a penny in the pound was levied for agricultural schemes affecting them more nearly than a library scheme were going to tax themselves for books.<sup>73</sup>

Councillors were not the only influential group to be less than enthusiastic about the establishment of rate-supported libraries in their rural districts. The public library philosophy of free access and of control by ratepayers roused the suspicions of sections of the clergy and the laity in both the Catholic and Protestant Churches. Conservative Catholic opinion suffered periodic bouts of anxiety about the type of literature that was available to those who were, as they believed, less discerning readers. In the nineteenth century this anxiety had focused on pamphlets circularised by Protestant evangelising societies. As the century came to a close, concern shifted to the



literature available to the newly literate masses, in particular pulp fiction and the popular press. In 1896 Canon Sheehan was complaining about the 'pagan realism of the squalid and nauseous literature of the last few years'.<sup>74</sup> Other Catholics, both lay and clerical, who had reached the same conclusion founded Vigilance Committees to oppose the importation of the English yellow press. By the early 1900s most large towns had such a committee in operation. Some committees relied on appeals to the consciences of newsagents and booksellers. Others preferred direct action and siezed bundles of English popular Sunday papers from railway stations. These papers were then ceremoniously burnt.<sup>75</sup>

W.P. Ryan, in his book The Pope's Green Island, published in 1912, saw a deeper significance behind these activities, namely an attempt to stop the spread of secular, and therefore potentially anti-clerical ideas.<sup>76</sup> Nor would Canon Sheehan have disputed this. In 1903, when he was already the author of the first bestsellers by an Irish Catholic since Kickham's Knocknagow,<sup>77</sup> Canon Sheehan warned seminarians at Maynooth of the growth of a new breed of young educated laymen who 'would not listen to their priests as their fathers had done, and were already showing signs of being attracted to fashionable anti-Catholic writers'.<sup>78</sup> The obvious source for these dangerous works was the public library and the obvious medium was fiction. The fact, indisputably proved by statistics of book issues, that the books most frequently borrowed from public libraries were novels, was sufficient to condemn libraries in the eyes of

conservative Catholics. It was in vain for supporters of the public library movement to argue, as Lyster did at the Calaroga Debating Club in November 1906, that many people must read for pastime not serious study, and that, for these readers, the recreational value of fiction was an aid to spiritual well being.<sup>79</sup> The critics of novels were adamant. They promoted morbid curiosity and unhealthy sensationalism and portrayed as acceptable standards of behaviour condemned by the Catholic Church. Even those readers who sought to improve their knowledge of technical or scientific subjects through the free libraries were not safe from contamination. Roderic Desmond, speaking to the annual conference of the Catholic Truth Society [hereafter CTS], in 1905, stated that 'ill-educated Catholics can lose their faith by reading in an undirected or uncritical way the works of materialistic philosophers, economists or scientists',<sup>80</sup> and, at the following year's conference, John J. Horgan, a prominent Catholic barrister, gave his verdict: 'there is no denying that free libraries tend towards irreligion'.<sup>81</sup> Horgan contrasted the public library with its catalogue full of books, which, 'if not postively harmful are written in praise of heretics and their doings', with the parochial library, where 'any one might take up the catalogue and be sure the books were alright'.

The parochial library was seen by conservative Catholics to be the proper response to the current demand for reading matter. From the end of the nineteenth century there was a

revival of parochial libraries, due principally to the establishment of the CTS which provided them with a new and inexpensive source of literature. This society, founded in 1899, owed its origin to a proposal put forward by Dr. Michael O'Riordan at a meeting of the Maynooth Union in June of that year. Dr. O'Riordan argued that the only way to deal with the irreligious literature which was flooding into Ireland from Britain was to provide a counter attraction, by publishing books that would be popular, Catholic, and inexpensive. A decision was taken to establish a Catholic Truth Society for this purpose. By the end of the year an executive committee had been appointed, and premises acquired at Lower Abbey Street, Dublin.<sup>82</sup> The first work of the Society was to issue pamphlets, which sold for a penny. Twenty five titles were issued in June 1900 and, by the end of the year, 250,000 copies had been despatched. These were sent out to promoters, the majority of whom were clergymen, and displayed on racks, or in boxes, in churches. Over 800 of these 'branches'; as they were called, were established by the summer of 1901.<sup>83</sup>

As was to be expected, the subjects covered by these pamphlets were, in the majority, religious, but 'healthy' fiction was also included, as were works on the history and literature of early Christian and medieval Ireland. Through these latter works, the society made an indirect contribution to the reawakening of the spirit of nationalism that Yeats had worked for in the Young Ireland League.

The CTS was very much a voluntary organisation, and the

condition of the boxes of pamphlets varied from church to church. Supporters were enthusiastic about them, - Cardinal Logue told the 1913 CTS conference that

any person who goes into our churches on Sundays sees the young boys and girls struggling with each other<sup>84</sup> to pick up the little numbers of your publications.

But critical comments were more frequent. A correspondent to the Munster News in September 1906, wrote of CTS boxes left unattended for months, or else containing 'a promiscuous jumble of odds and ends', valueless as sources of technical information. The delegates to the CTS conferences were equally outspoken in their criticisms. 'Surely no one could be expected to give a penny for the dog-eared, age worn, dirt-begrimed pamphlets that are found for sale'; was a typical complaint.<sup>85</sup>

It may have been their awareness of the shortcomings of parochial libraries that made members of the CTS so apprehensive of public libraries. The proceedings of their annual conferences, which were held from 1903, provide ample evidence of their scepticism. Papers were read with titles such as 'The attitude of Catholics towards municipal free libraries; or 'Some perils of current literature'. The public library movement was regarded as something that, if it could not be resisted, should be controlled. A speaker at the 1905 conference urged the clergy and the educated laity to lose no time in getting involved in the public library movement. 'If the opportunity of exercising a wise and well informed supervision over the free libraries is once lost, it

will not easily be regained.'<sup>86</sup> This suspicion of public libraries among the Catholic clergy and the middle class Catholics, who made up the bulk of the CTS membership, acted as a further hindrance to the spread of the movement. Carnegie had desired that the motto 'let there be light' be inscribed over the door of the public library. The CTS would have substituted the warning 'enter at your peril'.

Scepticism about the impact of the public library movement was not confined to Catholics. The members of the Church of Ireland, both clergy and laity, expressed no great enthusiasm for the public library ideal. The proceedings of the Church of Ireland's biennial conferences, which met from 1894, showed greater concern with the threat to faith from alcohol and gambling than from literature, but, where this was mentioned, it was in the same terms as used by the CTS. The Dean of Belfast, speaking on the secularist spirit to the 1902 conference, associated growing materialism among young people with the type of literature that they read; while another speaker expressed regret that the Church of Ireland was not as vocal in opposition to immoral books and plays as the Catholic Church. 'How many of our pulpits thunder against them?',<sup>87</sup> he asked. The Church of Ireland Gazette was consistently critical of the public library movement. Public libraries were regarded as an imposition on ratepayers, which were used by men to read betting news, and by nursery maids to read penny dreadfuls.<sup>88</sup> In a comment in April 1904, evidently inspired by receipt of the IRLA's circular, the Gazette expressed fears that the establishment of a free

library in a rural district would cause friction between different denominations.

The chief difficulty we foresee is about the selection of books by a locally elected body. Will all non Roman and non Irish books be boycotted by the R.C. clergy and the Gaelic League?<sup>89</sup>

Returning to the topic later that year, the Gazette expressed further reservations about public libraries 'There is a grave danger that they may tend towards a public carelessness of books, and to an absence of appreciation for the advantages of learning.'<sup>90</sup>

(v)

Thus, any group or individual who wished to establish a public library in a rural area had to win the support of councillors who might be apathetic, or fearful of increasing the rates. They also had to convert clergymen, both Catholic and Protestant, who might dislike the very concept of a public library. A vignette by George Russell in the Irish Homestead dramatises their difficulties

A few enthusiasts call a meeting, and then someone gets up and says in a shocked way that he saw in a book somewhere that cities were built before the world was created and that libraries would necessarily fill the people's minds with these infamous ideas, and they should be put down. He gets someone else to say that he too read a book once, and it said that men were descended from monkeys, and the inference is that all books are filled up with nastiness of that sort, and the motion is quashed.<sup>91</sup>

In 1906, a year before Russell sketched this scene, an event in Newcastle West, County Limerick, showed how easily this opposition could thwart attempts to have the public

libraries act adopted in a rural district. Newcastle West RDC was a large local government area covering the West of County Limerick. The population, according to the 1901 census, was 23,891 persons, of whom 3,373 lived in the town of Newcastle West [see figure one]. The councillors of the neighbouring rural district, Rathkeale, had adopted the public libraries act in 1903. By 1906, they had received the promise of a grant from Carnegie, and had commenced their building programme. A spirit of local rivalry prompted the councillors in Newcastle West to follow suit. The town included a range of nationalist organisations such as the Gaelic League, the Gaelic Athletic Association and the Ancient Order of Hibernians. There was a temperance society, a branch of the Catholic Young Mens' Society, and several confraternities.<sup>92</sup> The Desmond hall, a gift of the Earl of Devon in the 1860s, provided a place for meetings.<sup>93</sup> A public library would increase the status of the town, in the eyes of its citizens.

The Gaelic League had enjoyed particular success in the rural district. Even the village of Ashford, in the hilly western part of the district near the Kerry border, had its branch of the League.<sup>94</sup> Evidently, the members of the League in County Limerick had listened to the appeals of Cumann na Leabharlann for assistance in promoting rural libraries. A letter from Lord Monteagle to the Church of Ireland Gazette in May 1906, described the Gaelic League as one of the main pillars of support of the public library movement in County Limerick. The first move to have the public libraries act

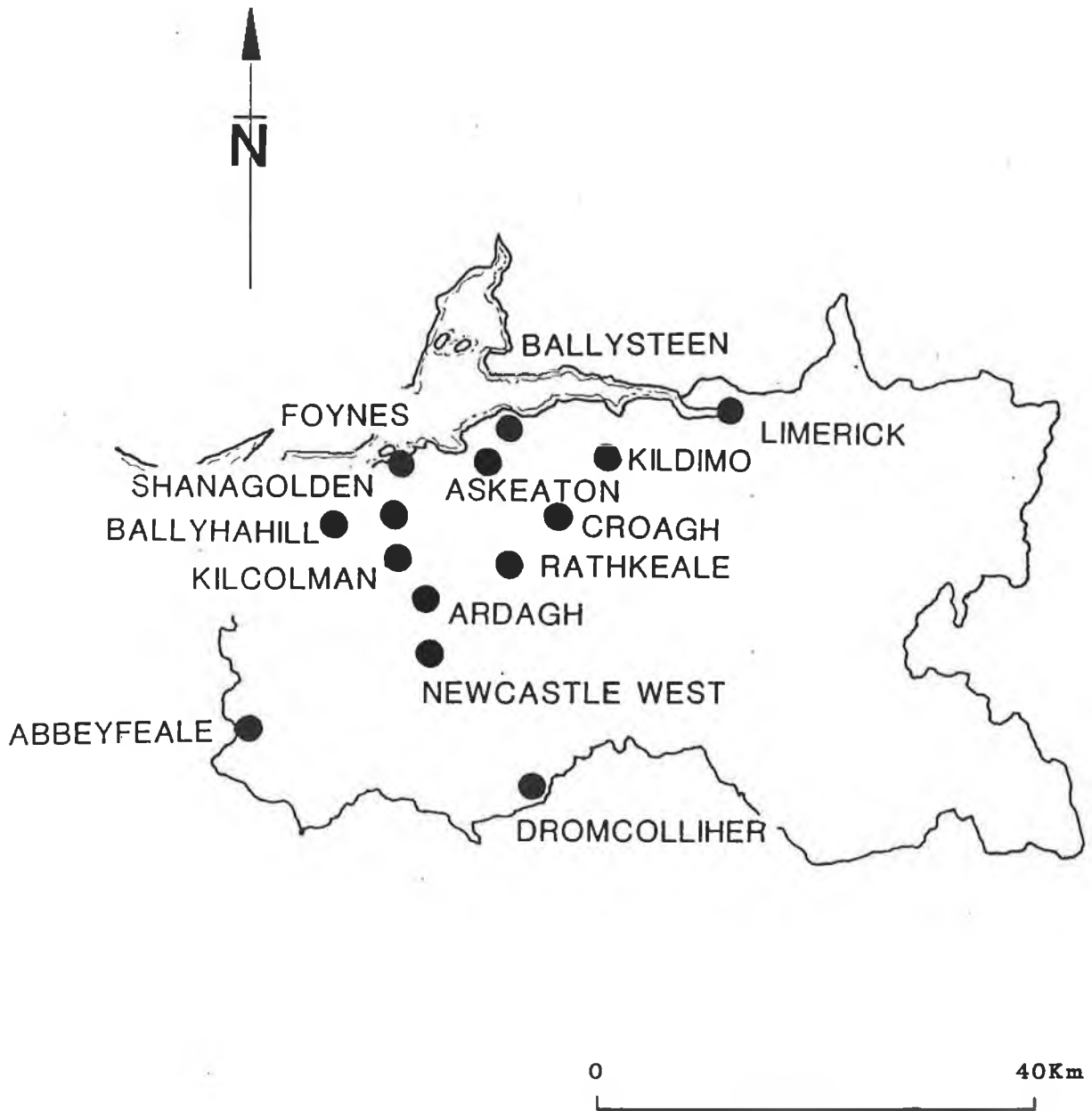
adopted came from the Gaelic League branch in Knockaderry. Councillor Edward Liston, a member of the branch, was mandated to place a notice of motion to adopt the act before the Newcastle West RDC on 29 August 1906. The motion was due to be voted on at the meeting scheduled for 27 October.

In contrast with Rathkeale, where the act was adopted without difficulty, a controversy immediately developed in Newcastle West. Supporters and opponents of the public library movement argued the case through the columns of the Munster News. Some opponents did mention the increase in the rates that would follow adoption, one councillor pointing out that a penny on the rates could provide relief for fifty 'paupers'. But the main opposition was based on the non-denominational nature of the public library, and the damage that it could cause to the existing parochial library. Correspondents believed that there was no room for both libraries in a town. It was a choice between one or the other. 'Why can we not have denominational libraries, as there are denominational schools', wrote Fr. O'Donnell, parish priest of Rathkeale, adding, ominously, that he had only joined the Rathkeale library committee to make the best of a bad bargain.<sup>95</sup> Roderic Desmond, a prominent member of the CTS, emphasised the book selection problem in his letter on the issue. He described how the library committee he belonged to refused to stock any Catholic book, for fear of being thought sectarian, although the population of the town, which he did not name, was nine-tenths Catholic.<sup>96</sup> The



Figure One

Rathkeale and Newcastle West rural districts.



editor of the Munster News also opposed the public library as something that was not required in a rural area. An editorial noted that most parishes in the rural district already had branches of the CTS, and added that, if country people wanted further reading material, there was 'good and varied matter to be found in newspapers'.<sup>97</sup>

These arguments alone might not have swayed the councillors. Indeed, they may not have been aware of them. But a more formidable opponent entered the debate, whom the councillors could not ignore. This was Monsignor Denis Hallinan, parish priest of Newcastle West, and one of the most prominent clergy in the Limerick diocese. Dr. Hallinan was not opposed to libraries as such. As a curate he had been involved in administration of the Catholic Young Mens' Society with its attendant reading room and library.<sup>98</sup> He had been an active supporter of the CTS from its foundation, and had revitalised the parish library which, by 1906, had a catalogue of 500 books. Nor was he narrowly anti-intellectual. He was a contributor to journals such as the Irish Ecclesiastical Record, and had taught himself Irish, so as to be able to participate in the Gaelic League<sup>99</sup>. He was, however, totally opposed to rate-supported libraries, which he described in a trenchant letter to the Munster News as 'an unmitigated curse'. The promoters of free libraries he asserted were 'well meaning philanthropists, to be sure, but outside the Catholic Church.' The establishment of such libraries in the rural district would result in the 'safely

selected supply of parochial books', being replaced by 'fashionable society novels', and books which 'attacked the Catholic faith in a seductive style'.<sup>100</sup>

Dr. Hallinan's dislike of public libraries was largely based on their non-denominational character. He was an outspoken advocate of denominational education, and of the administrative structure whereby the parish priest was manager of the national schools in his parish. By a coincidence that was unfortunate for the public library movement, this issue was at the time being debated in the columns of the Irish Peasant. This newspaper, although published in Navan, County Meath, had an influence which extended to remote parts of the country. It was almost entirely written by W. P. Ryan, who had been, at an earlier stage in his career, one of the founders of the London Irish Literary Society. Ryan was a forceful advocate of lay control of education. He argued that:

schools of each parish and district should be placed under the management of a committee composed of laymen and clergymen of all creeds, appointed by a central authority.<sup>101</sup>

Such opinions would have been anathema to Dr. Hallinan, and An Leabharlann reported that he tried to stop circulation of the Irish Peasant in Newcastle West.

Ryan was also an enthusiastic supporter of public libraries. 'We believe', he wrote in the issue of 15 December 1906, 'in the public free library, and the freer and the more public it is the better.' Sentiments such as these would have added to Dr. Hallinan's conviction that the public

library was a threat to the position of the Catholic clergy as leaders of their flock. This conviction inspired his comments to the Newcastle West RDC, expressing amazement that the supporters of the public library movement had ignored the explicit views of their parish priest, refused to withdraw the motion to adopt the public libraries act, and altogether showed themselves wanting in 'that delicate Catholic feeling which is characteristic of our race the world over'.<sup>102</sup>

Dr. Hallinan made these remarks during the meeting of the RDC on 8 November, when Councillor Liston proposed, on behalf of the Knockaderry branch of the Gaelic League, that the council adopt the public libraries act, Dr. Hallinan then addressed the meeting, as he said, in his dual capacity as pastor and ratepayer. In the course of a long and forceful speech, he urged the councillors to reject the motion. In support of his views, he read a letter, which he had received from Cardinal Logue, expressing reservations about the influence of public libraries on the faith of Catholics. Dr. Hallinan concluded by advising the councillors to 'unite with the clergy in your respective parishes, look after your Catholic Truth Society boxes, and start parochial libraries.' Not surprisingly, most councillors were persuaded by this argument. But the short debate that followed showed that a substantial minority were prepared to vote against Dr. Hallinan's wishes, thereby justifying Canon Sheehan's prediction to the seminarians at Maynooth. Indeed, Liston hinted that other councillors, who had declared public opposition to the motion, were privately in favour of it.

When the voting took place the motion to adopt the public libraries act was defeated by twenty three votes to ten.<sup>103</sup>

The affair at Newcastle West attracted wide interest at the time. The report in An Leabharlann<sup>104</sup> apportioned some blame to the attitude of the Munster News, and contrasted the sentiments expressed by Cardinal Logue to Dr. Hallinan with his enthusiastic speech at the opening of the Drogheda public library the previous April. The Church of Ireland Gazette, while noting the sectarianism behind Dr. Hallinan's action, agreed with his opinion of public libraries: 'in practice the majority of free libraries serve no more serious purpose than the dissemination of works of fiction'.<sup>105</sup> The advocates of the public library movement within Newcastle West RDC regarded this defeat as only a temporary set back. Just over five years later, on 29 February 1912, the motion was re-introduced, this time sponsored by the town commissioners. It was passed, almost without comment, by twenty nine votes to twelve.

At the end of 1906 the Irish Peasant ceased publication following ecclesiastical pressure on the owner's family.<sup>105</sup> The opponents of public libraries had had their prejudices confirmed by the statements of Dr. Hallinan and Cardinal Logue. The supporters had been shown how difficult it was to proceed against such opposition. During the following two years no RDC, and only one UDC, adopted the public libraries act. The initial impetus seemed to have run out of the movement.

Writing in the Library Association Record in 1913, G.E. Roebuck described the public library of small means as 'at once the failure of the library movement, and the best instance of its determined struggle for existence.'<sup>107</sup> The phrase 'library of small means' could be applied to every public library in Ireland at this period, due to the crippling effect of the penny rate. But the struggle for existence was most obvious in the rural library systems, which were burdened not only with small incomes, but also with too many buildings, as demanded by local pride. Lennox Robinson, who visited all the Carnegie funded libraries in Ireland during 1916 on behalf of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, painted a damning picture of what he saw:

Numerous villages managed to secure a small building, which they boldly named a library, but the librarian was only a badly paid caretaker, and there were few or no books. The building was simply a village hall, and badly managed at that.<sup>108</sup>

It was fashionable among the Dublin intelligensia to smile at rural rivalries which erected libraries at cross roads, and accounts of Carnegie libraries being used for dances, banquets, and the performance of melodramas, only added to their amusement. But they were city dwellers who could not appreciate the value of a hall to a rural population. The co-operative movement had understood this, and consequently promoted the establishment of village halls by co-operative societies. Observers of rural life saw the connection between the village library and the village hall. An article

on rural communities in the Irish Homestead of 5 July 1913 associated the slow progress of the rural library movement with the lack of a meeting place where country dwellers could gather to demand that their councillors adopt the public libraries act.

It is true that, where rural libraries were established, the use of the hall often became of greater consequence than the use of the bookstock. The minute book of the Malahide library committee shows that its business was almost entirely devoted to letting the hall to various organisations. Yet there always was at least one section of the community in each district which used the library for the purposes intended by Andrew Carnegie. There was also a sense of pride in the possession of a Carnegie library. An emigrant writing to the Newcastle West Weekly Observer in 1913 listed the existence of a public library with the installation of electric light as signs that the town had become modernised.<sup>109</sup> This pride was often what saved the library system of rural districts from complete collapse. Just how precarious the existence of a rural library was can be seen from a consideration of the history of the rate-supported library service in Rathkeale rural district between 1903 and 1915.

Rathkeale rural district covered most of the south west of County Limerick. (see figure one). In 1901 it had a population of 14,981 persons, 1,749 of whom lived in Rathkeale, the only town of any size in the district. A contemporary guide book<sup>110</sup> described Rathkeale as a small

agricultural town which, apart from its prominent position on a hill, contained little to detain tourists, an over harsh judgment, since it ignored the ruins of a thirteenth century Augustinian priory, just outside the town. It was, (and still is), a long straggling town, with narrow winding streets, the market centre for the dairy farmers of the surrounding countryside. A monthly fair swelled its population, and increased its sense of importance. Two hotels catered for those attending the assizes held at the court house, which was also the location for the meetings of the Board of Guardians and the RDC. The 'Union', or workhouse, completed the government buildings.<sup>111</sup> A number of societies catered for the leisure activities of the town dwellers, including the Gaelic League and St. Patrick's Temperance Society. A reading society had flourished in Rathkeale for a time in the nineteenth century. Fr. Fitzgerald, the parish priest, had established the Rathkeale Mechanics' Reading Society in 1858, evidently inspired by the Mechanics' Institutes. This society was patronised by tradesmen and apprentices, and had at one time 200 members.<sup>112</sup> But, as local trades declined in the face of external competition, the society disbanded, and the lack of a parish library meant that the increasingly literate townspeople had no access to reading material.

The absence of reading facilities in a rural district was not, in itself, sufficient to motivate councillors to adopt the public libraries act. Some additional motivation



was necessary, and in Rathkeale the cause of rural libraries had two advocates who were in a position to influence the decision of the district councillors, albeit from different perspectives. These were Lady Elizabeth Monteagle, who was a district councillor, and the wife of one of the most prominent members of the Anglo Irish ascendancy, and T.B. Naughton, clerk to the district council. The Monteagles were prominent in the co-operative movement from its inception Lord Monteagle was for several years president of the IAOS, while Lady Monteagle ran a successful poultry co-operative at Rathkeale. Both appreciated the importance of rural libraries, and the Foynes Social Improvement Society, which they founded, included a lending library. Naughton, a native of Ballysteen in the north of the rural district, had pursued a varied career before coming to Rathkeale in 1898. He had studied medicine before moving to a career as a journalist, and had been, for a time, editor of the Limerick Leader. He was a forceful personality, who did not let his position as an employee hinder him from expressing his views. The councillors were somewhat in awe of him, and tended in general to do what he told them. Locally, it was Naughton who was credited with establishing the rural library system in the district.

At a meeting of the RDC on 24 January 1903 Lady Monteagle proposed a motion to adopt the public libraries act, which was passed without much opposition. Some councillors did try to postpone the decision, by pointing out that no other rural district had as yet adopted the act. To

this argument Naughton sharply replied that they should be proud to take the initiative in Rathkeale. This appeal to local pride silenced the opposition, and the motion was adopted.<sup>113</sup> Unfortunately, the motion passed by the RDC only allowed a half penny rate to the library service, which would provide an annual income of £144. This parsimonious decision ensured that the service existed in a perpetual state of financial crisis. The question of book selection does not seem to have concerned the councillors, possibly because Lady Monteagle had taken the precaution of securing the approval of the Catholic bishop for her motion before presenting it to the RDC.<sup>114</sup>

Some months passed before the RDC took the further step of appointing a library committee to work out a plan for the administration of the library service. The committee, which included Lady Monteagle and Naughton, submitted a plan to the RDC at the end of June. This followed closely the lines suggested by Thomas O'Donnell in his circular to national teachers, and was probably based on it. If followed, it could have ensured a more effective use of the return of the library rate than the scheme that subsequently developed. No special buildings were envisaged. Any administration was to be carried out by the clerk, who would store the books in his offices at the workhouse. Branches were to be established in the larger national schools throughout the district, with teachers as librarians. Books would be exchanged between these branches at regular intervals. The clerk and the

teacher-librarians would be paid a small stipend and the whole scheme would be supervised by the district library committee.

The RDC agreed to this scheme,<sup>115</sup> and the committee was instructed to purchase books to the value of fifty pounds. The library committee had now expanded to include the parish priest Fr. O'Donnell, and other Catholic clergy. Lists of books were submitted. Fr. O'Donnell wanted religious titles, Naughton favoured Irish history, and Lady Monteagle insisted on the inclusion of novels for ladies. Eventually a selection was made, and 400 books were purchased for distribution to schools in the autumn. A list of books from the Rathkeale library system, dated 1903, has survived in the Scottish Record Office.<sup>116</sup> The titles show a preponderance of books on Irish history written from a nationalist point of view. Lives of Robert Emmet and Daniel O'Connell are included, as well as the writings of Thomas Davis and other Young Irelanders. Among the novelists listed are Canon Sheehan and Charles Kickham, as well as Dickens and Jane Austen. Jules Verne is the only novelist included who would be regarded as 'sensational'. As no technical books, or books on religious topics, are named, it is likely that the surviving list is incomplete.

Towards the end of July 1903, Naughton wrote to Andrew Carnegie for a grant towards the cost of the library system. This was followed up by a personal letter from Lady Monteagle on 3 September, in which she begged Carnegie to:

consider the case of those who live in purely rural

districts, whose inhabitants are cut off from all amusements and chances of ordinary social intercourse, with no alternative between absolute starvation and emigration.<sup>117</sup>

She invited Carnegie to come to Rathkeale during his Irish visit. Although he declined her invitation, he did agree to her other request and through Bertram promised £2,000 to the RDC. The councillors had now started to think in terms of buildings; initially a central library in the town of Rathkeale was proposed. But local pride, or self-interest, would not allow councillors from the rest of the RDC to accept that Rathkeale alone should benefit from Carnegie's largesse. At a meeting of the council in October, it was decided to build branch libraries in the villages of Askeaton, Shanagolden, Pallaskenry and Ballyhahill, where it was claimed 'such buildings are urgently needed, and much desired by the ratepayers'.<sup>118</sup> In order to finance this building programme, Lady Mounteagle was instructed to approach Carnegie during his visit to Limerick, and ask for an increased grant. Her approach as once more successful, and an additional £800 was promised. Once the principle of building libraries in the villages had been established, councillors from other areas began to state their case, and, by the time that the allocation of the £2,800 granted by Carnegie was being discussed, it had been agreed that libraries should also be erected at Croagh, Ballysteen, Kilcolman and Kildimo. The council decided to set aside £1,000 for the central library at Rathkeale, while the villages were allocated sums varying from £200 to £300. The

practicality of administering so many branch libraries on an annual income of £144 did not seem to concern the councillors.

James Hartigan, the RDC's engineer, was commissioned to provide plans for the libraries. This work, together with the necessity of obtaining free sites, held up any real progress on the library scheme for over a year. In the meantime, the original plan for school based libraries was operated. In October 1904, Naughton assured Bertram that fifteen branch libraries had been established in national schools throughout the rural district, where books were 'being read by the people with utmost interest and advantage'<sup>119</sup>.

Although Hartigan warned the councillors that the money allocated to the branch libraries was only sufficient to provide a basic structure, with no surplus for furniture or fittings, they still persisted with their decision to build nine libraries in the rural district. Building tenders were sought in June 1905. Only Rathkeale library attracted more than one tender, and James O'Dea was awarded the contract, although his quotation of £920 was not the lowest one, a decision that made Councillor Mc Coy complain that the RDC was not acting in the spirit of the original grant. He maintained that the councillors should be more economical, and keep the surplus for books and to pay the salary of a librarian. But the councillors, as usual, were more concerned with political patronage than the effectiveness of the library service.<sup>120</sup>

The library committee was faced with this financial problem as the Rathkeale library neared completion. The impossibility of running a service consisting of a central library, eight branch libraries, and seven depots in national schools, on the return of a half penny rate, came to be evident. The RDC and the library committee began to demonstrate a tendency to pass contentious issues from one to the other, and a certain amount of friction began to develop.

The appointment of a librarian was one such issue. The library committee refused to undertake this appointment without the sanction of the RDC. At their meeting in January 1907, the councillors, noting sharply that 'the library committee had declined to act in the matter', set up an appointment board consisting of ten councillors, clergymen of the different denominations in the town, as well as the local doctor and solicitor. The salary to be paid the successful applicant, was, naturally, of particular interest to the councillors. In keeping with their usual reluctance to spend money, several councillors argued that, since the librarian would have free accommodation, fifteen pounds a year was adequate. The majority, however, agreed with Councillor Hewson that 'for an important place like Rathkeale, fifteen pounds a year is very miserable',<sup>121</sup> and twenty pounds a year was agreed. The appointment board lost no time in filling the position for which there were two applicants, Daisy Noonan and John Dwyer. Daisy Noonan was appointed, and took up the position in March 1907.

The central library was now completed: 'a fine respectable structure', according to the Limerick Leader, (see plate II). However, as was to prove the case with many libraries in RDCs, starting a library service in Rathkeale was no easy matter. On 6 November, Fr. O'Donnell (still chairman of the library committee, in spite of his misgivings), appeared before the RDC to appeal for an annual grant of thirty five pounds in order to pay for the upkeep of the central library. He suggested that this money, which was needed for heating and light, be taken from the funds allocated for book purchase. Naughton strongly opposed this request because it would reduce the book fund to fifteen pounds a year, which, he said, would 'strike an awful blow at our library system'. He urged the committee to show initiative, and raise the necessary funds by organising a concert.<sup>122</sup> Following this intervention, Fr. O'Donnell's request was refused, but at the next RDC meeting he made another submission, this time for four pounds for purchase of newspapers. This annoyed the councillors from outside the town, and the council chairman accused the library committee of seeking to spend all the money raised by the library rate on the central library, leaving nothing for the village libraries. The difficulties of the library committee increased when the Rathkeale town commissioners refused to give them free gas.

Yet their situation was not hopeless, as Naughton outlined in a letter, which the district library committee

Plate II

Rathkeale Carnegie free library, County  
Limerick.





discussed on 26 November. He pointed out that they had thirteen pounds in hands, which they should use to open the library 'without one day's delay'<sup>123</sup> Once the library was open and in use by the public, he opined, the RDC and the town commissioners would help them. But the library committee refused to budge. The members were determined that the library would not open until they had received a grant of ten pounds from the RDC. A stalemate ensued. At the next council meeting one councillor, seeking a way out of the impasse, queried the sum of twenty pounds, which Naughton was receiving from the library rate. Naughton was quick to defend himself, pointing out that he was clerk to both the library authority (the council), and the book selection committee. His reply indicated that, even though a librarian had been appointed, all ordering and distribution of books was still carried out by the clerk. On this occasion, Naughton's response silenced the councillors. But the fact that one councillor attempted to introduce a motion to discontinue the library rate showed their frustration,<sup>124</sup>. Fortunately for the fate of the Rathkeale library, the new year, 1908, saw a softening of attitude on the part of the councillors, and their grant of five pounds enabled the library to open its doors during January. In February, Daisy Noonan reported that both the reading room and the news room were open for regular hours on week days.

A progress report, sent to Bertram in May 1909, indicated that the branch libraries at Ballysteen, Shanagolden, Ballyhahill, Croagh and Kildimo had been

completed. Naughton, who compiled the report, assured Bertram that the central library was

a fine commodious structure, occupying a prominent site and presenting quite a pleasing and indeed admirable appearance. It is managed and controlled by a representative committee, consisting of members of the district council, the town commissioners and clergy of the several denominations in the local community.

Regarding the book stock, he stated:

We have 3,000 volumes of varied and first class literature, divided according to population between the erected libraries, and the reading matter thus provided is affording keenest interest and the most desirable educational advantage.<sup>125</sup>

What these books were, and how many people borrowed them, cannot be determined due to the absence of records. Miss Noonan's report, given to the annual meeting of the library committee on 9 November 1910, suggests that the Rathkeale library, at least, was attracting a good number of readers. She informed the committee that an average of fifty readers visited the library daily and 500 borrowers had joined the lending library, a high proportion for a town with a population of less than 2,000. Figures for book issues were also encouraging: 5,646 loans had been taken out during the year. Miss Noonan's report, as reproduced in the Limerick Leader<sup>126</sup> gave no titles of books stocked in the library, but it is unlikely that all the books borrowed were required for educational purposes. When a touring dramatic company presented East Lynne and Lady Audley's secret in the district during 1908, the Munster News noted that the plays were based on books in the Rathkeale library.<sup>127</sup> This was in contrast to Naughton's assertion to the Tipperary RDC, in a letter

extolling the value of a public library system, that the Rathkeale library contained healthy, instructive and thoroughly national literature.

The dramatic company, that visited Rathkeale RDC in 1908 used the halls that were part of each Carnegie library for their productions. Because the attraction of a hall figured more prominently in the public mind than that of a lending library, plans submitted to councils tended to emphasise this feature of the library building. Hartigan's plan for the Rathkeale library was no exception, and Bertram complained to Naughton that 'the ground floor was all hall' while 'the library is really housed in an attic'<sup>128</sup> Naughton sought to justify this, by assuring Bertram that, although the reading rooms were located on the second floor, they were quite adequate to the needs of the town. He also contended that, by using the ground floor of the building for lectures, they were acting in the spirit of Carnegie's gift. In fact, from newspaper reports, it is clear that the hall was far more frequently used for recreational than educational purposes. Concerts, plays, and even political meetings, were frequently advertised for the various 'Carnegie halls' in the district. Occasionally the users of the halls came into conflict with the users of the reading rooms, to the embarrassment of the RDC.

In 1912 the council was reluctantly drawn into a dispute between the Askeaton branch of the Gaelic League, the local library sub-committee, and Fr. Lee, the parish priest,

concerning the use of the hall for Irish dancing. Naughton, who was a member of the Gaelic League, sought to obtain the support of the council for the Askeaton branch, whose members were using the hall to teach Irish dancing. However, as Naughton told the councillors, the class was interrupted by a member of the local library sub-committee, who 'removed the oil lamp and left them in darkness' so that 'the melodeon was as mute in the Askeaton library as the harp in the hall of Tara'.<sup>129</sup>

The councillors simply referred the issue to the district library committee, no doubt hoping it would solve itself. However, a heated correspondence in the Munster News between Fr. Lee, Naughton, and Canon Hackett, who was secretary of the Askeaton sub-committee, kept the issue alive. It was evident that the freedom to use the hall attached to the Carnegie library was a cause of contention between the Catholic clergy and laity. At Ballysteen, where, as Naughton described it, 'the boys and girls assemble at the library every Sunday evening and dance for a few hours', the curate had asked the library sub-committee for the library key, which the members refused to give him, while Fr. Lee was dismissed by his fellow sub-committee members when he made the same request. The councillors were embarrassed by their clerk's fiery debate with local Catholic clergy, particularly when Fr. Lee complained about his attitude as a paid official. When Irish dancing classes resumed in Askeaton, they were pleased to describe the whole affair as a misunderstanding. The members of the Gaelic League felt they

had won a victory and celebrated appropriately. The Limerick Leader reported that members of the League marched through Askeaton to the library, carrying banners and singing A nation once again, a popular nationalist ballad with words by Thomas Davis.<sup>130</sup>

In spite of the popularity of the halls, many councillors were still not convinced of the value of the library service. In February 1911 a motion was put before the Rathkeale RDC to withdraw the half penny rate, and let the libraries fend for themselves. This was only defeated through vigorous action by Naughton, who sent a circular to each councillor outlining the consequences that would follow if the motion succeeded. The library system would collapse, and the council would lose credibility for having reneged on its commitment to Carnegie. The motion was withdrawn, but the comments of those who had proposed it showed that some councillors, in particular those from outside the town of Rathkeale, regarded the library rate as a waste of ratepayers' money.<sup>131</sup>

Thus the RDC adopted a policy of inaction towards its libraries. It would not abandon them by withdrawing the rate, but neither would it spend any money other than the minimum which had been voted in 1903. By 1912 both Rathkeale and Askeaton libraries needed repainting, while Hartigan reported that the library at Croagh was 'in a disgraceful condition, presenting a melancholy and wretched appearance from the outside'<sup>132</sup>. The council simply marked these

reports as 'read', and the buildings, which had been distributed so liberally around the district, were allowed to fall into disrepair. Their salvation was to come not from the ratepayers of Rathkeale or their elected representatives, but from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Organising libraries in Limerick and Kerry, - the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust's Irish policy, 1913 - 1918.

#### (i)

During the period 1902 to 1913, £27,080 was dispensed from Carnegie's New York office to finance rural library schemes in Ireland.<sup>1</sup> These grants formed only a small portion of Carnegie's benefactions. At the time of his death he had donated over \$60,000,000 towards the erection of free public libraries throughout the English speaking world.<sup>2</sup> Nor was this the extent of his philanthropy. A wide variety of projects benefited from Carnegie's endowments, ranging from the Carnegie Hero Fund to the Simplified Spelling Board. A love of music led him to give grants to enable congregations to purchase church organs, an offer availed of by 219 Irish parishes during Carnegie's lifetime.<sup>3</sup>

As applications for grants increased in volume, Carnegie realised that some administrative structure was necessary, not only to ease the burden placed on him, but also to ensure the perpetuation of his work. In 1903 he had established the Dunfermline Trust in his native town. This Trust was used as the basis of Carnegie's larger scheme for the United Kingdom, when, in 1913 he established the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust [hereafter CUKT], a charitable trust incorporated by a trust deed, which he signed on 3 October. The Trust was to be funded by 10 million dollars worth of United States Steel

Corporation shares, handed over by Carnegie. The deed stipulated that the resultant income, amounting to approximately £100,000 a year, was to be used for

the improvement of the well-being of the masses of the people of Great Britain and Ireland, by such means as are embraced within the meaning of the word 'charitable' according to Scotch or English law.<sup>4</sup>

In order to deal with its vastly expanded remit, the number of trustees was increased to thirty two, and a formal administrative structure was created. A general meeting of the trustees was to be held annually. Day to day administration was placed in the hands of three standing committees: the executive committee, the finance committee, and the Dunfermline standing committee. A full time secretary and treasurer were appointed. Among the names listed on the Trust's First Annual Report<sup>5</sup>, are several that were to become familiar to those involved in public libraries throughout Ireland, in particular Dr. John Ross, the first chairman, Sir William Robertson, the vice-chairman, A.L. Hetherington, the secretary, Thomas Gorrie, the treasurer, and two life trustees: Sir John Struthers and Horace Plunkett. Plunkett's inclusion on a body that was, at least initially, overwhelmingly Scottish is an indication of his international reputation.

At their first meeting, which took place on 22 December 1913, the trustees decided to suspend further payments, until they had surveyed the results of all previous Carnegie grants. They commissioned W.G.S. Adams, Gladstone professor of political theory at All Souls College, Oxford, to provide



this information. Adams was not only a Scot, but also a close personal friend of Plunkett, having been superintendent of statistics in the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction from 1905 to 1910.<sup>6</sup> Adams's original brief was to investigate the extent to which local authorities had provided libraries, museums, public baths and parks, as well as reporting on town planning and housing. This wide-ranging brief proved impractical, and, when the trustees received Adams's preliminary report, which dealt mainly with public libraries, they decided to concentrate on that area, where there was an obvious need for development. As a result, Adams's brief was reduced to a consideration of the state of public libraries, with particular reference to those which had been in receipt of grants from Carnegie. He was also requested to make recommendations for future policy options for the CUKT. Acting on these instructions, Adams was able to present his report to the trustees at the end of 1914.<sup>7</sup>

Adams considered that, viewed broadly, the results of Carnegie's grants had been positive. They had

made possible, at many centres, a development which would not otherwise have come into existence. The Carnegie grants have brought home the idea of the free public library as an important local institution.

But the best possible use had not been made of the money given by Carnegie, and Adams condemned local authorities for what he termed 'over-building': erecting elaborate libraries, which used up in maintenance costs money that should have been spent on books. His report conclusively illustrated that urban authorities in Britain were no different from

rural authorities in Ireland in their willingness to succumb to this temptation. Adams also identified the penny rate, and the inadequate size of library districts in rural areas, as further reasons for the slow development of the library service.

None of these conclusions were particularly original, indeed the extracts from letters, which Adams received from librarians, and included in an appendix to his report, all reiterated the same arguments. However, Adams used these complaints of isolated individuals to strengthen his recommendations to the trustees as to their future policy, and these recommendations were to influence the entire subsequent development of the public library service. His chief recommendation was that the CUKT should, in the immediate future, concentrate on developing library services in rural areas. He noted that most of Carnegie's grants had gone to urban districts, while the county library service had been largely ignored. In accounting for this neglect, Adams used words with a distinctly co-operative ring:

the dispersion of population makes common thought and common action difficult. It is part everywhere of the rural problem that there needs to be an organizing centre for the concentrating and directing of rural thought and action.

The CUKT must act as this organizing centre, and take the initiative in providing a rural library service in certain selected areas. This would show what an effective rural library service could achieve, and so would hasten the demand for the legislative change that was necessary to deal

with the rate limitation and the size of the rural library district. These model schemes, or 'experimental library schemes' as Adams termed them, were to be run with the minimum expenditure on buildings, and the maximum on books. These schemes would consist of a central depot, or repository (even the phrase 'central library' was to be avoided), which would be the administrative headquarters and village libraries, which would be located in schools, with the teacher as voluntary librarian. The village libraries would have permanent collections of reference works, supplemented by a circulating library which would be exchanged at regular intervals.<sup>10</sup> This scheme, proposed by Adams, was to be utilised in all the CUKT rural library experiments in Ireland down to 1925.<sup>11</sup>

The trustees accepted Adams's recommendations in toto, and, in their First Annual Report, stated that they proposed to act along the lines which he had suggested. The provision of rural library services was to be a priority, and a number of experimental library schemes were to be initiated. In a complete reversal of Carnegie's policy, the Trust was to concentrate on assisting book supply rather than financing buildings. 'There can', noted the report, 'be no advantage in erecting costly library buildings in out of the way districts, or remote villages.'<sup>12</sup> The trustees justified this change of policy on the grounds that rural areas had been neglected in the past to such an extent that what they were to undertake now would be really pioneering work.<sup>13</sup> Undoubtedly, the presence of Plunkett would have helped to

direct their attention towards rural problems. In addition, on a practical level, Adams's recommendations provided a ready made policy that the trustees could follow even within the restrictions imposed from 1914 by wartime conditions.

The first experimental library scheme that the trustees initiated was the so-called 'north of Scotland scheme', which covered the Orkneys, Shetland and the Isle of Lewis. This absorbed a number of village libraries established between 1901 and 1912 by the textile magnate, James Coats of Paisley. The administrative structure followed closely along the lines recommended by Adams. A repository was established in the CUKT offices at Dunfermline. The administration of the repository and the purchase of books were paid for by the Trust, but book selection and distribution were in the hands of a committee of island dwellers. Books were despatched twice a year to the islands in book boxes designed by the Trust's secretary, A. L. Hetherington. This north of Scotland venture formed the pattern for the Irish county schemes introduced on an experimental basis on the early 1920s.

(ii)

The trustees' first venture into Irish affairs was directed, not to the public library system, but to the IAOS, which was perhaps not surprising, considering Plunkett's presence on the executive committee of the CUKT. Plunkett had established the Co-operative Reference Library in January 1914. This library, located in Plunkett House, was intended

to provide information on the world-wide co-operative movement to enquirers, and text-books on agriculture to progressive farmers. Initially Plunkett and Fr. Finlay contributed books from their own libraries, but a grant of £2,000 sanctioned by the CUKT in July 1914 enabled many additional books to be purchased. Two staff members were appointed: Lionel Smith Gordon, as librarian, and Cruise O'Brien as his assistant.<sup>14</sup> Neither had a background in librarianship. Smith Gordon was an Englishman with a specific interest in rural economics, who was mainly involved in the financial affairs of the IAOS. Cruise O'Brien was a freelance journalist and sometime playwright - whose revealing nickname in Plunkett House was 'Caruso'.

This grant was not just an isolated gesture by the CUKT. The trustees continued to subsidise the Co-operative Reference Library over the following years. This support was based on their belief that the library fitted in well with their policy of improving rural social conditions, of which the financing of rural libraries was another facet.<sup>15</sup>

The trustees exhibited a marked reluctance to become involved in the existing rural library service in Ireland. As their Second Annual Report put it:

The peculiar political and social conditions of Ireland, and the circumstances of the present time, make it impossible to carry out immediately a coherent policy corresponding to that which the trustees are endeavouring to set on foot in England and Scotland.<sup>16</sup>

It is hard to blame the trustees for their caution. Viewed from Dunfermline, Irish politics must have seemed baffling.

In January 1913 the Ulster Volunteers had been established by Ulster unionists who were determined to resist the imposition on Ulster, if not on Ireland, of a home rule parliament, as promised by Asquith's home rule bill. This lesson was not lost upon nationalists and, in November 1913, another Volunteer force was organized to defend home rule. Both sides imported guns illegally and commenced drilling, but the outbreak of war in August 1914 changed everything. John Redmond, knowing that the Irish Parliamentary Party's survival depended on the implementation of home rule, offered the support of the National Volunteers to the war effort. The majority of Volunteers supported him, and many volunteered for war service. But a more republican anti-British rump formed the Irish Volunteers, and leadership passed to those who believed that 'England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity'.<sup>17</sup>

It would have been prudent to confine Irish grants to the Co-operative Reference Library. But, at their first meeting, the trustees had undertaken to honour payment of all grants promised by Carnegie prior to 1913. This commitment drew them, willy-nilly, into Irish library affairs. As early as May 1914 Dr John Ross, - chairman of the Trust, received, via Carnegie's New York office, a letter written by the clerk of Newcastle West RDC, to whom Carnegie had reluctantly promised £3,900 the previous year. The letter enclosed plans for a central library and ten branch libraries, and asked for clearance to commence building. Ross was horrified by this example of the very over-building that the trustees

had determined to oppose. He wrote to Plunkett, asking him to investigate the position in Newcastle West.

Plunkett, as has been described, had many connections with West Limerick, where he was a frequent visitor to Mount Trenchard, home of Lord Monteagle, and Cahirmoyle, the country house of Monteagle's nephew, Dermot O'Brien. Both were supportive of the rural library movement. Lady Monteagle had been instrumental in obtaining a grant for the Rathkeale RDC, while O'Brien, who was a successful portrait painter, had been consulted on the selection of a site for the proposed library at Ardagh, and had offered to contribute fifty pounds towards the cost of the building.<sup>18</sup>

Plunkett travelled to Cahirmoyle, and discussed the RDC's application with O'Brien. Based on his report, Ross wrote to A.J. Byrnes, the Newcastle West clerk, on 22 September, making various demands for changes in the plans which were aimed at reducing the size of the hall and increasing the space allocated for reading. 'Your intention', commented Ross, 'seems to be to erect buildings for holding meetings, not libraries'.<sup>19</sup> Hetherington was sent to Newcastle West in an attempt to persuade the RDC to reduce the number of branch libraries. Together with Smith Gordon, he met the members of the district library committee on 19 February 1915. Their attempts to get the RDC to abandon its plan and accept an experimental scheme on the lines of that in the north of Scotland, met with failure, because the councillors were determined to hold the trustees to

Carnegie's original promise. The only concession they would make was to agree to establish libraries in schools in those parts of the district not served by branch libraries.<sup>20</sup>

Plunkett asked Smith Gordon to prepare a memorandum on the Newcastle West library grant to submit to the executive committee meeting on 27 February. In this memorandum<sup>21</sup>, Smith Gordon argued that, although the need for reading matter in rural areas was as urgent in Ireland as in Britain, the method whereby this need was met would have to be radically different, if it was to be successful. In Britain, schools could be used as centres for book distribution. In Ireland, schools were unsuitable, because they were usually associated with a particular religious denomination. Furthermore, due to Carnegie's ill-advised policy, the term 'library' in Ireland was understood to mean 'a handsome building of bricks and mortar with convenient accommodation for meetings, whether intellectual or recreational',<sup>22</sup> - in other words - a village hall. No matter what conditions were laid down in Dunfermline, Irish councils would continue to use their libraries as halls. As a solution to these difficulties, Smith Gordon proposed that the trustees make it a condition of the grant that they have the right to appoint a librarian to take charge of the district library system. 'If three or four of these librarians were set down in different parts of Ireland, and went into the work with enthusiasm, the results might be great', he argued.<sup>23</sup> Finally, he pointed out that, if combined with Rathkeale rural district, Newcastle West would be an ideal location for



the first Irish experimental scheme.

Plunkett presented this memorandum to the executive committee on 1 March, urging them to initiate an experimental scheme in the two rural districts. He was supported in this by Hetherington, but the remaining committee members were still reluctant to act without further information. It was decided to commission a special report on the state of the Rathkeale library service, and the prospects for Newcastle West. Cruise O'Brien, of the Co-operative Reference Library, was entrusted with this task.

Two of O'Brien's characteristics which impressed his contemporaries were his skills as a journalist and his sharp satirical wit.<sup>24</sup> The report<sup>25</sup>, which he forwarded to the trustees on 24 March, gave him ample scope to display both qualities. It was not merely a bald outline of facts, but contained a detailed analysis of what he found in the two rural districts, enlivened with vivid pen-pictures of library buildings, local committees and rural intrigues.

Although O'Brien did treat of the problems of Newcastle West he devoted most of his report to the condition of the library system in Rathkeale, justifying this on the grounds that 'the same state of things as now obtains in the Rathkeale district will occur in Newcastle West, if these rural authorities are responsible to no one but themselves'.<sup>26</sup> In Newcastle West he had discussions with A.J. Byrnes, the district clerk, and with Councillor Liston. He also noted that clerical hostility towards the library

scheme had by no means lessened since 1906 'The parish priest of Newcastle West, Monsignor Hallinan is extremely hostile to the whole library scheme, but his flock seem determined that he will not have his way'.<sup>27</sup> Father Liston of Shanagolden told O'Brien that he believed that the CTS pamphlets provided enough reading matter for country people. These attitudes, O'Brien warned the trustees, could make it difficult to establish a schools-based system of libraries in the rural district.

On visiting all the libraries in Rathkeale rural district, O'Brien found that standards varied considerably between the town library and the branches. He concluded that the Rathkeale district library committee was operating efficiently. The selection of books, amounting to 5,000 volumes, was a good one. These books were stored, O'Brien noted with some surprise, not in the town library but in the district clerk's offices, an arrangement that he recommended be changed as soon as possible. He was impressed by the condition of the town library, which he found well managed and maintained due, he believed, to the ability of Miss Noonan, whom he described as 'an intelligent and competent young woman'. Although the library building was fulfilling the function of a town hall, it was also being used as a library and newsroom. The lending library had 500 volumes in stock, and 310 readers enrolled. O'Brien made some observations on the type of book favoured by these readers. Novels were popular, including the works of Dickens and Robert Louis Stephenson. Irish history and biography were

also in demand, and he noted that women borrowed books on homecraft, especially 'Mrs Beeton's classic work'. He noted the existence of some more discerning readers. 'There are a few people who read books which do not as a rule make an appeal to the dweller in country towns of this size. Even Mr. W.B. Yeats has his devotees in Rathkeale'.<sup>28</sup>

But, if the town library seemed to be fulfilling its proper function, the five branch libraries had fallen into decay. Not only were they being used solely as 'village halls where people gathered for talk and games', but even at that level, they were not being efficiently run. O'Brien visited the Carnegie library in the village of Askeaton, a typical district council building, with a hall on the ground floor, and two rooms, intended to house the library, overhead. He discovered that these rooms had been let by the library sub-committee to two village societies who kept the rooms permanently locked. The 'library' was confined to a bookcase, and the 'librarian' was 'a well intentioned man, who had never read a book in his life'.<sup>29</sup> This individual assured O'Brien that less than twenty readers used the library. Yet this was the building about which Naughton and the local clergy had squabbled so vehemently only three years previously.

The branch libraries at Kilcolman, Shanagolden and Ballyhahill were also dilapidated. In Kilcolman O'Brien had a revealing conversation with the village librarian, who was the local blacksmith. He explained why the number of readers had declined - people did not get the books they wanted.

"They'd sooner", he confided to me, "read the story in the Cork Examiner (the local daily paper) than to be reading history books. Sure it's a little excitement they want'.<sup>30</sup>

But O'Brien felt that this was an argument for the appointment of a trained librarian:

The people have no one to tell them what there is to be found in the books on the library shelves. The blacksmith-librarian is as wise as they are, and the library committee is more anxious to keep a strict supervision over the boys' and girls' jigs and reels than to set itself to the more important business of making its books of real use to the people.<sup>31</sup>

The doubtful distinction of having the most neglected library building in the rural district belonged to the village of Croagh (see plate III). O'Brien described the branch library as 'an eyesore in the village, dirty and dilapidated, with the paint scratched off the door, and the windows broken.' The sub-committee had not met for five years and no books were available since the caretaker had burnt them. 'Whether' observed O'Brien 'to emulate the example of Savonarola, or from some less exalted motive, I have not been able to ascertain'.<sup>32</sup>

Any experimental library scheme initiated by the CUKT in Ireland would, O'Brien believed, have to ensure that the sub-committees in charge of the branch libraries performed their duties efficiently. If they were allowed to become careless, then the branch libraries would inevitably fall into neglect. To prevent this, O'Brien recommended that the submission of annual reports and financial statements be made a condition of any grant given by the trustees, and that all such schemes be regularly inspected by a representative of the Trust. In

Plate III

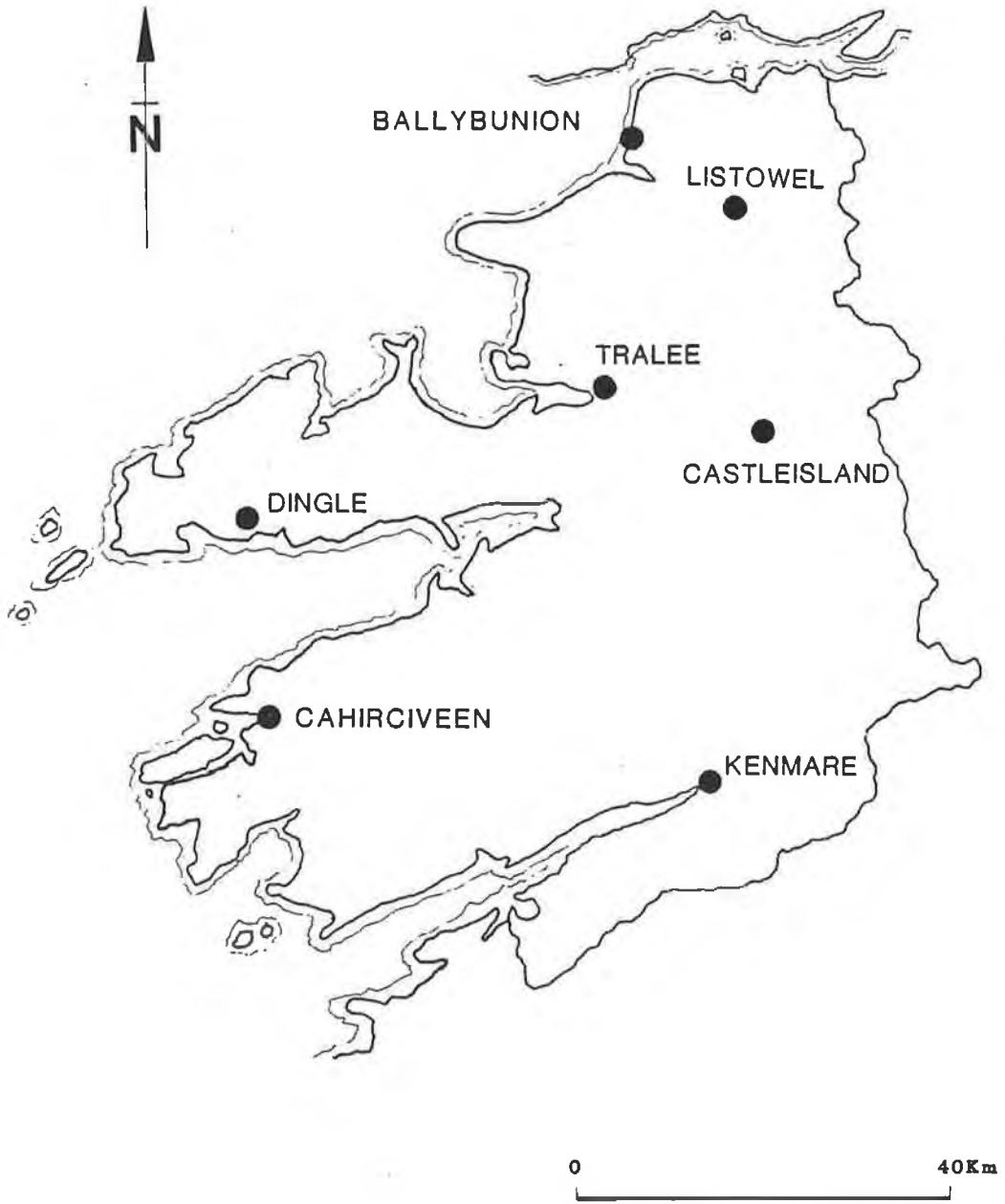
Former branch library, Croagh, County Limerick.



the case of Rathkeale RDC, this representative could be the librarian of the Newcastle West system. O'Brien was in agreement with Smith Gordon on the necessity for a CUKT appointee to be placed in charge in Newcastle West. He believed that the Rathkeale RDC would inevitably ask for the assistance of this person, and thus both library systems would be run on proper lines with immense benefit to the rural population. In order to obtain the agreement of the Newcastle West RDC, O'Brien recommended that the grant be increased to £4,900. 'I believe', he stated, 'that for an extra grant they would agree to almost any condition'.<sup>33</sup>

While the executive committee was considering O'Brien's report, letters arrived at the Dunfermline office which indicated that it would not be possible to confine its Irish concerns to County Limerick. Thomas O'Donnell, who had tried to rally national teachers behind the cause of rural libraries in the early 1900s, had also made contact with Carnegie and obtained his promise of grants to a number of district councils, both urban and rural, in County Kerry, (see figure two). Some districts, such as Listowel urban, and Cahirciveen rural and urban, had received their grants and built libraries. Others, such as Dingle rural, were still awaiting the first installment, when Carnegie handed over his library affairs to the CUKT. In March 1915, Matthew Byrne, the secretary of the Listowel library committee, wrote to say that the town library was completed although not yet open to the public.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, Bertram forwarded a letter from O'Donnell asking for some of the promised grant

Figure Two  
County Kerry



for the library at Dingle. Hetherington, assuming this to be a new application sent a non-committal acknowledgment. O'Donnell's reply must have alarmed Hetherington, who had believed that Carnegie's promise to Newcastle West RDC was the only one still outstanding to an Irish applicant. In fact, as O'Donnell wrote, eight years previously Carnegie had promised £2,000 for libraries in Dingle RDC.<sup>35</sup> An application was also received from Fr. Philip O'Doherty, who wrote for a grant to establish a library in the new village hall at Carndonagh in the Inishowen peninsula, County Donegal. This village hall may have been built in response to the campaign in the Irish Homestead, since Fr. O'Doherty was an active co-operator. He assured the trustees that the hall was run by a local committee representative of all religious and political persuasions. It was proposed to organise evening classes in technical subjects and lectures by guest speakers in the hall, in addition to the library.<sup>36</sup>

This worthy idea might have appealed to the trustees, who did take up the cause of the village hall in the 1930s, but they were still cautious. Hetherington had been convinced of the just claims of Ireland, however, and he supported Plunkett against those members of the executive committee who did not like any deviation from the library schemes as recommended by Adams. In order to win these trustees over, Plunkett decided to arrange a 'spontaneous' request for assistance from the Rathkeale RDC, which he hoped would sway the trustees. Lord Monteagle agreed to organise



this and, in addition, made a suggestion that was afterwards adopted by the CUKT, namely that a small annual subsidy be paid to the library sub-committees in both rural districts, provided that the trustees received a satisfactory report on the state of the branch libraries under their control. This system, he pointed out, had worked well in schemes run by the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction. Carrying the agricultural analogy still further, Monteagle suggested that the person appointed to administer the library schemes at Newcastle West and Rathkeale be called an 'organiser', since his work would resemble that of an IAOS organiser 'though his subject matter would be books, not butter'.<sup>37</sup> Through Monteagle's influence, Cruise O'Brien was invited to address the Rathkeale RDC on the benefits of having a CUKT librarian in the district, and he easily persuaded the councillors to write to Dunfermline in the terms Plunkett had suggested.

The concept of an organising librarian, although perfectly logical to those versed in the ways of agricultural co-operation, was new to the trustees, whose experimental schemes were based on the county and the traditional county librarian. O'Brien provided Plunkett with a list of the possible duties of the successful applicant.<sup>38</sup> He (that it would be a man was taken for granted) would act as a mediator between the Newcastle West councillors and the trustees to ensure that the grant was administered properly. He would prepare a list of books for the library and initiate a

schools-based system, which would operate until the library buildings were ready. In Rathkeale he would reorganise the book stock, and move it to the town library. He would ensure that the sub-committees kept the branch libraries in good order, met frequently, and exchanged their book stock at regular intervals. Finally, he was to give talks on literary appreciation, in order to educate the rural population in the best use of their libraries.

When the executive committee met on 6 May, they had before them O'Brien's list of duties, as well as the request for assistance from the Rathkeale RDC. Plunkett, Hetherington, and Sir John Struthers, convinced the remainder of the committee that the only way to deal with the situation in Newcastle West and Rathkeale was to appoint an organising librarian. It was decided to allocate £3,000 (in addition to the £3,900 promised by Carnegie), over a period of five years in order to establish a satisfactory library system in the two rural districts.<sup>39</sup> The executive committee also hoped that this experience would indicate what was the most appropriate library policy for Ireland.

(iii)

But who was the organising librarian to be? Who would aspire to be at once an official charged with the machinery of book distribution, and a teacher charged with brightening the countryside, for £150 a year, plus expenses? Cruise O'Brien had a candidate in mind, selected not from those who

were active in the co-operative movement, but from the more bohemian patrons of the United Arts Club. This club had been founded in 1907 with the object, as its initial circular put it, of:

combining the usual advantages of a social club, open to both ladies and gentlemen, with features of special advantage to workers in art, in music, and in literature.<sup>40</sup>

From the start, the club attracted the leading figures of the Dublin literary scene: Yeats, Russell and Dermot O'Brien being among its first members. By 1913 its premises at 44 St. Stephen's Green was 'the intellectual and social centre of Dublin',<sup>41</sup> frequented by people of widely differing political opinions whose only common denominator was good breeding. Although most members were nationalist in their politics, the club was theoretically non-political. Consequently, it provided a sort of literary no man's land where civil servants like Maurice Headlam, who was Treasury Remembrancer of Ireland from 1912 to 1922, could indulge in intellectual conversation without being compromised.<sup>42</sup> Cruise O'Brien had been elected to the club in 1911, and soon became one of the inner circle of members, active in organising exhibitions, lectures and soirees.

Among the more obscure members in 1915 was Lennox Robinson, playwright, stage manager and temporary civil servant, in whom O'Brien divined qualities that caused him to write to Plunkett: 'He has the knowledge, the tact and the enthusiasm for rural betterment necessary for anyone who holds the post'. Robinson himself was more honest, as he

wrote, years later:

It seemed to be my fate to be pushed into positions for which I possessed no qualifications. I had to deal with libraries and I had never even heard of the Dewey system of book classification. Utterly ignorant, I had to go south and reorganise derelict libraries.<sup>43</sup>

Lennox Robinson was twenty seven years old in 1915. Born in Cork city, he was the son of a stockbroker who became a Church of Ireland clergyman. His childhood was spent in a number of rectories around County Cork. Although his family was unionist in political outlook, a number of incidents influenced Robinson to adopt a more nationalistic position. His friendship with the younger members of the Daunt family (whose grandfather had been a prominent associate of Daniel O'Connell), brought him into contact with Catholic nationalists of his own class, and provided him with access to the nationalistic writings of Thomas Davis among others. Together with Tom Daunt, he attended a performance by the Abbey players from Dublin of Lady Gregory's drama The rising of the moon in the Cork Opera House in 1907. Apart from further inflaming his nationalistic sympathies this experience inspired him to write for the stage.<sup>44</sup> Yet his early plays were not romances of the Gaelic past, but dramas showing a vision of rural life that was as dark as anything painted by Paul-Dubois or Canon Sheehan. His first play The Clancy name had for its theme 'the passion for respectability that can stifle small town life',<sup>45</sup> and his subsequent plays mined the same vein. These dark dramas of peasant life arose from Robinson's strong nationalistic feelings. He explained his vision of Ireland thus:

We young men didn't see [Ireland] as a queen...just because we loved her so deeply her faults were clear to us. Perhaps we realists saw her faults too clearly, perhaps we saw her too often as a grasping middle-aged hag...yet we would write all our terrible words about her out of our love.<sup>46</sup>

Audience reaction to The Clancy name was enthusiastic, and it ran for three months at the Abbey Theatre in 1908. Robinson moved to Dublin where he became part of the literary circle that centred on the United Arts Club. Further plays followed, still in the realistic mould. In 1910 Yeats offered him the position of producer manager at the Abbey, an offer so quixotic, given Robinson's complete inexperience, that it gave rise to the rumour that Yeats engaged Robinson because he liked the back of his head on seeing him in the Abbey audience.<sup>47</sup> In spite of some early difficulties, Robinson stayed with the Abbey until 1914, when he resigned to devote himself to writing. The outbreak of war disrupted his plans, and he attempted to enlist. He failed the medical examination, however, and took up a temporary civil service post in the Ministry of Pensions. It was at this stage that Cruise O'Brien decided to intervene to save Robinson from such an unsuitable position. He had no hesitation in 'pulling the Irish wire' to have his friend appointed organising librarian for the CUKT.<sup>48</sup>

With hindsight it can be said that Robinson was quite a good choice for this position, which he held, in various forms, until 1925. He had considerable organising ability, and was able to deal with people from all classes of society, overcoming the barrier between unionist Anglo-Irish and

Catholic nationalist that might have frustrated the efforts of other members of his class. He was also possessed of a highly developed sense of the ridiculous, which helped in dealing with some of the more ludicrous examples of petty officialdom that he encountered during his work for the CUKT. In appearance Robinson was tall and extremely thin, and his poor eyesight had caused O'Brien to maliciously nickname him 'Lynx'. The actor and playwright Micheal MacLiammoir, whose friendship with Robinson dated from 1919, has left the following evocative character sketch

He is as long and bony as Don Quixote, as shrewd as a squirrel, and as exasperating and as unexpected as a traffic jam, and his plaintive voice has the sound of an infant prodigy making impossible demands.<sup>49</sup>

A first encounter with Robinson could be quite disconcerting, as Michael O'Donovan, who came to dislike him, recalled of his interview for a position with the CUKT:

I met Robinson in the restaurant of the Cork railway station at Glanmire, where he was waiting for a train and drinking double brandies. He always looked like someone's caricature of him, long and mournful and disjointed, as though he had suffered on the rack, and he had a high pitched disjointed voice with every third word isolated and emphasized.<sup>50</sup>

Hubert Butler, who also worked in the county library service, remembers Robinson as cranky and quarrelsome,<sup>51</sup> while Lady Gregory, who knew Robinson both at the Abbey and through the CUKT regarded him as vague and morose. Certainly, he could be ruthless and stubborn, sometimes indefensibly so. Nevertheless, his contribution to the development of rural libraries in Ireland has been undeservedly forgotten.

Plunkett, a shrewd judge of character, may have divined

Robinson's qualities, as he accepted O'Brien's recommendation, although he had not known Robinson prior to a hastily arranged interview. He even arranged that the Ministry of Pensions would release Robinson without the necessity of working out notice. On 25 May Robinson wrote to Hetherington accepting the position of organising librarian in Newcastle West and Rathkeale. The trustees were anxious to put their plans into operation, and Robinson had time only for brief discussions with Plunkett and the staff of the Co-operative Reference Library, before he was instructed to travel to County Limerick. In order to give him an opportunity to look for suitable accommodation, it was arranged that he stay for a few weeks at Cahirmoyle with Dermot O'Brien's wife, Mabel, and their family. In fact, he was to remain there for the next four years.<sup>52</sup>

Robinson's first introduction to the library system he was to revitalise was anything but encouraging. He wrote to O'Brien:

on the way to Mount Trenchard on Saturday we stopped at - and I 'inspected' the library, that is to say, I climbed in through a broken window and saw the bare room. As you know yourself there are neither books nor bookcase there; that lonely hillside, those few scattered cottages, that gaunt<sup>53</sup> empty building, how am I to bring them all together?

But once he started to travel around the Rathkeale rural district he was heartened to discover that, even before his arrival, the district committee had begun to assert its authority over the various sub-committees to get them to put their branch libraries in order. Only one sub-committee, at

Croagh, had made no attempt to improve its library, and this, Robinson was informed, was largely due to the unhelpful attitude of the local parish priest.

The enthusiasm and co-operation that Robinson met among the village sub-committees was not, however, reflected in the district council. Naughton had died suddenly in June 1914, and the acting clerk, Hassett, had no interest in libraries other than in retaining the twenty pounds he was paid for administration. Robinson found books, intended for the library, piled carelessly on tables and on the floor in Hassett's office. Not surprisingly, many books had been lost, and the sub-committees complained that, when they returned books to the clerk he often simply despatched them back again. It was clear that the books would have to be moved to the central library in the town, but this proposal roused fierce opposition in the Rathkeale RDC, opposition which Robinson surmised was activated by the clerk. The RDC was equally vehement in its opposition to the trustees' request that the library rate be increased to one penny.

On 10 July, Robinson wrote to Plunkett outlining these difficulties, and suggesting how the trustees might prudently proceed. Showing a practical understanding of human nature, he recommended that the trustees adopt Lord Monteagle's idea of an annual bonus. This would not only enable the sub-committees to repair their libraries, but would give the trustees a certain hold over the RDC. He advised the trustees simply to insist on the books being moved to the central library, leaving the clerk his twenty pounds for doing



nothing. 'This need not shock your economic sense', he assured Plunkett, 'since he is doing nothing at the present moment'. The penny rate issue should be left until the library system had been reorganised. Otherwise, as he put it, ratepayers might reasonably ask

why should we pay even a half-penny in the pound for a library which contains a few mouldy books, which is seldom open, and is only used occasionally for<sup>54</sup> a farmers' meeting, or a drill hall for the volunteers

Plunkett submitted these ideas to the executive committee who were favourably impressed by all of them, except the suggestion that the clerk should be paid for doing nothing. 'It seems almost bribery to secure an individual's neutrality in a project which has nothing for its object but the good of the district', they protested.<sup>55</sup> However, Plunkett persuaded them that it was worth accepting the situation to secure the support of the council.

The conditions under which the CUKT would assist the RDC were outlined in a letter read to a meeting of the council on 18 August. These had been reduced to a guarantee of co-operation with the organising librarian, and a promise to move all books to the central library. For its part the Trust would pay annual bonuses, ranging from three to fifteen pounds, to the librarians and committees of the various libraries, and would pay Robinson's salary for five years. These conditions were readily accepted by the councillors, and the clerk, as an indication of his good will, declared that the books had already been moved, as requested.<sup>56</sup>

Robinson now set to work in the central library. In

order to make it less like a town hall, he placed the books on shelves, where they were freely accessible to readers. He estimated that up to 600 books were missing, and inserted advertisements in the local newspapers asking borrowers to return all books to the central library in Rathkeale. He also started to compile a catalogue of the bookstock, which he intended to circulate to schools, creameries, Gaelic League branches, etc., throughout the rural district. It was difficult work, and he assured Plunkett that he was busy in the central library from early morning until late evening.

By October, the results of his efforts were apparent. The central library was rearranged, the catalogue was completed, and the local sub-committees were energetically improving their buildings. The libraries at Askeaton and Kilcolman, which O'Brien had found virtually abandoned, were open in the evenings and were well supplied with books and newspapers.<sup>57</sup> Even the parish priest at Croagh had given Robinson a free hand to do what he could to improve the village library. By the end of 1915 Robinson felt that the major part of his work in Rathkeale had been completed. The trustees looked on this progress with considerable satisfaction: - 'a great change has taken place in the library administration of the district', they noted in their Second Annual Report.<sup>58</sup>

Robinson's other County Limerick responsibility, the embryonic library scheme in Newcastle West, also occupied his attention during his first months at Cahirmoyle. Here he had

to persuade the RDC to reduce the number of branch libraries they planned to build, something that Carnegie himself had been unable to do. Robinson sought the advice of A.J. Byrnes, the district clerk, and James Leahy, the council's engineer, who had already drawn up a plan for the Newcastle West central library. Byrnes advised him that the sites at Tournafulla and Feenagh could be abandoned without repercussions, but that councillors from the other villages would cause difficulties. He shrewdly suggested that Robinson put forward the altered scheme at the August meeting of the council, when the harvest season assured a low attendance. Those councillors who did attend could be shown Leahy's plan for the central library, which had been considerably altered by Richard Orpen, a Dublin architect, in the hope that this would impress them.<sup>59</sup> It had been decided that the central library should be built by Leahy under the supervision of Orpen, and that the costs should be borne directly by the CUKT. This was to lessen the influence of the councillors over the type of structure that was erected.

Being thus assured of support from both Byrnes and Leahy, Robinson wrote to the Newcastle West RDC to explain that the trustees had agreed to increase the grant by £1,000 to take into account the rise in the cost of building materials caused by the war. As in Rathkeale, bonuses were promised, and the services of the organising librarian. For their part, the councillors were expected to use the library rate, which they had accumulated since 1912, to purchase books and equipment for a schools-based scheme, as outlined

by Adams. They should also, as Robinson quaintly put it 'grant full facilities for organising to the organising librarian', and, as a first step in that direction, they were to suspend building of branch libraries until the central library had been completed and opened. This letter was read to the council at its August meeting (at which there was, as Byrnes had predicted, a small attendance). A number of councillors objected to the branch libraries being pushed aside, but Leahy explained that this was necessary because he would be in charge of all building work undertaken for the CUKT. The chairman of the council, who was favourably impressed by the new plan for the central library, urged his fellow councillors to agree to the trustees' conditions, which they did, albeit reluctantly.<sup>60</sup> Robinson was present in the council chamber, and, although he was not asked to comment, he must have been satisfied with the result of the meeting.

Robinson's difficulties with the Newcastle West RDC were by no means over. During the autumn, when not occupied in Rathkeale, he compiled a list of books which he intended to distribute through the schools. In October he wrote to the council, asking for the release of some of the accumulated library rate so that he could commence this schools-based system. The council's response showed that its first priority was to obtain libraries, or more correctly village halls - the provision of reading matter being a secondary consideration. Indeed, it was feared that a successful

library system based in the schools would lessen the chances of obtaining 'free libraries' in the villages. Therefore the council took its usual evasive action, by marking Robinson's letter 'read'.<sup>61</sup> Robinson did not press the issue, because he was assured by Byrnes that fear of controversy over book selection was behind this action. He simply decided to appoint a book selection committee to overcome this problem.

(iv)

Robinson's terms of employment should have confined him to Rathkeale and Newcastle West. However, as individuals from other parts of Ireland 'made overtures to the Trust to obtain the same beneficial administration which the Newcastle West and Rathkeale areas enjoyed',<sup>62</sup> his sphere of operations expanded, until he became de facto the CUKT's Irish representative.

His first venture on behalf of the Trust was to the neighbouring county of Kerry. Even against their better judgement, the trustees were obliged to take an interest in the library problems of this county. Firstly, Thomas O'Donnell was pressurising them to release some of the money promised by Carnegie to Dingle RDC. Secondly, Matthew Byrne of Listowel had written several times, hinting that a grant to purchase books would be quite acceptable. Thirdly, the trustees were in receipt of some incoherent correspondence from Tralee rural district concerning the Castleisland library.

Since March 1915 O'Donnell had been pressing first Bertram, and then Hetherington, for payment of the grant of £2,000, which he claimed had been promised by Carnegie in 1907, to build three libraries in Dingle rural district: a central library in the town of Dingle, and branch libraries at Castlegregory and Annascaul. The trustees did not favour this scheme, since they wished to avoid building branch libraries. They suspected that, if Carnegie had agreed to three buildings, they would have no option but to acquiesce, as Plunkett admitted to Hetherington 'the Dingle case is likely to give us a great deal of trouble. Mr. O'Donnell is very progressive, but he is also very aggressive.'<sup>63</sup> Although O'Donnell was unable to produce documentary evidence of the 1907 promise, the trustees agreed to honour the grant of £2,000. They still hoped to save the scheme by reducing the number of buildings to one central library in Dingle, with a schools-based service in the rest of the rural district. Robinson was entrusted with the unenviable task of persuading O'Donnell to accept this compromise, and on 31 July 1915, travelled from Cahirmoyle to Dingle to meet him. The result was the reverse of what the trustees had intended. O'Donnell convinced Robinson that, due to the mountainous nature of the rural district, at least one branch library was essential. As a stalling tactic, Robinson invoked administrative problems that had arisen in the Dingle RDC about collection of the library rate as an excuse for delay in implementing the library scheme until the following year. This half promise satisfied O'Donnell for the time being.<sup>64</sup>

Earlier in July, Robinson had travelled to Listowel to investigate the condition of the Carnegie library in the town. This library owed its existence to Canon Denis O'Riordan, the parish priest, who had written to Carnegie in 1911 for a grant towards the cost of building a library. A grant of £1,500 was promised, but difficulties in obtaining a suitable site, and Bertram's objections to the amount of space devoted to a lecture hall in the building plans, delayed work on the library until 1914.<sup>65</sup> The same year both Listowel urban and rural districts adopted the public libraries act, and resolved to pool the product of their library rates, thus giving the town library an annual revenue of £145,2.4d. Unlike the library systems in County Limerick, the Listowel library was vested in a board of trustees and administered by a committee of management, an arrangement insisted on by Canon O'Riordan, and one which gained the approval of the CUKT, since it lessened the power of councillors over the library. The principal champion of the Listowel library was Matthew Byrne, secretary of the committee of management. Byrne was a solicitor with a large practice in the Listowel area. Described by Robinson as 'a man of considerable learning, intelligence and taste',<sup>66</sup> he was a contributor of articles on local history to scholarly journals, and had translated a number of medieval Gaelic texts.<sup>67</sup>

Since the trustees did not reply to his first letter, Byrne wrote again in June 1915, outlining the library system

which it was proposed to operate in Listowel. This involved a central library for the townspeople, and a circulating library based in the schools for rural dwellers. Although this was probably based on O'Donnell's 1903 pamphlet, Parish libraries, it closely resembled the system now being promoted by the trustees. This letter caused Hetherington to give Robinson his first assignment outside County Limerick 'If', he wrote to Plunkett, 'Mr. Robinson has any spare time, he might fit in a visit to Listowel to find out what the situation is'.<sup>68</sup>

In Listowel, Robinson met Byrne and Canon O'Riordan, who explained to him that a grant of eighty pounds from the CUKT would enable them to purchase books for the rural circulating library. Following Robinson's favourable recommendation, the trustees agreed to grant £100 to Listowel, specifically to organise book distribution through its schools. It is evident, from the minutes of the executive committee, that they saw the Listowel library as being in the mould of the north of Scotland scheme.<sup>69</sup> Before disbursing this grant, the trustees insisted on a development plan being supplied by the Listowel committee. This plan, drawn up with the assistance of Robinson, was submitted to the trustees in October. On Robinson's advice, the committee had restricted the number of locations for rural libraries to six: Duagh, Tarbert, Ballylongford, Newtown, Lixnaw, and Ballybunion. Boxes of books were to be sent to either the parish priest or the schoolmaster in each village for distribution. An annual report was to be submitted to the trustees, and Robinson was



to assist with book selection. This satisfied the trustees, who forwarded a cheque for £100 to Byrne.

Robinson's involvement with the library affairs of the Tralee rural district produced an element of farce, which caused Hetherington to comment 'these Irish library affairs are beyond belief, you must be getting a lot of material for plays'.<sup>70</sup> Tralee RDC had adopted the public libraries act in 1909, and, through the representation of O'Donnell obtained a grant of £1,500 from Carnegie, which was used to erect a library in the town of Castleisland in the west of the district. The library was completed in 1914, but remained unopened. The trustees were unaware of its existence until September 1915, when they received two letters from Castleisland. The first, from James Roche, asked the trustees to influence the council to open a technical school in the building. The second, which was rather incoherent, came from Michael Healy. He complained about the refusal of the council to open the library and requested that his son be appointed 'librarian' : 'he will be well recommended, had numonea 2 years and can't stand rain or cold'.<sup>71</sup>

Again, Robinson was instructed to investigate and, although he was immersed in the task of cataloguing the Rathkeale bookstock, he agreed to do so. He wrote to the parish priest of Castleisland, Monsignor O'Leary, for information about the library, but received no reply.

Accordingly, on 3 November, he travelled to Castleisland to investigate the situation at first hand. The account of this visit, which Robinson wrote to Plunkett on the following day, showed that his flair for comedy was not confined to drama.

On arriving in Castleisland he called at the presbytery, where he found Monsignor O'Leary about to get into a 'covered car'

I explained who I was and that I had written to him about the library.

The Mon[severely] "And I told you then that I had nothing whatever to do with the library."

I [quite humbly] "But I never got that letter; I never got any letter from you"

The Mon. [more severely] "I didn't write one either"

At this stage the Monsignor's driver intervened to advise Robinson to contact Brian O'Connors, the chairman of the library committee. O'Connors was the proprietor of a public house and, since he was not at home, Robinson waited for him, drinking 'the hottest and greasiest chicken broth I have ever tasted', and discussing local politics with Mrs. O'Connors. He discovered that most people in the town wanted to use the library as a technical school. Eventually O'Connors returned with the clerk of the council, and another councillor who was surly and very deaf.

I got the impression, that the place seethes with jobbery and corruption. They have no books, nor do they have the vaguest idea of how to set about getting them, or indeed to want to get them

All agreed that what Castleisland really needed was a technical school. They were astonished when Robinson suggested that this would be a misuse of Carnegie's gift. Since the key to the library door had been (deliberately, Robinson thought), mislaid, he could only view the building

from outside. It seemed well designed, but too large for a town like Castleisland, which had a population of only 1,500. As a parting shot, Robinson urged O'Connors to appoint an active library committee, purchase books from the accumulated rate, and open the library. In reply, O'Connors persisted in stressing the people's desire for a technical school.

The situation seemed hopeless, but, while Robinson assured Plunkett that he would understand if the trustees abandoned Castleisland library to its fate, he felt that he might make something of it, with the backing of the CUKT.<sup>72</sup> Plunkett's reply showed that he agreed:

It is better to try to get some value for Mr. Carnegie's expenditure, not only in the interest of the particular community concerned, but with a view to strengthening the position of the Carnegie trustees in whatever<sup>73</sup> civilising work they may undertake in the future.

A letter was sent to the Tralee RDC offering the assistance of 'the Trust's Organising Librarian' to establish a library service in the district. Through the support of O'Connors, this offer was accepted, and by the end of 1915 Robinson had another ailing library system under his control.

(v)

Robinson's letters caused considerable amusement in the CUKT offices at Dunfermline. 'He is worth his salary for his writing alone' Sir John Struthers commented in a marginal note on Robinson's account of his expedition to Castleisland. This letter may have given Struthers the idea of compiling a report on the Trust's work in Ireland, which could be presented to the individual trustees as a Christmas gift from the chairman. This report could include the more colourful details which the Trust's published Annual Report would have to omit. Hetherington suggested a title: Glimpses at the rural library problem in Ireland, and wrote to Robinson for a report on his work to date. He told Robinson that the aim of this report was to give the trustees, who were not on the executive committee, an indication of the special problems that existed in Ireland. However a letter written to Plunkett at the same time hinted that the intention was to entertain rather than to educate, as it referred to 'the priceless letters received from our friends Mr. Healy and James Roche'.<sup>74</sup>

This letter was delivered to Plunkett House, where Cruise O'Brien, whose report of the previous March was also to be included, read it. He suspected an Irish burlesque, and asked Hetherington to write a chapter indicating that a solution to the Irish rural library problem was in sight. John Ross, chairman of the CUKT, was also dubious about the project, as he feared that the report might get into the

wrong hands and embarrass the Trust. But Hetherington pressed on with the project, assuring Ross that the report would be strictly confidential, and O'Brien that it would not be simply a humorous resume of Irish idiosyncrasies. He wrote to Robinson in the same terms. 'Your reports are, in my humble opinion, quite literary gems, and for that reason alone are most worthy of permanent record.'<sup>75</sup> He also took the precaution of editing out some of Michael Healy's scathing comments on the Tralee rural district councillors.

On 30 November Hetherington sent a draft to Robinson for his approval. This elicited the comment that 'the glimpse is a very dark and stormy one, and I think that attention should be drawn to the shaft of sunlight that slants on Rathkeale'.<sup>76</sup> In his reply, Hetherington promised that the preface would emphasise the hopeful signs. Glimpses at the rural library problem in Ireland, part one (for Hetherington envisaged this as an annual publication), duly appeared in mid-December, suitably bound in green, and marked 'strictly confidential for the information of trustees only'. The trustees were immensely delighted with their gift, according to Hetherington. But there is no evidence to indicate that it increased their interest in Ireland.

If Glimpses at the rural library problem in Ireland provided an unofficial account of the CUKT's work in Ireland during 1915, the Second Annual Report, presented to the annual general meeting in February 1916, was more circumspect. The difficulty of dealing with the rural library problem in Ireland was stressed, but so was the

spirit of friendly co-operation that the organising librarian had met. In a patronising vein the report noted that

There are not wanting signs both that the people can be made to understand the value of a library system, and that, when they do understand it,<sup>77</sup> they are ready to avail themselves of its advantages.

The report cited Rathkeale and Listowel as examples of what an Irish rural library system could achieve if it was put on a proper footing. In all, the trustees were pleased with their involvement in Ireland, and looked forward to 1916 with optimism.

(vi)

Robinson's newly acquired position of library organiser had not caused him to abandon his literary activities. In the autumn of 1915 he recommenced work on his novel A young man from the south, which he had thrown aside the previous year. This time he persisted with what was for him a new medium and finished the text on New Years Eve. Like many first novels it was semi-autobiographical. The hero, Willie Powell, is a young Anglo-Irishman from Cork who becomes a successful playwright. A search for his cultural identity leads Powell to involvement with Irish language enthusiasts and revolutionary Sinn Feiners, some of whom were thinly disguised portraits of real people.<sup>78</sup> In January 1916 Robinson submitted the manuscript to a Dublin publisher.

Unknown to Robinson, some of those who appeared in his roman a clef were planning events that would make 1916 a

turning point in Irish history. On Easter Monday, 24 April, groups of Irish Volunteers occupied strategic positions in Dublin. On the steps of the General Post Office, P.H. Pearse, in his capacity as president of the provisional government, proclaimed the establishment of the Irish Republic. Among the insurgents who were present was Sean T. O'Ceallaigh formerly of Cumann na Leabharlann.<sup>79</sup> The rebellion was soon crushed. On 29 April, Pearse surrendered unconditionally to the military authorities. The British government, fearful of a German invasion, and under pressure on the western front, acted swiftly. By 12 May, fifteen of the leaders had been executed, only his American birth saving Eamon de Valera, who had commanded the Volunteers at Boland's Mills (the family business of John Boland M.P.). Among the many human casualties and the destruction of property in the city centre was one lesser disaster. Robinson's manuscript perished with the destruction of the Dublin publishing house.

In spite of 'the trouble in Dublin', as the Limerick Leader's headline tactfully put it,<sup>80</sup> Robinson's library responsibilities seemed unchanging. On 24 May the condition of the library at Ballyhahill was agitating the Rathkeale district councillors who complained that the premises was being used for drinking and gambling. The local librarian, who attended the meeting, blamed his sub-committee for failing to support him against troublemakers. The councillors had a solution: to turn part of the building into a medical dispensary. They instructed the district clerk to write to the CUKT for permission to undertake the

necessary alterations.<sup>81</sup> This solution may have seemed quite sensible to the councillors, but the trustees would not countenance it. Robinson tried to make a fresh start by arranging for the nomination of a new sub-committee. He would have liked to dismiss the librarian, whom he described as 'inefficient, and difficult to remove',<sup>82</sup> but this proved impossible, and the condition of the library worsened. In October an indignant councillor described it as 'a sink hole, a ball alley, and an abode for tramps'.<sup>83</sup>

The branch library at Croagh, which Cruise O'Brien had considered to be the most neglected in the district, was still in that position eighteen months later. The district engineer's report, submitted to the RDC on 22 June 1916, described a derelict building with shuttered windows, and a door hanging from its hinges.<sup>84</sup> Again the councillors blamed the local library sub-committee, and nominated a new one. However, they re-affirmed the parish priest, Fr. Mulcahy, as chairman of the sub-committee. This was unfortunate, since Robinson had identified the ill-feeling between Fr. Mulcahy and a section of his parishioners as the chief obstacle to progress in Croagh. The new sub-committee was more energetic and in November applied to the RDC for a grant to help repair the building. The councillors, as usual, were loath to part with money, but, when the district engineer assured them that Robinson had promised that the Trust would pay part of the cost, they agreed.<sup>85</sup>

In contrast to the apathy at Ballyhahill and Croagh, the



other sub-committees continued to run their branch libraries efficiently. The central library in Rathkeale was a particular source of satisfaction to Robinson. The number of borrowers and books issued increased dramatically, and Miss Noonan proved a capable and reliable librarian. Taking an over view of the Rathkeale library service in July 1916, Robinson was able to recommend that all the sub-committees, with the exception of Ballyhahill and Croagh, be paid the bonuses promised by the trustees the previous year.

The members of Rathkeale RDC seemed anxious to fulfill their obligations to the CUKT, and were somewhat overawed by Lennox Robinson. Their counterparts at Newcastle West suffered from no such inhibitions. Although they had agreed that the Newcastle West library be built by direct labour, they took exception to the fact that the £4,900 promised by the CUKT was lodged not in a local bank under their control, but in the Co-operative Reference Library's account in Dublin. During the early months of 1916, they bombarded Plunkett (ignoring Robinson) with demands that the money be transferred. Cruise O'Brien, the recipient of most of these letters, was moved to complain that 'this Newcastle West plague is reaching disgusting proportions'.<sup>86</sup> In an attempt to stem it, Hetherington wrote to A.J. Byrnes stating bluntly that the trustees intended to continue building the libraries themselves.<sup>87</sup>

The councillors then tried a new tack. As the central library neared completion, they began to press Leahy, the district engineer, to begin work on the branch libraries. To

ensure that no unnecessary (in their estimation), expenses were incurred by purchasing books, they ignored a letter from Robinson, read at a meeting on 29 May, asking them to appoint a book selection committee. Instead, they passed a resolution calling on Leahy to proceed with the branch libraries at Knockaderry, Broadford, Feenagh and Athea, where sites had already been acquired.<sup>88</sup> Leahy, who was aware that there was not sufficient money left from the grant to build four libraries, wrote to O'Brien for advice. O'Brien told him that he should inform the councillors that the number of branch libraries would have to be drastically reduced, but Leahy prudently declined to dash his employers' expectations. Sensing storms ahead, Smith Gordon wrote to Hetherington in a humorous vein.

I fear Mr. Lennox Robinson's position, if not his life, may be rendered somewhat insecure, when the representatives of local constituencies discover that they are not to have a village hall after all.

This time, Hetherington was not amused, and he telegraphed Robinson for a copy of the resolution that had been passed by the Newcastle West RDC in August 1915, when the councillors had agreed to the CUKT's conditions in return for an increased grant, in case it should become necessary to seek legal advice. Robinson's reply from Cahirmoyle, indicated that he, at least, had no fear for his personal safety. 'There will probably be a lot of fuss about abandoning some of the libraries, but it had to come sooner or later'.<sup>90</sup>

This confrontation took place at a poorly attended meeting of the RDC on 19 August. O'Brien and Robinson both

addressed the meeting on the need to reduce the number of branch libraries. They told the councillors bluntly that they had only themselves to blame, since it was their insistence on including a large hall in the central library that had used up all but £700 of the original grant. O'Brien, who spoke as Plunkett's representative, stressed, with tongue in cheek, that the trustees were mercenary Scotsmen, who had no interest in Ireland, while Robinson hinted that, if the councillors made a success of the library system, more money might be forthcoming in a few years' time. The councillors capitulated before this two-pronged attack, and agreed to abandon some branch libraries and appoint book selection and management committees.<sup>91</sup> The management committee included Monsignor Hallinan, who had evidently overcome his objection to public libraries sufficiently to allow him to join.

The book selection committee got to work on lists compiled by Robinson, who acted as its secretary. The clerical members of the committee were particularly concerned with the moral welfare of their flocks. As Robinson confided to Plunkett:

Censorship is pretty rigorous, but, in spite of it, I am squeezing in a lot of good books. I don't deliberately suggest books dangerous to faith and morals, but you never can tell.<sup>92</sup>

The management committee, meanwhile, advertised for a librarian to administer the circulation of book boxes throughout the rural district, and supervise the central library, for which they offered a salary of twenty pounds a

year. The successful applicant was Michael Nix, who was selected at a council meeting on 12 October.<sup>93</sup>

The central library opened on 13 November 1916. (see plate IV). The reading room, which was stocked with newspapers and periodicals, was considered to be an asset to the town. However, proprietors of commercial meeting rooms in the town were not pleased with the lecture hall, which they realised would reduce their business. They were accused, both by Robinson and by anonymous correspondents to the local papers, of being responsible for the fracas which spoiled the first function held in the Carnegie library. On 23 November the management committee organised a concert to raise funds to purchase furniture for the lending library. The programme included items by a number of artistes brought from Dublin with financial assistance from the CUKT. A section of the audience objected to the anti-national nature of the programme (an accusation Robinson vehemently rejected, pointing out that the same programme had caused no offence in Rathkeale), and the concert broke up in disorder.<sup>94</sup> The incident lived long in local memory. Daniel Doyle, the first Limerick county librarian, recorded a version he heard in the 1950s. This account attributed the disturbance to the audiences' objection to a song about the Famine being sung by a woman obviously from the ascendancy class.<sup>95</sup>

Plate IV

Carnegie library, Newcastle West, County Limerick.



The library service in the various rural districts in County Kerry which already boasted Carnegie libraries continued to occupy Robinson during 1916. In the early months of the year he discovered the existence of two further Carnegie libraries. While in Castleisland to meet the new library committee, which he had persuaded the RDC to appoint, he met an old schoolfellow, who told him about another unopened Carnegie free library in the town of Kenmare. The following month he visited Kenmare where he discovered that the library committee was already distributing books through the schools, and was about to open the town library. He was able to report to the trustees, probably with some relief, that this Carnegie library, at least, would need little more than an occasional visit. From Kenmare, Robinson travelled on to Cahirciveen where another Carnegie library had opened in 1911. The library committee had written to the CUKT for a grant to purchase books for the purpose of distribution throughout the rural district. As in Kenmare, Robinson was satisfied with the condition of the library, and his recommendation obtained a grant of £100 for the library committee.<sup>96</sup>

The Listowel library was officially opened in January 1916, with Robinson present to represent the CUKT. The library committee set about organising the library service with some energy, and its report, which Matthew Byrne forwarded to Dunfermline in July, indicated that considerable

progress had been made. The total book stock numbered 1,168 volumes, of which 378 were fiction, the small proportion perhaps reflecting Byrne's own prejudices 'I despise fiction', he wrote to Robinson, 'and the clergy dread it'. Historical works predominated in the non-fiction category. Byrne's report did not give titles of specific books, but showed that historical works were most popular in the reading room, while fiction was most frequently borrowed for home reading. The circulating library, which was intended to cater for residents in the rural district, did not commence until the autumn. When Robinson visited Listowel in November, prior to compiling his annual report, he found the scheme in operation. As he wrote to Plunkett:

I was at Listowel last week, and inspected three of the schools, which were supplied with books from the library. The first school has made tremendous use of the books, gets them every two months, fifty at a time, and the schoolmaster says they are much appreciated in the district. The other schools have had only one <sup>97</sup>box each so far, but the books are much used and liked.

Thomas O'Donnell had not forgotten Robinson's promise that money would be available to start building the Dingle library in 1916. In the spring of that year, his insistent letters caused a flurry of activity among the staff of the Co-operative Reference Library. The Local Government Board architect, Richard Orpen, was asked to inspect the sites proposed for libraries in the Dingle RDC, in the company of Robinson and O'Donnell. It was hoped that this time O'Donnell would be persuaded to abandon the idea of branch libraries in favour of a system based on schools, as was

operating in Listowel RDC. Again O'Donnell proved stubborn, and only reluctantly agreed to reduce the scheme to a central library at Dingle and a branch library at Castlegregory.<sup>98</sup> With that the trustees had to be satisfied, and by the end of the year work had begun on the central library.

The fate of his novel may have persuaded Robinson to turn back to writing for the theatre. During the summer of 1916 he wrote what was to be his most enduring play, The White headed boy, which received its premiere at the Abbey on 13 December. Strangely enough, in view of Robinson's previous plays and the political circumstances of the time, this was not a realistic tragedy but a 'genial satire of small town life'.<sup>99</sup> Its popular success encouraged Robinson to devote more time to writing, a decision facilitated by his declining library responsibilities. He re-wrote A young man from the south from his notes, and began The lost leader, a play on the fall of Parnell. There were also the pleasures of country living at Cahirmoyle, reflected in a letter from Mabel O'Brien to her husband: 'The Lynx and I played the whole of Sheherazade last night, and read a canto of the Purgatorio. We had a great evening'.<sup>100</sup>

He did not neglect the library committees, but they seemed to be at last learning to manage their own affairs. Developments in Rathkeale were particularly encouraging. Following visits to Ballyhahill and Croagh in February 1917, Robinson was able to report that 'the two blacksheep of the district are at last bestirring themselves and are really going to put their houses in order'.<sup>101</sup> In Ballyhahill, the



newly appointed curate, Fr. Edmund McCarthy, proved to be such a useful ally that Robinson turned a blind eye to his political sympathies, as he confessed to Plunkett:

I believe the first use the restored library was put to was a meeting at which Father McCarthy sang six rebel songs and enrolled 150 members in a Sinn Fein club. But we won't tell this to the other trustees!<sup>102</sup>

Fr. McCarthy was also influential in persuading the RDC to raise the library rate to a penny. He was present, as a representative of the district library committee, at a meeting of the RDC on 16 May, when a letter from Robinson urging this change, was read. Following a lengthy speech by Fr. McCarthy, a notice of motion to raise the library rate was introduced by Councillor Madden. This motion came before the council on 30 May, when both Robinson and Fr. McCarthy were present to speak in its favour. Both laid emphasis on the poor return from the half-penny rate, while Robinson stressed the educational value of the libraries. Support was by no means unanimous. There were the usual objections to increasing taxation, and one councillor complained that the libraries were only used for gambling. In the end, Robinson's arguments won the day, and the motion was carried by thirteen votes to ten,<sup>103</sup> an achievement which the trustees regarded with considerable satisfaction.

The 'Newcastle West plague' which had caused so much irritation since 1915, subsided in 1917, as the councillors found political agitation more interesting than libraries. Even when the villagers of Knockaderry refused to accept a branch library, preferring to build a hall by public

subscription, there was no clamour for the library to be built elsewhere, and it was simply assigned to the neighbouring village of Cloncagh. In the summer, Leahy commenced building at Athea, Broadford, Feenagh and Cloncagh. The lending section of the central library opened in May, and the CUKT's Third Annual Report noted its popularity:

The stock of books is necessarily small at present, but it forms a sound nucleus for a library, and there seems little doubt that Newcastle West<sup>104</sup> will prove a successful centre for book distribution.

Much of this success Robinson attributed to Michael Nix's organising ability.

The rural library services in Kerry continued to experience mixed fortunes. James Flahive, the builder employed to erect the Dingle library, informed Robinson that due to the continued increase in the cost of building materials he would not be able to complete the work within his estimate. For their part, the councillors, assisted by the indefatigable Thomas O'Donnell, sought an extra £500 from the CUKT. Robinson supported their application: 'they are a decent community down in Dingle, and I think that they are likely to run their library well',<sup>105</sup> and the trustees agreed.<sup>106</sup> By the end of 1917, the Dingle library was almost complete and the branch library at Castlegregory was at the planning stage.<sup>107</sup>

In Listowel rural and urban districts the library service expanded considerably under the guidance of an active and enthusiastic committee.<sup>108</sup> Matthew Byrne's annual report<sup>109</sup>, dated August 1917, indicated that the bookstock

in the town library now amounted to 2,000 volumes, while a further 800 were used in the rural circulating library. Six sub-libraries had been established in the larger villages in the rural district. These were supplied with boxes of books twice a year, Byrne having arranged for boxes identical to those used in the north of Scotland scheme to be manufactured for this purpose. The report included some information on the subjects most popular with users of the central library. Fiction continued to be most in demand, followed by books on the history of Ireland, and a category called 'educational books'. There were 222 books on religious topics in the bookstock, perhaps reflecting the clerical predominance on the book selection committee. But the low number of issues from this category, - only thirty three, indicated that this did not reflect popular taste. Statistics from the sub-libraries showed the same reading trends, although more books on religious topics were borrowed in Ballybunion, a seaside resort favoured by holidaying clergymen. In spite of the care taken in selecting books, there had been complaints, and it was felt necessary to appoint a censorship committee, which reviewed the entire bookstock, and weeded out any titles likely to cause offence. Unfortunately, Byrne gave no indication of what specific works met this fate.

The neighbouring rural districts of Tralee and Cahirciveen provided a contrast of library fortunes. The Castleisland library remained obstinately closed, although Robinson did succeed in persuading the RDC to give some of

its accumulated rate to help the town library in Tralee (another Carnegie benefaction). The Cahirciveen library committee, on the other hand, commenced supplying boxes of books to a number of sub-libraries located in national schools, and Robinson, who inspected the scheme during the summer, reported that it was being used by a large number of appreciative readers.<sup>110</sup>

(viii)

Robinson's burdens in Limerick and Kerry might have grown lighter, but developments in the CUKT indicated that his responsibilities in other areas were likely to expand. Due to the increase in the number of library schemes which they were financing throughout the United Kingdom, the executive committee established a library standing sub-committee in July 1916. This sub-committee (hereafter referred to as the library sub-committee), dealt with most of the routine decisions with regard to library schemes, leaving major decisions to the executive committee. Plunkett was nominated to this sub-committee, as were the other trustees who had expressed most interest in Ireland. A complete review of the Trust's library policy was undertaken, and, as part of this, Robinson was instructed to visit all the public libraries in Ireland that had received grants, either from Carnegie or from the Trust, and to report on their condition. In the autumn of 1916 Robinson visited forty libraries, both urban and rural, in various locations throughout Ireland

excluding Limerick and Kerry. The following January he travelled to Dunfermline to report his findings to the trustees. As a result, he was asked to submit a more detailed report for the consideration of the library sub-committee. This report was circulated to the trustees in May 1917, as 'Glimpses at the rural library problem in Ireland, part two'.<sup>111</sup> It contained not simply descriptions of what Robinson had found in his inspection of Carnegie libraries, but also opinions as to the causes of these conditions, and suggestions as to how the CUKT might assist in future library development. This report was to shape the direction of the CUKT's Irish library policy for the following eight years.

Robinson considered that only six of the forty Carnegie libraries, that he had visited were providing an adequate library service. These were all located in Dublin, Belfast and Cork. He classified sixteen libraries as reasonably well managed, and fourteen as inefficient. Four 'libraries' he discovered were simply halls, and included no books at all. The principal reason for the high number of inefficient libraries, according to Robinson, was not ill-will on the part of local authorities, but poverty. Just like the members of Cumann na Leabharlann a decade previously, Robinson identified the penny rate as the cause of the library problem. 'The value of the rate is so low in Ireland that it inevitably leads to starved libraries,'<sup>112</sup> he wrote, noting that the penny rate affected both urban and rural libraries. Its poor return meant that even urban libraries

could not meet the expenses of maintaining an often over-elaborate building, paying trained staff, and purchasing new books at regular intervals. The book budget was invariably the victim of this financial crisis. Rural libraries had, in addition to these difficulties, to contend with an inefficient local bureaucracy. They all needed the same attention that he had given to Rathkeale.

As a solution to these difficulties, Robinson proposed that the CUKT should establish a central book repository in Dublin, from which all Carnegie libraries could borrow on payment of a subscription. This was not a new idea; the Dunfermline book repository, which Robinson would have observed during his January visit, serviced the north of Scotland in the same way. Robinson argued that a repository in Dublin would enable libraries to stock the new titles which they could not at present afford. This would raise the standard of their service and encourage new readers. In addition, this repository would draw the isolated rural libraries together in a network of book subscription, which should eventually lead adjoining districts to amalgamate into county library services.

Robinson strongly urged the trustees to increase their involvement in Ireland. The Irish library service was underdeveloped, he argued, noting that 'a line drawn from Limerick city to Larne would cut off nearly half of Ireland, and would not contain a single Carnegie library'.<sup>113</sup> As he pointed out, there were on file in Dunfermline thirty two applications from Ireland for financial assistance, either

for library buildings, or for book purchase. If the mistakes of the past were to be avoided, the trustees should ensure that all such applications were investigated thoroughly. To do this, Robinson recommended the establishment of an Irish office, based in Plunkett House, and staffed from the Co-operative Reference Library, and an Irish advisory committee, similar to the several sub-committees already attached to the Trust. These proposals, in Robinson's view, represented the only course of action open to the trustees, if they were not to abandon Ireland altogether. 'I cannot believe', he concluded, 'that the trustees will grudge the expenditure of a few thousands of pounds to complete Mr. Carnegie's work'.<sup>114</sup>

When the library sub-committee met on 7 June 1917, the members had before them Robinson's report on library conditions and his suggestions for future policy development. The idea of a book repository in Dublin appealed to them, but Robinson had not included costings, or any indication of the number of possible subscribers. It was therefore decided to establish a small advisory committee, made up of what the minutes termed 'representative men in Ireland'. This committee would make a detailed study of the feasibility of establishing a Dublin book repository, and report, through Plunkett, to the chairman of the Trust. This advisory committee was given another responsibility, which indicated how the trustees wished to proceed. This was to investigate

whether certain areas, in which there existed no library facilities at present, should be given an

opportunity of instituting an experimental scheme on the general lines adopted in Great Britain.<sup>115</sup>

The trustees relied on Plunkett to suggest suitable members of the advisory committee which held its first meeting on 25 September. As a consequence, the majority of those nominated had been active in the co-operative movement, or in the promotion of rural libraries. Fr. Finlay was nominated, as were Lyster and Wilkinson. Another nominee was Hugh Law, a nationalist M.P. from Donegal, who had been on the committee of the IRLA. The remaining members of the advisory committee were Sir Alexander McDowell, a Belfast lawyer, nominated by the trustees to represent the Ulster unionist interest, and John Bernard, the Provost of Trinity College. Dr Bernard, a former Archbishop of Dublin, who had come into public prominence as a spokesman for southern unionists, was appointed chairman, with Lennox Robinson as secretary.

The Irish committee was, not unnaturally, completely in favour of the establishment of a book repository. It was not deterred when an information circular sent by Robinson to all Carnegie libraries in Ireland elicited only twelve positive replies, as this was attributed to the usual inefficiency of Irish library committees. As the trustees had requested, an estimate of the cost of establishing and running a book repository was submitted. It was suggested that this repository should be located in Plunkett House, headquarters of the IAOS.<sup>116</sup> The trustees considered the estimates too high, and they instructed Hetherington to meet with Plunkett



and the Irish advisory committee in an effort to reduce the cost. Following this meeting, which took place in January 1918, a revised cost of £3,015 over five years was accepted by the executive committee on 26 February.<sup>117</sup> This decision marked the end of the first phase of the Trust's involvement in the development of rural libraries in Ireland.

## CHAPTER FIVE

'In Ireland there are peculiar difficulties...'

- the Irish advisory committee, 1919-1920.

(i)

In Ireland there are peculiar difficulties, and at the present moment it cannot be expected that any measure of a social or educational nature can be successfully prosecuted.

Such was the pessimistic view of the trustees as published in their Fourth Annual Report, presented to their annual general meeting in February 1918.<sup>1</sup> Yet this judgement was also a realistic one, given the unstable political and social condition of Ireland at that time. Just as the pendulum of British policy towards Ireland swung between coercion and appeasement, so the pendulum of public opinion in Ireland swung towards those parties, whether unionist or nationalist, who took an uncompromising political stand. Among nationalists the hasty executions of the 1916 leaders and the widespread arrests of Volunteer activists swung support from the Irish Parliamentary Party to those who had taken part in, or approved of the 'Sinn Fein Rebellion', as the events of Easter Week had been rather inaccurately christened. Even Lennox Robinson was affected by this shift in public opinion, and in a foreword to A Young man from the south, which was finally published in 1917,<sup>2</sup> he declared that, if he had expanded the plot to include the Rising he would have placed 'Willie Powell' in the G.P.O. 'not far from P.H. Pearse'.

How much public opinion had changed was shown by the enthusiastic welcome given to the interned Volunteers when they were released in June 1917. A month later Eamon de Valera was elected Sinn Fein M.P. for East Clare, one of a number of by-election victories over Irish Parliamentary Party candidates. Among the crowd outside the Ennis court house to witness de Valera's victory was Lennox Robinson, who had earlier sailed across the Shannon estuary with Mary Spring-Rice, Lord Monteagle's nationalist daughter. Returning to Cahirmoyle Robinson mused uneasily on what he had seen:

the hills all around me are crowned and flickering with fires and uncertain like those fires come a crowd of thoughts...Was it all a tragic tangle, or is there purpose and progress in it?...Once more Ireland seemed for sale, put up for auction. "Going-going"! What will you bid? The unionist bids one thing, the nationalist another, de Valera boldly bids "An Irish Republic"...five thousand Claremen have accepted his promise as good, and the bidding<sup>3</sup> has been pushed up. "Going-going!" What will you bid?

Lloyd George's bid was the Irish Convention, an attempt to salvage the cause of home rule by means of a compromise between unionists and nationalists. Horace Plunkett, the epitome of constructive unionism, chaired the Convention, which met from July 1917. It was a forlorn gesture, and the Convention has been aptly characterised by R. F. Foster as 'well-meaning and strenuous..but...condemned to impotence',<sup>4</sup> since it excluded Sinn Fein. Robinson tried to help the cause of the Convention by his play about Parnell, The lost leader, which opened at the Abbey on 19 February 1918. But the mood in Ireland was one of grim foreboding.

Dark days was the evocative title Robinson chose for a book of essays he published in 1918.<sup>5</sup>

In March 1918 events on the western front caused the pendulum of British policy to swing again. On the twenty first the Germans launched a massive offensive, in a desperate attempt to break the military stalemate. In a few days, they pushed the British line back thirty five miles, capturing a number of important French towns.<sup>6</sup> Faced with an urgent need for recruits, the Prime Minister, Lloyd George introduced a military service bill, which would have conscripted males, between the ages of eighteen and fifty three, from the entire United Kingdom, including Ireland.

Opposition to conscription united all shades of nationalist opinion. 'If there is a God, he evidently hates Ireland', Robinson wrote to Plunkett, 'otherwise he wouldn't have given us your report,<sup>7</sup> conscription, and the German offensive all in one week'<sup>8</sup>. Eventually the application of conscription to Ireland was postponed, but the crisis 'finally confirmed the popular influence of Sinn Fein'.<sup>9</sup> The Catholic hierarchy took a strong stand on conscription and issued a statement affirming that 'the Irish have a right to resist by every means that are consonant with the law of God'.<sup>10</sup> Sinn Fein was naturally opposed to conscription and the presence of Catholic priests and Sinn Fein activists on the same platform at the massive anti-conscription rallies that were a feature of the campaign conferred a respectability on the latter which they had not previously enjoyed.

Under these circumstances, the trustees can hardly be criticised for their reluctance to start new Irish initiatives. On 3 May 1918 Hetherington wrote to the members of the Irish advisory committee, informing them that the trustees had postponed the establishment of a book repository until conditions improved.<sup>11</sup> Hetherington was himself conscripted the following month, and his work at the CUKT office was taken over by James Douie. Robinson, perhaps feeling that his repository scheme had come to a dead end, planned to enlist, arguing, in a rather confused letter to Plunkett, that this gesture would prove that it was possible to be anti-England, without being pro-Germany. Plunkett dismissed the idea; 'one must stick to one's job and see it through', was his advice.<sup>12</sup>

Robinson returned to Cahirmoyle where he divided his time between acting as secretary to the Newcastle West agricultural show and library matters. He made two journeys to Kerry on behalf of the trustees during the summer. In June he travelled to Listowel in response to a barrage of appeals from Matthew Byrne for a grant of £100 to enable the library committee to pay off its outstanding debts. Although he had become impatient with Byrne - 'he is a nuisance, always wanting something', Robinson made representations to the trustees on his behalf. Eventually, the trustees agreed to the grant with the proviso that Listowel must, in future, be self-financing.<sup>13</sup> In July Robinson went to Castleisland to make a further effort to get the Tralee RDC to open the library. He was irritated to note that, thanks to the

deficiencies of the district clerk, although the library was furnished, no books had been purchased.<sup>14</sup> It was decided to threaten legal proceedings against the RDC in an attempt to force the councillors to open the building to the public.

The armistice of 11 November made the conscription issue irrelevant. There was much talk in Ireland about the need for 'reconstruction', as if in an effort to stem the gradual collapse of parliamentary politics. Plunkett founded a short-lived Irish Reconstruction Association, and Robinson used his annual report to the trustees to suggest they make the provision of library facilities part of this reconstruction. Prompted by Robinson, Plunkett raised the question of the book repository at the December meeting of the library sub-committee. He urged the trustees to regard the political situation in Ireland not as a reason for abandoning their library work, but rather as an incentive to promote anything that would educate public opinion. It was an indication of the respect enjoyed by Plunkett that the trustees decided to re-convene the Irish advisory committee, and to establish a book repository in Dublin.<sup>15</sup>

In February 1919 Robinson, acting for the advisory committee, took out a lease on rooms at 16 Harcourt Street. On the instructions of Hetherington (now demobilised from the army), interviews were held to find a person to administer the repository scheme, and John Thomas McKnight from Wigan public library service, was appointed. Unfortunately, the first months of the book repository's existence were beset

with difficulties caused by friction between Robinson and McKnight. The trustees wanted McKnight, who was a trained librarian, to have sole charge of the book repository scheme, and to be responsible directly to Dunfermline. Robinson, whose salary was now increased to £250 a year, was to act as secretary to the advisory committee and to be responsible for gaining subscribers to the scheme. This arrangement was not acceptable to Robinson, who felt that, as the CUKT's representative in Ireland, he should be McKnight's superior. In fact, the arrangement proposed by the trustees was a cumbersome one, which may have been inspired by Hetherington's doubts about Robinson's capacity for routine administrative matters. 'His function will lie in the country areas', was a significant comment in an internal memo to Struthers.<sup>16</sup> The advisory committee rallied to Robinson's support, and eventually the trustees gave in and agreed that McKnight should report to Robinson.

Robinson had now moved back to Dublin, where he had rented a flat in Clare Street. He also decided to use the 'Irish wire' to get back into the Abbey Theatre Company, where there was a vacancy for a manager, and persuaded Yeats to intervene on his behalf with Lady Augusta Gregory, the theatre's principal patron. They met at the theatre on 9 March. Robinson looked 'thin and languid', but, when the meeting was over, he had been promised the position.<sup>17</sup> He had no intention of resigning from the CUKT, however, and assured Plunkett that he could easily cope with both responsibilities. Besides, he added, rather tartly, 'as long

as the trustees pay me a small salary, they must be prepared for my trying to augment my income by working in my spare time for other people.'<sup>18</sup>

Robinson's responsibilities in Newcastle West and Rathkeale did not cease with his departure to Dublin. In the spring of 1919, reverberations from the deteriorating political situation made him travel hastily down to Cahirmoyle to deal with a crisis in Newcastle West. In November 1918, an army unit from Limerick had occupied a section of the Newcastle West workhouse. The councillors blamed the military for an outbreak of enteric fever among the patients in the workhouse over Christmas, and passed a resolution asking them to leave. The result was not what had been intended, and the RDC meeting on 13 February was abruptly interrupted by Michael Nix, the librarian, who announced that the army had taken over the central library.<sup>19</sup>

The council was outraged at this news, and telegraphed Robinson to attend an emergency meeting of the district library committee. Robinson immediately informed the trustees of the occurrence, asking them to put pressure on the military authorities in order to save the library system from collapse.<sup>20</sup> The emergency meeting which was held the following day, gave the councillors an opportunity to give vent to their resentment of British authority. 'Why' demanded one councillor, 'did the military not occupy some of the castles of the aristocracy in the district?', while another councillor linked the occupation of the central library with the occupation of Ireland by British forces.



(The violence of the councillors' opinions was too much for the military censor, who 'blacked out' several sentences in the Munster News's report of the meeting).<sup>21</sup> Even Canon Lee, chairman of the library committee, favoured vigorous action to get the library back. Robinson urged caution, and persuaded the councillors to accept a moderately worded resolution asking the military to vacate the central library, which he forwarded to the commanding officer in Limerick.<sup>22</sup> The trustees referred Robinson's letter to the Irish advisory committee, as they did not wish to be seen as critical of the military authorities. Eventually, the advisory committee received an assurance from army headquarters that the occupation would be a short one.

The wrath of the councillors soon subsided. Nix managed to retrieve most of the bookstock from the central library, and was able to continue to send out books to national schools throughout the district. The branch libraries at Athea, Broadford, Feenagh and Cloncagh were completed during the spring. It was indicative of the lack of interest in the libraries that Robinson's decision to abandon the half completed buildings at Drumcolligher and Abbeyfeale, due to lack of finance, caused no protest.<sup>23</sup> The army vacated the central library in July, leaving the councillors to complain of damage done to books and furniture. They linked their claim for compensation with a vote of sympathy on the death of Carnegie which had occurred on 11 August, to whom the chairman declared 'the town owed a great debt of

gratitude'.<sup>24</sup>

The trustees' decision to give Robinson overall responsibility in the book repository did not improve his relations with McKnight. Friction continued between the two men throughout the summer of 1919 to such an extent that the executive committee decided to send a delegation to Dublin to sort the matter out.<sup>25</sup> This visit was planned for October but, before it could be organised, the Irish advisory committee abruptly terminated McKnight's employment, with one month's salary in lieu of notice. Since the advisory committee alleged that McKnight was incompetent (although he had brought the book repository scheme to such a stage that the first book boxes were despatched to subscribers in October), the trustees had no option but to accept the decision.<sup>26</sup> The position was re-advertised, this time in terms which showed that it was clearly subordinate to Robinson. The successful applicant was Christina Keogh, formerly assistant librarian at the Carnegie free library in the Dublin suburb of Rathmines. This time there were no personality problems. 'She was a delightful colleague to work with, very patient with my blunders', Robinson recalled, in his autobiography'.<sup>27</sup>

(ii)

The ill-will shown by Robinson and the Irish advisory committee towards the unfortunate McKnight seemed a

reflection of the relations between nationalist Ireland and Britain. The general election of December 1918 saw the final demise of the Irish Parliamentary Party, whose strength fell from eighty members to six. Among the casualties of this electoral massacre was John Dillon, Boland and O'Donnell having prudently retired, thus avoiding the same fate. Only in north-east Ulster did unionists win a majority of seats. Sinn Fein's representation rose to seventy three. In accordance with the policy formulated by Arthur Griffith, the Sinn Fein M.P.s did not take their seats at Westminster, but met in Dublin in January 1919 to form their own parliament, Dail Eireann. Its first act was to reiterate the declaration of an Irish republic that had been proclaimed from the steps of the G.P.O. in 1916. A parliamentary delegation, including Sean T. O'Ceallaigh, was sent to the peace conference at Versailles in the hope of gaining international recognition for the new republic.

A desire not to antagonise American public opinion while this conference was taking place led the British authorities to hold back from repression in Ireland. The republicans made good use of this respite. The Irish Volunteers were reconstituted as the army of the Irish republic and organised for a campaign of guerilla warfare. In the autumn of 1919 the British finally shook off their lethargy and declared both Dail Eireann and Sinn Fein illegal organisations, but, by then, an alternative government and army had been created.<sup>28</sup>

As the fifth anniversary of their involvement with the

public library service approached, the trustees must have been struck by the contrast between the state of the service in Ireland and in Britain. Personal conflicts might bedevil their Irish advisory committee but in Britain the atmosphere was much more positive. By the end of 1919 they had the satisfaction of seeing the first substantial piece of library legislation since 1892 on the statute book and the two great barriers that had inhibited the development of the public library service, namely the penny rate and the parish library authority, finally overcome.

The Library Association's campaign to abolish the penny rate limitation had, as has been described, concentrated on attempts to get a private member's bill through parliament. This campaign had been suspended on the outbreak of war in 1914, but, with the Armistice and the return of peace time conditions, the Association took up the issue again. The need for the abolition of the penny rate limitation was made more urgent by the inflation which had resulted from the war. The return of the penny rate, insufficient in pre-war days, could not meet the post-war increase in prices. Without an increase in their budgets, many library services faced collapse. At their 1919 conference, the Library Association passed a resolution calling on the government to introduce amending legislation, and a delegation from the executive met officials at the Board of Education to press the case.<sup>29</sup>

Before 1914 the Library Association had been an isolated pressure group which governments could easily ignore. Now

they had a powerful ally in the CUKT. The CUKT's library policy was, as indicated above, largely based on the recommendations of W.G.S. Adams in his 1915 report. Adams's contacts with librarians had left him in no doubt as to the burden of the penny rate. Many of the letters he received had urged him to press for its removal, as in the following example.

A special aim of the Trust should be the removal of the limit to the rate. Scarcely any greater service could be rendered to the movement.<sup>30</sup>

As a result, one of Adams's recommendations was that the CUKT should support the Library Association in its efforts to get an amending bill through parliament. Once the war was over, the CUKT took up the issue and, in May 1919, sent a letter to all local authorities which had public libraries, and to all M.P.s, urging them to support abolition of the penny rate.<sup>31</sup>

The removal of the penny rate limitation was just part of the CUKT's library policy, which also embraced the broad issue of the county library service. In Britain the CUKT was now operating, or about to commence, nineteen experimental schemes on the north of Scotland model, while fourteen more awaited approval.<sup>32</sup> These schemes had been guaranteed for five years only and, unless the parish was replaced by the county as the library authority, they were in danger of collapse. In April 1919 a delegation of trustees led by the chairman, John Ross, met Herbert Lewis, parliamentary secretary at the Board of Education, and urged him to introduce legislation that would enable county councils to

adopt the public libraries act.<sup>33</sup> They had chosen an auspicious time to press their case. The Fisher Act of 1918, so called after H. A. L. Fisher, then president of the Board of Education, had committed public funds to adult education, both in urban and rural areas.<sup>34</sup> Public libraries were seen as part of this educational process. In May 1919 the Ministry of Reconstruction issued a report which gave some indication of government thinking:

With increased opportunities for reading, and the development of non-vocational and technical education in rural areas, it may well be<sup>35</sup> that the demand for libraries will be stimulated.

On 28 November Lewis introduced a public libraries bill in the house of commons. This quickly passed all stages and on 23 December received the royal assent as the Public Libraries Act 1919.<sup>36</sup> This act, which enabled county councils to become library authorities, and increased the rate limitation to threepence, applied to England and Wales only, the position of Scotland being regularised by the Public Libraries (Scotland) Act of 1920.<sup>37</sup>

The public library service in Ireland was not affected by these acts. The trustees recognised that Irish libraries needed help, but they were not sure how to proceed. At their annual general meeting in February 1920, John Ross articulated this dilemma:

In regard to our work in Ireland, I have all along felt that we are not sufficiently conversant with the problems involved in dealing with its claims. We do not as yet enjoy sufficient acquaintance with those who can help us in our work in Ireland.<sup>38</sup>

His solution was to propose, once again, the idea of a

visit by a delegation of trustees to Ireland, in order to win the support of leaders of Irish public opinion for the cause of library development. This idea was strongly supported by Plunkett, but it proved impossible to get a delegation together and, instead, the Trust's newly appointed secretary Colonel J.M. Mitchell was instructed to inspect the Dublin book repository, and report his observations.

Mitchell travelled to Dublin in July 1920, and spent a few days at the book repository offices in Harcourt Street, meeting the staff and the members of the Irish advisory committee. Robinson and Christina Keogh were both at pains to convince him of the success of the repository scheme. Robinson pointed to the ready acceptance it had won from both rate-supported and private libraries; while Christina Keogh produced statistics to show that the repository book stock needed to be increased to 9,000 titles, to keep pace with the demands of the subscribers. In reality, progress was slow. Robinson had tried to publicise the scheme by means of a circular to all known libraries. A copy that has survived in the Scottish Record Office (see figure three), indicates that it was envisaged that the service would be aimed mainly at voluntary societies in rural areas which could receive fifty books a year for a subscription of £1.00, or up to 250 books for £5.00. The continued influence of the ideas of Thomas Davis can be seen in the inclusion of the motto 'Educate that you may be free', although this may have been a prudent attempt by Robinson to counterbalance the foreign title

Circular issued by the Carnegie United Kingdom  
Trust's Irish office, 1920.

## CARNEGIE UNITED KINGDOM TRUST

"Educate that you may be free."—*Thomas Davis*

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LENNOX ROBINSON, *Secretary.*

MISS C. KEOGH, *Librarian.*

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BOOK REPOSITORY,  
16 HARCOURT STREET,  
DUBLIN

The Carnegie Trustees have established in Dublin a Book Repository for the purpose of lending books to Libraries, Schools, Clubs, Village Institutes, Friendly Societies, etc., in Ireland.

The Repository contains a comprehensive selection of books by standard and modern authors, and subscribers are asked to indicate in the Repository's catalogue the books that they desire. If any of the books selected are already in circulation the Librarian will either purchase other copies or substitute similar books.

**Libraries, Village Institutes, Clubs, Young Men's Societies,** etc., are supplied with books on History, Biography, Travel, Fiction, Poetry, Drama, Science, Art, Gaelic Books, etc.

**Farmers' Associations, Co-Operative Societies, United Irish-women,** etc., are supplied with general works on Agriculture, Stock, Dairying, Cropping, Co-Operation, Civics, Gardening, Bee-keeping, Poultry-keeping, etc.

**Schools** are supplied with books of Children's Tales, Poetry, History, Travel, Elementary Science, School Gardening, Arts and Crafts, etc.

The books are sent in half-yearly instalments, each instalment being kept by the subscriber for six months, and the terms of subscriptions are as follows:—

(Minimum Subscription, £1).

£1 0s. 0d. entitles subscribers to 50 books per annum

(viz.: 25 books each half-year)

£2 0s. 0d. entitles subscribers to 100 books per annum

(viz.: 50 books each half-year)

and in the proportion of 50 books to the £1 up to a maximum subscription of £5 0s. 0d.

The Repository pays carriage one way.

Intending subscribers should make immediate application to the Secretary at the above address.



'United Kingdom Trust'. In spite of this publicity only thirty one libraries had become subscribers, and the majority were from urban areas. Mitchell was disappointed at this poor result. 'Hardly any rural library supply is in progress', he informed the library sub-committee.<sup>40</sup> He was alarmed to discover that the principal beneficiaries of the book repository scheme were not impoverished rural libraries, but city libraries, who were using it as a cheap source of book supply. The trustees now realised that their Irish library policy needed to be completely re-evaluated. For advice they turned, as in 1913, to W.G.S. Adams, who was commissioned to produce a report on library conditions in Ireland, including recommendations for future action.<sup>41</sup>

(iii)

The concerns of the trustees were far removed from the realities of every day life in Ireland during 1920. Open warfare had broken out between the Irish Republican Army (as the Volunteers were now popularly called) and the British forces.<sup>42</sup> It was a warfare of ambush, raid and reprisal which caused the Limerick Leader to editorialise in March that 'a whelter of chaos now prevails in the country'. In rural areas the republicans concentrated their attacks on police barracks in an effort to force their abandonment. Over the weekend of Easter 1920 the Irish Republican Army (hereafter IRA), attacked 157 police barracks, including eighteen in County Limerick. Since the countryside was ro

longer safe for the police, the Government augmented its military presence by recruiting two special forces from among ex-soldiers in Britain, the so-called 'Black and Tans' and the Auxiliaries.

In Dublin these forces and the unseen soldiers of the IRA fought a war of sudden engagements and arrests, in the midst of which the citizens went about their daily business. 'How to convey the ambience of that time' wrote the poet, W.R. Rodgers 'the gunshot in the dark, the feet running, the frightened silence'.<sup>43</sup> William Ewart, who visited Dublin in April 1921, found the experience somewhat unsettling.

The abiding impression of Dublin at the time was the recurring contrast between the ordinary workday life of a modern city and the queer forces which lurked such a little way beneath.<sup>44</sup>

In the public parks he noted nursery maids reading (novelettes, he patronisingly assumed), while on the roads outside military lorries 'tore along at twenty five miles per hour' packed with soldiers who held their guns at the ready. Yet the theatres remained open, in spite of the curfew, although Ewart found the Abbey half empty and the acting below the standard he had been led to expect. The intellectual life of the city also continued, with Robinson dividing his time between the United Arts Club and soirees at Yeats's house in Merrion Square or Maud Gonne MacBride's house in Stephens Green.

In July 1920, Robinson had assured Mitchell that the work of the book repository had been little affected by the increasing violence. But, with destruction by fire becoming

a popular weapon on both sides, it was unlikely that Carnegie buildings would escape. The central library at Newcastle West was the first to meet this fate. In January, a mob of ex-soldiers had threatened to attack the library in order to break up a republican meeting being held in the lecture hall. Only the prompt arrival of the local IRA brigade saved the library on that occasion.<sup>45</sup> The IRA in Limerick was well organised, and particularly active in attacks on the police. On 17 July, Constable Masterson was shot dead in Newcastle West. That night, a detachment of Black and Tans from Limerick raided the homes of several well known republicans in the town. Failing to make any arrests, they set fire to the co-operative creamery<sup>46</sup> and the nearby Carnegie library. Part of the creamery was saved, but the library was completely gutted.<sup>47</sup> The card catalogue and most of the book stock were rescued by the towns people the following morning and stored in the workhouse, where Robinson inspected them when he came down to view the damage. The Newcastle West library committee mourned the loss of the library in an angry letter to the trustees: 'In the case of the library the destruction is complete, nothing remains but the bare walls'. This disaster, the committee assured the trustees, 'is deplored by the entire town, which was justly proud of its library'.<sup>48</sup>

The trustees may have been tempted at this stage to abandon Ireland, but Adams's memorandum, presented to the library sub-committee on 12 October, urged the contrary. 'More light is needed, both from within and without to help

the people at this critical stage of their history'<sup>49</sup>. Adams recommended that the Trust should concentrate on extending the system of circulating libraries in rural districts, and, if necessary, provide libraries for the country towns. To assist in this work, which Adams described as 'pioneering', and 'basic', the trustees should nominate a small advisory committee representing all parts of Ireland.

These recommendations were approved by the library sub-committee, and passed to the executive committee for sanction. This was given at the October meeting when it was decided to allocate £20,000 over a two year period to be spent on projects in Ireland, as recommended by the new advisory committee. Plunkett was asked to submit names of possible committee members, but, when ill-health forced him to travel to America in November, the trustees were probably relieved to postpone any new Irish initiatives until his return in 1921.<sup>50</sup>

## CHAPTER SIX

### The first Carnegie experimental county library schemes in Ireland, - Donegal and Antrim, 1921 - 1924.

(i)

Speaking at the annual general meeting on 4 March 1921 Sir John Ross (who had just received his knighthood), admitted that the Trust was making little progress in Ireland:

There is one branch of our work in regard to which we have much regret. I refer to the manner in which we are affected by the present state of matters in Ireland. Practically, we may say that our work has been suspended.

The return of Plunkett from America in late spring 1921 renewed the trustees' interest in Ireland. He was present at the executive committee meeting on 6 May, urging the trustees to view the 'unhappy state of the country as a strong reason for pressing on with admittedly important work, in no way connected with political controversy'.<sup>2</sup> He put forward a number of names to expand the Irish advisory committee, including Dermot O'Brien of Cahirmoyle, George Russell, and Lady Augusta Gregory. The trustees accepted these nominations, but they balked at his proposal that Robinson be appointed secretary of this new committee and given an assistant. A personal inspection of the Trust's Irish office was felt necessary, and Sir John Ross, Sir William Robertson, and Colonel Mitchell, were deputed to travel to Dublin.

In April the Irish advisory committee had instructed Robinson to prepare a memorandum on rural library policy for

submission to this delegation.<sup>3</sup> In this memorandum Robinson reiterated the points he had made following his 1916 tour of the Irish Carnegie libraries. The Trust should concentrate on supplying rural areas with books rather than with buildings, service counties rather than rural districts, and employ only trained librarians. County councils, Robinson pointed out, were unlikely to establish rural library schemes on their own initiative. Therefore he recommended that the Trust should establish and finance a number of experimental schemes in selected Irish counties. These experimental schemes should be based on the system that the Trust had been operating in the English and Scottish counties since 1915. A book repository, administered by a trained librarian, should be established in the county town, from which book boxes would be sent out to local centres. A county library committee would be formed to supervise such matters as book selection. These schemes should be supported by the Trust for two years, during which time, Robinson maintained, public opinion in the county would gather in support of the library service so that the council would be certain to take it over when the Trust withdrew. Robinson identified two counties where a start could be made with good prospects of success - Donegal and Wexford. He estimated that experimental schemes could be provided in both counties for less than £5,000.

Plunkett anticipated that it would take some skill to persuade the three trustees to accept this proposal. He advised Lady Gregory that the best strategy was 'not to

oppose them, but to try and get what money we can, and have the spending of it to ourselves'.<sup>4</sup> Fortuitously, the trustees' arrival in Dublin, on 11 July 1921, co-incided with the truce that ended the Anglo-Irish war. An atmosphere of optimism prevailed throughout a dinner party at Kilteragh, Plunkett's house in the Dublin suburbs, where Robinson was now a tenant in the gate lodge. The following morning the trustees and the newly expanded Irish advisory committee met at the book repository offices. It was a rather tense meeting. Robertson criticised everything, but Ross was much more open-minded and positive, and Lady Gregory pinned her hopes on him. Her faith was not misplaced, and the executive committee, meeting on 15 July, accepted most of Robinson's proposals. The concept of experimental county schemes in Ireland was accepted, the book repository was granted an additional £1,000, and Robinson was given permission to recruit an assistant secretary.

The Trust's Irish library policy now moved into a new phase. Since 1919 the county council had been the basis of the rural library service in England and Wales and the library rate had been increased to a maximum of three pence. In June 1920 the Public Libraries (Ireland) Act<sup>5</sup> brought Ireland into line as regards the rate limitation, but not the position of the county council. This emphasis on the penny rate may have been due to the fact that the initial approach to the government came from an urban source: the committee of Rathmines public library, in the Dublin corporation area, although the CUKT also lent its support.<sup>6</sup> This act was

welcomed with enthusiasm by urban librarians. As John Roy, the branch librarian at Rathmines, expressed it:

To one engaged in the struggle for over a quarter of a century, the relief granted by the provisions of this act was a real emancipation from slavery.

Outside the urban areas the RDCs were still the library authorities, a situation now even more unsatisfactory since many councils, particularly in the south of the country had dissolved themselves 'sine die' as a protest against government policy. The trustees therefore decided to ignore the RDCs and base their experimental schemes on the county in Ireland as they were already doing in Britain. This decision marks the start of the Irish county library service. The first two experimental schemes will now be examined in detail.

(ii)

The selection of Donegal as a suitable county for the first Irish experimental scheme came as a result of contacts made with the CUKT several years previously by Fr. Philip O'Doherty, of Carndonagh in the north of the county (see figure four). The co-operative movement had met with considerable success in the north west of Ireland, due partly to the active support of the Catholic bishop, Dr. O'Donnell, and Hugh Law, the local M.P. Fr. O'Doherty had become involved in the promotion of co-operative projects, including the erection of village halls, and in spring 1916 he wrote to Plunkett for finance to start a village library. Plunkett

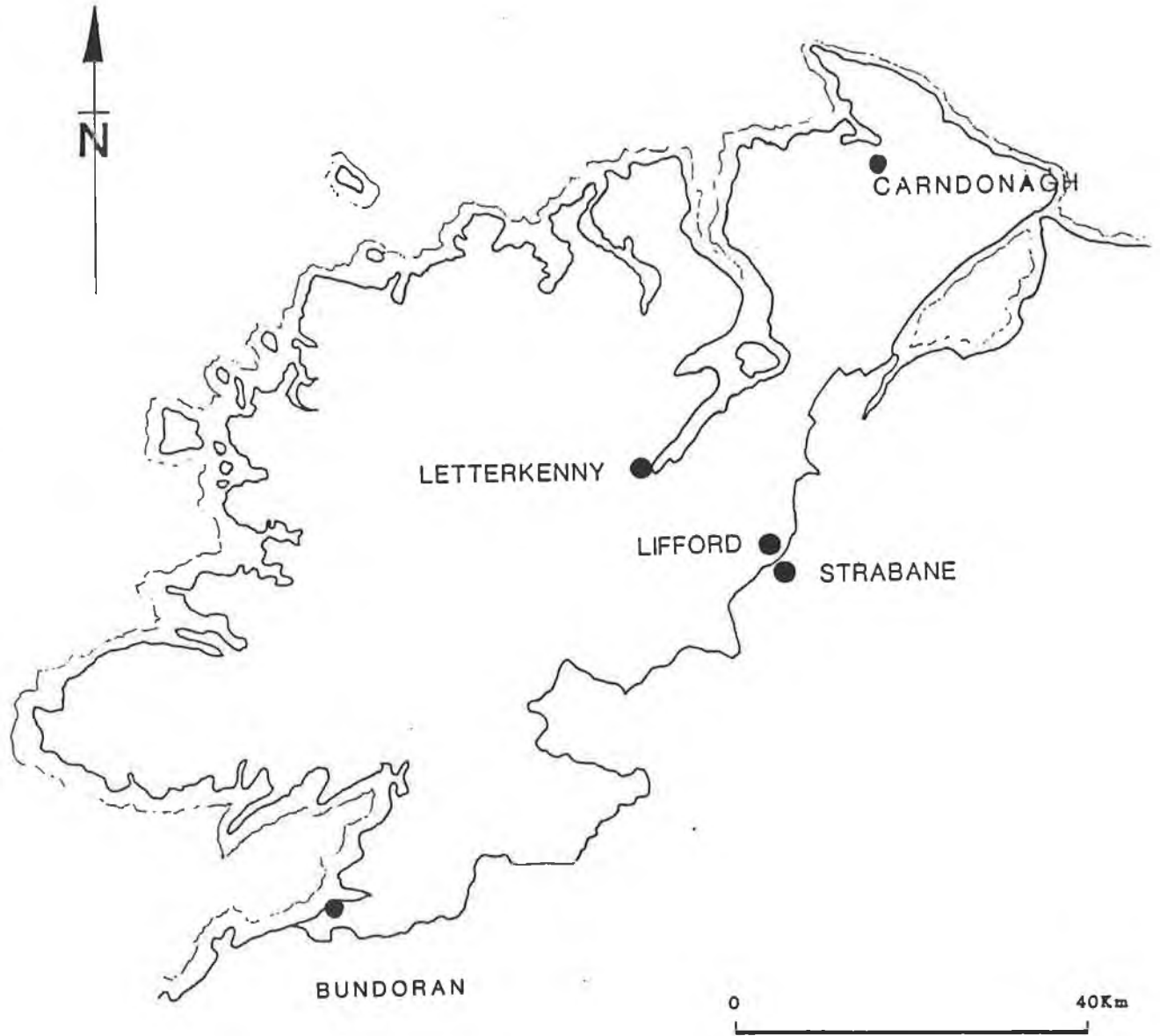


asked Robinson to meet Fr. O'Doherty in Carndonagh. 'You will be free to recommend any form of assistance to the community there, if, as I confidently anticipate, you find them ideal minded (sic) towards self improvement'.<sup>8</sup> Robinson visited Carndonagh in April, and again in October, 1916. He thought the district suitable for a schools-based service using the village hall as a central library, provided the RDC could be persuaded to adopt the public libraries act. In his 1917 report on library conditions, Robinson again singled out Carndonagh as a promising district for a rural library development, but the trustees' decision to concentrate on the Dublin book repository, caused this proposal to be shelved.

In November 1920 Robinson renewed contact with Canon O'Doherty, as he now was. 'The prospects of Carnegie work in Ireland are much improved, and we may be able to do something about a comprehensive scheme for Donegal'.<sup>9</sup> O'Doherty's reply was enthusiastic: 'The times are badly against us, but still we have achieved a great deal since you were here... I consider your scheme to be an ideal one for the county'.<sup>10</sup>

It was time for another visit to Donegal on behalf of the CUKT. On this occasion, however, Robinson did not travel himself, but despatched his unofficial assistant Thomas McGreevy. A fellow member of the United Arts Club, McGreevy was at one stage Robinson's room mate in Clare Street.<sup>11</sup> An interest in the arts may have been the basis for their friendship since their backgrounds were completely different.

Figure Four  
County Donegal



McGreevy<sup>12</sup> was seven years younger than Robinson, a native of Tarbert, a seaside village on the Kerry-Limerick border, where his mother had been a school teacher. A devout Catholic, he had been inspired to enlist in 1914 by John Redmond's recruiting efforts, and had served on the western front being twice wounded at the battle of the Somme. Demobilised from the army he enrolled as an undergraduate at Trinity College, Dublin, where he obtained a degree in history. But his main interest was in art and he was earning a precarious living as an art critic when Robinson engaged him to travel to the north west as a library organiser.

McGreevy proved himself to be an effective lobbyist. On 22 December Bernard MacFadden, the county secretary, wrote to Robinson on behalf of the county council for details of the CUKT's experimental library schemes.<sup>13</sup> He was a useful ally, as was Edward Gallen, a leading member of the county agricultural committee. Local support was necessary because the CUKT operated the same procedures in their library schemes in Ireland as in Britain. Before the trustees would commit themselves to financing any new schemes, they expected that the appropriate local authority would formally ask for the establishment of such a scheme in the local administrative area, and indicate an intention of taking over the library service, when the experimental period expired.

Following some lobbying by Canon O'Doherty, two representatives of the county council, Hugh O'Duffy and Madge Rodgers, visited the book repository in March 1921. But the trustees' suspension of all new Irish initiatives during

Plunkett's absence, postponed any further developments. Robinson's renewal of contact with Donegal came at an inauspicious time. The Anglo-Irish war was at its most ferocious, affecting many of the normal activities of daily life. The Donegal-Derry railway was blown up and, as O'Doherty wrote to Robinson, it was necessary to hire a car to collect the mail. More library buildings fell victim to guerilla warfare. James Wilkinson's library in Cork was one of the public buildings burnt during the sack of the city by the Black and Tans on the night of 11 December 1920.<sup>14</sup> Kerry was the scene of considerable IRA activity. Matthew Byrne was not himself active in politics, but his clerk, Denis Quille, was prominent in the local IRA battalion. Consequently Byrne's office was frequently raided by the military. In late February 1921 a number of ambushes in the Listowel area brought the inevitable reprisals. On 7 March the Carnegie library was burnt along with other buildings, including the creamery. A cryptic note was left nearby - 'no more meetings will be held here by the army of occupation - I.R.A.'. Local opinion however attributed the destruction to the Black and Tans.<sup>15</sup>

Although nationalist M.P.s had abandoned the house of commons, the government still hoped for a political solution. The Government of Ireland Act,<sup>16</sup> passed in December 1920, attempted to satisfy both nationalists and unionists. This act divided the country into two: 'Northern Ireland', consisting of the six north eastern counties: (Antrim,

Armagh, Derry, Down, Fermanagh and Tyrone) and 'Southern Ireland' consisting of the remaining twenty six counties. Each would have its own legislature and an All-Ireland council would provide a common forum. This act in its subsequent forms had profound implications for the development of the public library service. On a more immediate level, it made Donegal a frontier county.

Robinson still favoured establishing an experimental scheme in Donegal. On 18 June he wrote to Bernard MacFadden that

It would be of value to me to have from your council an expression of general approval of the scheme and an indication that the members will co-operate in working it. We could not undertake the scheme unless we are fairly confident that at the end of two years it would be carried on at the expense of the public authorities.<sup>17</sup>

McGreevy was sent to Donegal again and, with the support of MacFadden and Gallen, arranged to have Robinson's letter read to the county council at its meeting on 21 June. The councillors passed a resolution supporting the scheme and promising 'hearty co-operation'.<sup>18</sup> With this evidence of local support to encourage him, Robinson submitted a costing for an experimental scheme in Donegal to the trustees during their July visit to Dublin. Subsequently, as has been described, the scheme was approved by the library committee on 15 July.

Robinson then proceeded to organise a meeting of representative individuals, from whom a county library committee might be created. In his invitations he shrewdly appealed to local pride, by pointing out that the Donegal

scheme was the first to be organised by the CUKT in Ireland, and allayed clerical fears by stressing that all books would be selected by a local committee. Thirty one people attended the meeting, which took place in the county house (as the county council's office was called), Lifford, on 23 August 1921. Robinson and McGreevy outlined how the experimental county library scheme would work, and those present expressed their support for establishing such a scheme in Donegal. In addition to those who attended the meeting, Robinson received several letters of support from branches of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, and from private reading clubs in Strabane and Ballyshannon. The climate in Donegal seemed to promise success, and, in October, Robinson sent a comprehensive minute to the trustees, recommending that they fund the county library scheme, which he estimated would cost £2,364.10.0 in the first year and £710 the second year. He concluded:

I am convinced that County Donegal sincerely desires the scheme to be put into operation at once, and that the county council will do all in its power to make it a success and, to secure its maintenance at the end of the two years. <sup>19</sup>

At its 14 October meeting the executive committee gave its approval for the inauguration of what was termed 'the Donegal rural library scheme'.

The establishment of the county library committee involved Robinson in further correspondence during October and November 1921. He wanted to have as broadly based a committee as possible, and sought representation from the various churches, members of Dail Eireann, teachers'

organisations, and district councils. The replies indicated some differing priorities. The councillors from the urban and rural district councils queried the likely location of the county book repository, while clergymen wondered how many members of their congregations would be included on the library committee. Robinson tried to ensure that the committee included some women, and invited Madge Rodgers to join as a CUKT nominee. She accepted, somewhat ungraciously - 'It will periodically mean the loss of a day's salary', she pointed out.

Of the thirty five persons nominated to the library committee, twenty attended the inaugural meeting on 13 December. The nominees selected the name 'Tirconnaille Carnegie rural libraries committee', in keeping with the current practice of the county council whose members were fiercely nationalistic (In 1919 the council had sworn allegiance to Dail Eireann and ceased all communication with the Local Government Board; sometime in 1921 the name 'Tir Connaille', referring back to the old Gaelic kingdom was adopted).<sup>20</sup> P.J. Ward was elected as chairman, Rev. William Logan, a Presbyterian minister from Letterkenny, as vice chairman, and Edward Gallen as secretary. The book selection committee comprised Fr. John Cunningham, the Catholic diocesan schools inspector, Fr. Hugh McDwyer who had been active in the co-operative movement, Rev. Logan, S.S. Kerrigan, a medical doctor from Killygordon, and Madge Rodgers. The location of the county repository was quickly settled. There was no question of a county library building,

and when P.J. Ward offered two rooms on the ground floor of the county house in Lifford, this was quickly accepted.

Robinson was able to inform the meeting that a librarian had been appointed to administer the experimental scheme. This was Samuel J. Maguire, who had been selected from a number of applicants when the post had been advertised in November. Maguire had been senior assistant in the Falls Road branch of the Belfast public library system, and the branch librarian thought highly enough of him to send an unofficial commendation to Robinson. 'He has no side or swank whatever, and knows his work upside down'.<sup>21</sup> Maguire was to play a prominent role in the first early experimental schemes, and an obituary in An Leabharlann described him, with some justification, as the father of the whole county library service.<sup>22</sup> Robinson's costing of the scheme had allowed for the employment of an assistant, and Hugh Law's wife approached him on behalf of a protegee of hers, Andrew MacIntyre. MacIntyre was older than Maguire, a married man with little formal education, but widely read. Michael O'Donovan remembered him as 'an untidy harassed little man in glasses',<sup>23</sup> an unflattering portrait, but his letters certainly indicate a lack of self-confidence. He was not however, too timid to respond to Robinson's 'suggestion' that he come for interview with a request for a weekly salary of two pounds, not thirty shillings as was offered, so that he could meet 'those emergencies which are likely to occur in the life of everyone, and which anyone with a pretence of



foresight must be prepared to meet'.<sup>24</sup> The interview took place in Argues' hotel, Lifford, on 5 January 1922 and resulted in the appointment of MacIntyre as Maguire's assistant at a salary of £104 a year.

While Maguire and MacIntyre prepared the central respository for reception of the first consignment of books, the book selection committee wielded a liberal blue pencil on the list of titles supplied by McGreevy. Among the books rejected by Fr. McDwyer were Hardy's The Woodlanders, and Fielding's Tom Jones. He added that he would object to many other books if he were selecting for a parish library, but, rather inconsistently, asked McGreevy to allow him the first loan of Fraser's The Golden bough.<sup>25</sup> Madge Rodgers's deletions ranged more widely, embracing the works of Balzac and Dostoyevsky, the inoffensive Chats on old lace, and 'all Mahaffy's Greek stuff'. Her objection to the latter did not indicate a dislike of Greek literature. John Pentland Mahaffy, professor of ancient classics, and later Provost of Trinity College, Dublin had been outspoken in his criticism of Irish literature and of nationalism, both of which were ardently supported by Miss Rogers.<sup>26</sup> McGreevy tried to persuade her to relent:

I do not suggest that you should have any book to please me, but I do believe you are anxious that we should be an enlightened people, and I am sure we shall not be, if we are to be censored as drastically as you propose.

He suggested she consult with Maguire:

He is a devout practising Catholic, and has been fighting in the IRA ever since the troubles began in Belfast (not since the truce of course), so any push he can give to Kultur in Donegal will be in the direction

of religion, morality and nationality.<sup>27</sup>

Fearing that Miss Rodgers might create trouble for the fledgling library scheme, he asked Maguire to go to visit her in Gortahork where she taught in the village school. Maguire found her to be quite amenable, although he warned Mc Greevy that she was preparing a sharp riposte. In fact, she contented herself with a brief note stating that what she wanted to put before Donegal country people was not foreign authors, but 'sane healthy books, with a sane healthy outlook'<sup>28</sup>. An attack of neuralgia prevented her from attending the meeting of the book selection committee on 21 February, when 3,500 books were passed for purchase.

Shortly after Robinson's visit to Lifford in December 1921, Edward Gallen wrote a brief article for the local newspapers, describing how the new county library scheme would work. Within a few months, he promised, several thousand books would be available for circulation throughout the county.<sup>29</sup> Maguire followed this up by inserting an advertisement seeking applications from people interested in establishing centres in their towns or villages. Since no books had yet been delivered, Maguire was to realise that this was a mistake, as he was harassed by correspondents from centres looking for their books.<sup>30</sup>

March 1922, was an extremely busy time for Maguire. 'Haven't a minute to spare', he wrote to Robinson, 'the place is simply stacked with books and, between labelling, numbering and recording, I'm in great form'.<sup>31</sup> Fifty centres had been approved by the library committee and only

593 books had arrived in the repository. The essential book boxes had not been delivered, and he was in urgent need of a copy of Dewey's Decimal Classification. He made several trips to villages, where disputes had arisen about the location of the book distribution centre. In general, these centres were in national schools, but co-operative stores, and churches had also been selected. Ballyshannon had three centres, - the Protestant club, the Catholic club and the technical school. 'I think they have never seen books before, judging by the list which they demand', Maguire complained.

When the first books were delivered in April, Maguire hastily made up and despatched ten boxes to the most persistent centres, including those in Ballyshannon, and in the Inishowen peninsula, where Canon O'Doherty had established a number of centres. The contents of these boxes can be surmised from a breakdown by subject of a hundred books deemed suitable for a rural library, which Maguire included in his paper read to the Irish library conference in June 1923:<sup>32</sup>

Genera	4	Useful Arts	10
Philosophy	3	Fine Arts	4
Religious	3	Literature	8
Sociology	5	Fiction	30
Science	8	History	9
		Biography	6
		Travel	10

While Maguire laboured to get the Donegal rural library service into operation, the political situation deteriorated. The truce of July 1921 had been followed by protracted negotiations. Finally, on 6 December, a treaty was signed

whereby Southern Ireland was to become a self governing state known as the Irish Free State, with dominion status within the British Empire. Northern Ireland was empowered to opt out, retaining the status conferred by the Government of Ireland Act. After an acrimonious debate the treaty was ratified by Dail Eireann on 7 January 1922, but bitter divisions soon emerged, as politicians and IRA activists split into pro- and anti- treaty factions. A confused series of events during the spring and summer of 1922 moved inexorably towards a civil war which nobody wanted.<sup>33</sup>

Even the Irish advisory committee were affected by the prevailing unease. On 13 April, the members considered 'the effect which the disturbed condition of the country might have on the trustees' work in Ireland', and 'whether the circumstances required any change in policy or procedure'. Perhaps the presence of Plunkett at the meeting stiffened their resolution to continue. The minutes noted their unanimous conviction that

there is a special value in carrying on work that was non political and educational at the present time, and that the smooth and rapid progress, which their rural library schemes had already made, was a good augury<sup>34</sup> for their success, whatever conditions might prevail.

'You are a lucky man to be able to go there from this God forgotten country',<sup>35</sup> Maguire wrote to McGreevy, in April 1922, on the latter's return from a visit to Paris. He was conscious of the fact that Lifford was now a frontier town, as the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State ran through the town, dividing it from its twin town of Strabane, across the river Foyle. To add to his

apprehension, the army barracks, now occupied by the Free State army, was just across the street from the county house where the book repository was located. Along the border sporadic shooting took place between the Northern Ireland police and the 'Irregulars', as those within the IRA who had taken a stand against the Anglo-Irish treaty were popularly called. Throughout Donegal there was open conflict between these Irregular forces and the Free State army.

These occurrences did not prevent the library committee meeting as usual on 23 May, with the Rev. Logan in the chair. Maguire was able to report that thirty centres were in operation and, as evidence of the success of the experimental scheme, to read letters received from the centres at Mountcharles and Ballintra asking for more books to keep up with local demand. Only a discussion about the need for insurance against the possibility of damage to books or book boxes indicated that conditions were not normal.<sup>36</sup>

A week later the civil war suddenly erupted in Lifford. Maguire had planned to travel to the village of Fanad on 30 May, to deal with problems that had risen in the administration of the local centre. Instead, he found himself in the middle of a battle, as the Irregulars in Lifford and the security forces in Strabane exchanged bullets and mortar fire from midnight to six a.m.<sup>37</sup> Maguire despatched a telegram to Robinson: 'Business impossible. Repository under fire', and followed it up with a letter: 'The county house is getting its share of bullets. No one

is allowed to cross the bridge from either side. Thus we are really in a state of siege'.<sup>38</sup> Sniping continued for a few days, but, by 8 June, Maguire was able to report that he had resumed work at the repository, and he felt sufficiently confident to travel to Fanad. Here he closed down the centre, remarking to Robinson that the secretary was a 'rustic of uncommonly low mentality'. The Fanad centre was the exception rather than the rule. Most Donegal centres were well run, although it is doubtful if all were subject to the same degree of strictness indicated by the rules drawn up for the seaside town of Bundoran (see figure five). The anticipated attack on Lifford barracks took place on the night of 6 July, when a party of Irregulars, having cut telephone wires and blocked the approaching roads with trees, mounted an intense, but unsuccessful, barrage.<sup>39</sup> Maguire's nerves were on edge. He complained of insomnia and a bad cold, and left for a fortnight's vacation on Rathlin Island off the coast of County Antrim, leaving MacIntyre in charge.

As soon as it was safe to do so, MacIntyre travelled to Letterkenny to investigate the condition of books in the library centre which was located in the court house. The books had been damaged when some Irregulars, who had been imprisoned in the building, went on a rampage of destruction. MacIntyre exonerated the local library committee from blame, and recommended that a fresh supply of books be obtained. Robinson agreed with this recommendation, and assured

Rules of the library centre at Bundoran, County Donegal.

# Tironaill Carnegie Library.

St. Patrick's Hall, Bundoran, Branch.

## R U L E S

1. The Library is open for the issue of books every SUNDAY, TUESDAY, and ~~WEDNESDAY~~, from 7-30 p.m. to 8-30 p.m. *Thursday*
2. Books are loaned free of charge to all persons resident in the neighbourhood. School children must obtain permission to borrow books from their teachers.
3. Borrowers may not keep any book for longer than 14 days from the date of issue. If any borrower wishes to keep a book for a longer period, application for re-issue must be made to the Local Librarian. Books will only be re-issued when they have not been required by other borrowers.
4. Any borrower who keeps a book for longer than 14 days, without having it re-issued, will be fined One Penny for Each Week, or Portion of a Week, that the book is kept beyond that time. Any person incurring such fines, will not be permitted to use the library again, until such fine has been paid.
5. Borrowers will be held responsible for the safe keeping of all books borrowed by them, and any borrower may, at the discretion of the Local Library Committee, be required to make good any damage caused to any book, while the book was in that borrower's possession. If any borrower is fined for damaging any book, and refuses to pay the fine, that borrower will not be allowed to use the Library again until the fine has been paid.
6. If a case of Infectious Disease occurs in any house, where a library book is in the possession of anyone living in that house, the book is to be handed to the Sanitary Inspector when he comes to disinfect the house, and NOT returned to the Library.
7. In order to preserve the books in the Library, in a serviceable condition for as long a period as possible, borrowers are requested to handle them with the greatest possible care. Books must be protected from rain; they must not be marked in any way, and the corners of leaves must not be turned down.
8. Students using the Library are reminded that the special resources of the Central Library for Irish Students are available to them. Applications for service from this Central Library should be accompanied by particulars as to the books desired. All such applications should be made through the County Librarian, County Book Repository, Lifford, Co. Donegal.

MacIntyre:

I am all for going ahead with our library schemes even under the worst conditions. They make for order, and prepare for the period of reconstruction, which must come sooner or later.<sup>41</sup>

The position of the Irregulars was gradually eroded, as the pro-treaty forces recaptured, or held on to, the main centres of population in the county, forcing their opponents to take refuge in the mountainous areas to the north. When Maguire returned to Lifford at the end of July, he was relieved to find the town was patrolled by pro-treaty soldiers, and comparatively quiet. He was particularly pleased to learn that Peadar O'Donnell, a leading member of the Irregulars, who was Miss Rodgers's nephew, had been arrested and imprisoned in Mountjoy. 'May all Irregulars be so dealt with' he wrote bitterly to Robinson.<sup>42</sup> Robinson and McGreevy, who also knew O'Donnell, were more charitable. Robinson tried to arrange a visit and McGreevy sent him some books.<sup>43</sup> In Donegal there had also been arrests of anti-treaty sympathisers, including Edward Gallen and Seamus Flaherty T.D., a member of the library committee. Gallen, who was suspected of complicity in the attack on Lifford barracks, wrote from Sligo gaol, apologising for the fact that he was 'not likely to have the opportunity of attending committee meetings for some time'.<sup>44</sup> Another member of the library committee was also absent. Mr Kinch, headmaster of the Protestant Prior school in Letterkenny had left the county.

As conditions in Lifford continued to remain quiet,



Maguire was able to concentrate on the expansion of the experimental scheme. In his report, which he presented to the library committee on 24 October, (a meeting attended by Mr Kinch), he noted that fifty nine centres had been established, and 3,000 books were in circulation throughout the county. He admitted that the majority of these were fiction, although Irish history was also popular. As a Gaelic enthusiast, he regretted the poor demand for books in Irish, even in parts of the county where Irish was the everyday language, but he attributed this to the limited selection of books in Irish, published in a format that would stand the wear of a circulating library.<sup>45</sup>

As the Donegal experimental library scheme was approaching its first anniversary, Robinson was anxious that moves should start to ensure that the county council would take it over on 1 January 1924 when the CUKT's support would be withdrawn. Maguire was summoned to attend the Irish advisory committee meeting on 9 November, where Lady Gregory found his report impressive. 'There are good reports from Donegal; the libraries are a great success because of a good librarian', she noted in her journal.<sup>46</sup> He was instructed to get the support of council officials so that a resolution undertaking to continue the library scheme would be adopted at the council's December meeting. This necessitated some tactful negotiation with the county secretary, Bernard MacFadden, who felt that this resolution should be postponed until the end of the Trust's experimental period. Maguire got his way, with the support of the chairman, P.J. Ward,

and, at the council's meeting on 19 December, a motion was unanimously adopted, which resolved

that the Tirconnail county council is willing, as from 1 January 1924, to undertake the maintenance of the rural library scheme known as the Tirconnail Carnegie rural library scheme, and hitherto maintained out of funds supplied by the CUKT.

As it was not possible for the county council to raise a library rate, it was resolved to use the section of the 1902 public libraries act that enabled councils to make a grant in aid from technical education funds for library purposes, to finance the library scheme.<sup>47</sup>

During 1923 Maguire worked energetically to establish new centres, in order to be able to hand over a strong scheme to the council. To promote the concept of the rural library as an educational resource, rather than a provider of fiction, Maguire drafted a circular stressing the importance of books to those who wished to improve their technical knowledge in terms that would not have been out of place in the Irish Homestead, two decades previously. 'Books are by far the most effective and cheapest way of quickening the intellectual interest of the population generally'. He listed the categories of people who used the library: teachers, farmers, workers, Gaelic enthusiasts and students. The general reader appeared at the end of the list, almost as an after thought. This listing disguised the fact that the majority of books issued were fiction, and the real use of the library was as a source of recreation. In his paper read to the 1923 library conference, Maguire was more candid, and

quoted the following percentages of books borrowed:<sup>48</sup>

Fiction	66.36%
History-Geography	17.86%
Literature	6.64%
Science	3.74%
Sociology	1.38%

He did not break these down into actual number of books issued.

This circular was distributed throughout the county in May, and, as a result, Maguire was able to report to Robinson in June:

I am still receiving enquiries re the scheme, and requests for application forms for centres. The books are still going strong. Sometimes they come in<sup>49</sup> and have to be sent out in loads, and we are very busy.

Earlier in the year he had experienced difficulties in getting the books he ordered delivered by rail, when the Northern Ireland customs officials in Strabane refused to clear the book boxes. To have the books released he had been obliged to enlist the support of the county council, and of the Irish advisory committee, who were responsible for the cost of the books supplied for the experimental scheme. There was a continuous demand for new books. Seventy-seven centres were in operation, well distributed throughout the county [see table three], with 4,866 registered borrowers, of whom 3,344 were adults. According to the 1911 census figures, this represented, 2.8% of the total population of the county.<sup>50</sup>

In August 1923 Robinson travelled to Lifford to inspect the scheme, and meet with the council officials. He wished to ensure that there would be no difficulty in the formal

Table Three

Location of library centres in County Donegal, August 1923<sup>51</sup>

Annagry	Killybegs
Ardara	Kilmacrenan
Arranmore Island	Kincasslagh
	Knocknastolan
Ballindrait	
Ballintra	Letterkenny
Ballygorman	- Barkhall school
Ballymichael	- Convent
Ballyshannon	- Catholic committee
- Technical School	- Protestant school
- Catholic Club	Lifford
Bunrana	- town and in Prior
Burnfort	school
	Lochanure - Gweedore
Carndonagh	Lunniagh - Gweedore
Carrick - Glencolmcille	
Carickart	Manorcunningham
Cashel	Meenamara - Dungloe
Cashel -Glencolmcille	Meenabanid - Dungloe
Cashelmore	Meenlaragh
Creaslough	Millford
Cashelnagon -Gortahork	Moville
Cashlennan	Middletown
Church Hill	Mountcharles
Convoy	Muff
Croagh	Mullaghduff
Cruit Island	
Culdaff	Newtowncunningham
- Temperance House	
- Protestant hall	Ramelton
	Ranafast
Donegal	Raphoe
Doneyloop	- Recreation hall
Dungloe	- Royal school
	Rathmullen
Fahan	Rosakill
Falcarragh	Rossnowlagh
Fanad	Ruskey
Frosses	- Football club
Glasslough	Stranorlar
Gweedore	
Glen-Carrigart	Tawney - Fanad
Glenties	Termon - Letterkenny
Gola Island	
Gortnabrade	Welchtown
Keadue	
Kerrykeel	
Kilcar	

handing over of this, the CUKT's first Irish experimental scheme, to the county council. He may also have wished to see how MacIntyre was coping with the additional responsibility that had now been placed on him. Just as Robinson's position as organising librarian in County Limerick had developed so that he became the CUKT's Irish representative, so Maguire's role expanded into that of itinerant Carnegie county librarian, given the task of nursing a number of experimental schemes through their difficult early days.

Maguire went first to the neighbouring county of Sligo, where he was seconded by the Irish advisory committee for a six months' period beginning in June 1923. He was to train Robert Wilson, who had been selected by Robinson as the future county librarian,<sup>52</sup> while keeping a watchful eye on MacIntyre, in Donegal. In fact, MacIntyre proved quite capable of running the scheme, with the help of his niece Letitia Barr, who had been taken on as an assistant. Demand for books continued to keep him fully occupied. In October, he wrote to Robinson about the enthusiastic readers of Meenabanid, in the west of the county. The village centre had recorded 815 issues of forty books over three months, and a reader had requested the complete works of George Bernard Shaw.<sup>53</sup> MacIntyre's main difficulty was dealing with the members of the library committee, who insisted on getting first choice of books from the book repository rather than using their local centre. Since these included members of the county council and local clergymen, he felt it was not

politic to refuse them, although this offended the principle of a book repository.

Perhaps it was for this reason that MacIntyre was not entrusted with the negotiations involved in the final handing over of the scheme. Indeed, whereas Maguire had from the start dealt with Robinson and McGreevy as an equal, MacIntyre was always conscious of the difference in background and education between the CUKT's Dublin staff and himself. At their insistence, he agreed to take the Library Association's examination, which would qualify him to become a county librarian, although he was dubious about his chances of passing. 'I was brought up in an intellectual wilderness, and never got a dog's chance compared with other people', he confided to McGreevy.<sup>54</sup>

Maguire returned to Lifford in October for discussions with MacFadden on the arrangements whereby the council would take over the experimental library scheme. Following this visit, and using information supplied by Maguire, Robinson wrote to Mr. Clarke, acting chairman of the council, formally outlining the conditions imposed by the Irish advisory committee in return for the gift to the council of the book stock and equipment used in the experimental scheme. The council was to guarantee continued financial support for the library from public funds. It was to appoint a trained librarian, who would be approved by the Irish advisory committee, and to submit an annual report to the CUKT. In return, the council would receive 6,135 books, 120 book boxes, and fittings to the value of £1,286. The maintenance

of the county library scheme would, Robinson estimated, amount to £740 a year.<sup>55</sup>

Concerning the position of MacIntyre, Robinson told Maguire that this should be decided on its merits. The county library committee had no such doubts about MacIntyre, and, at a meeting on 10 December, passed a resolution strongly supporting him for the position of county librarian. MacIntyre himself was not at the meeting, as he was in Dublin taking the Library Association's examination, which he passed with honours, thus removing the barrier that might have prevented him from becoming county librarian. Both Maguire and MacIntyre were present in Lifford on 18 December, when Robinson's letter was read to the county council. Only one councillor (an old man who opposed everything, according to MacIntyre), spoke against the library scheme, and the council passed a resolution formally agreeing to take over administration of the book repository and the rural centres.<sup>56</sup> At its meeting in January 1924, the council followed this up with a grant of £185,00 to the library committee, the first installment of the grant in aid.

As was to be expected, a certain amount of administrative confusion accompanied the hand-over. The library committee had been appointed by the CUKT, and its members were not sure where their responsibilities now lay. MacIntyre was also somewhat uncertain, and wrote to Robinson for guidance, only to receive the rather cold reply that this was now a matter for the county council. The position was

not regularised until February,<sup>57</sup> when the county council reconstituted the Carnegie library committee as the Tirconnail county library committee, and appointed MacIntyre as county librarian, a position he held until 1948.<sup>58</sup> Robinson wrote more cordially to congratulate him: 'I am sure you will make a great success of the library scheme in Tirconnail'.<sup>59</sup>

The successful conclusion of the first experimental scheme was a matter of great satisfaction to the Irish advisory committee. Robinson noted:

During the twenty months in which books were distributed 50,387 books were issued to borrowers, which is convincing proof of rural Ireland's desire for reading, and also a proof that the Trust's method of book distribution is an efficient one.<sup>60</sup>

This encouraged the committee members to initiate even more experimental schemes than they had already set in train.

(iii)

The Irish advisory committee had selected County Wexford as the location for its second experimental library scheme. The local situation seemed to indicate that a library scheme in this county would be successful. The United Irishwomen, an offshoot of the IAOS, were particularly strong in the county and, as part of their programme of improving the quality of rural life, had established a number of subscription libraries attached to their branches. Inspired by the success of these, a number of applications for



financial help to start village libraries had been sent from Wexford to Dunfermline even before the establishment of the Dublin book repository. In his report on library conditions, presented to the CUKT in 1917, Robinson had noted the interest shown in rural libraries in the county. A Carnegie county experimental scheme could be expected to build on, and expand, this interest.

Even more promising was the enthusiasm expressed for the idea of a county library service by the secretary to Wexford county council, Thomas Frizelle. In November 1920 Frizelle called to the book repository offices in Harcourt Street and met Robinson and McGreevy. They outlined how an experimental library scheme would work, and Frizelle undertook to canvass support, as a preliminary to persuading the council to pass a resolution requesting such a scheme. In spite of the disturbed state of the county owing to the Anglo-Irish war, he felt sufficiently confident of success to invite Robinson to Wexford in June 1921 for a meeting with the council chairman and some interested councillors.<sup>61</sup> But the sudden arrest of Frizelle on 28 June disrupted these arrangements. At first, Robinson hoped that he would be released following the truce of 11 July, and kept Wexford on the agenda in his correspondence with the trustees. However, when Frizelle was transferred to a detention centre on Spike Island, in Cork harbour, during the autumn, it became clear that plans for Wexford would have to be postponed.

At its meeting on 11 November, the Irish advisory committee took the decision to substitute County Antrim for

County Wexford as the location for the second experimental library scheme.<sup>62</sup> Logically this seemed a strange substitution. In the winter of 1921 Northern Ireland was in the middle of a long period of violence, which between June 1920 and June 1922 claimed over 2,000 victims - 1,760 wounded and 428 killed,<sup>63</sup> and at times threatened the complete collapse of the newly created State.

Northern Ireland, as has been noted, was given legal status by the 1920 Government of Ireland Act. The general election of May 1921 - the last to be held on an all-Ireland basis - resulted in the establishment of a two-tier legislature - Commons and Senate - at Belfast. Sir James Craig was appointed Prime Minister, but his government was bereft of an opposition since the twelve non-unionist M.P.s elected refused to take their seats. R.J. Lawrence has described the situation that faced Craig thus:

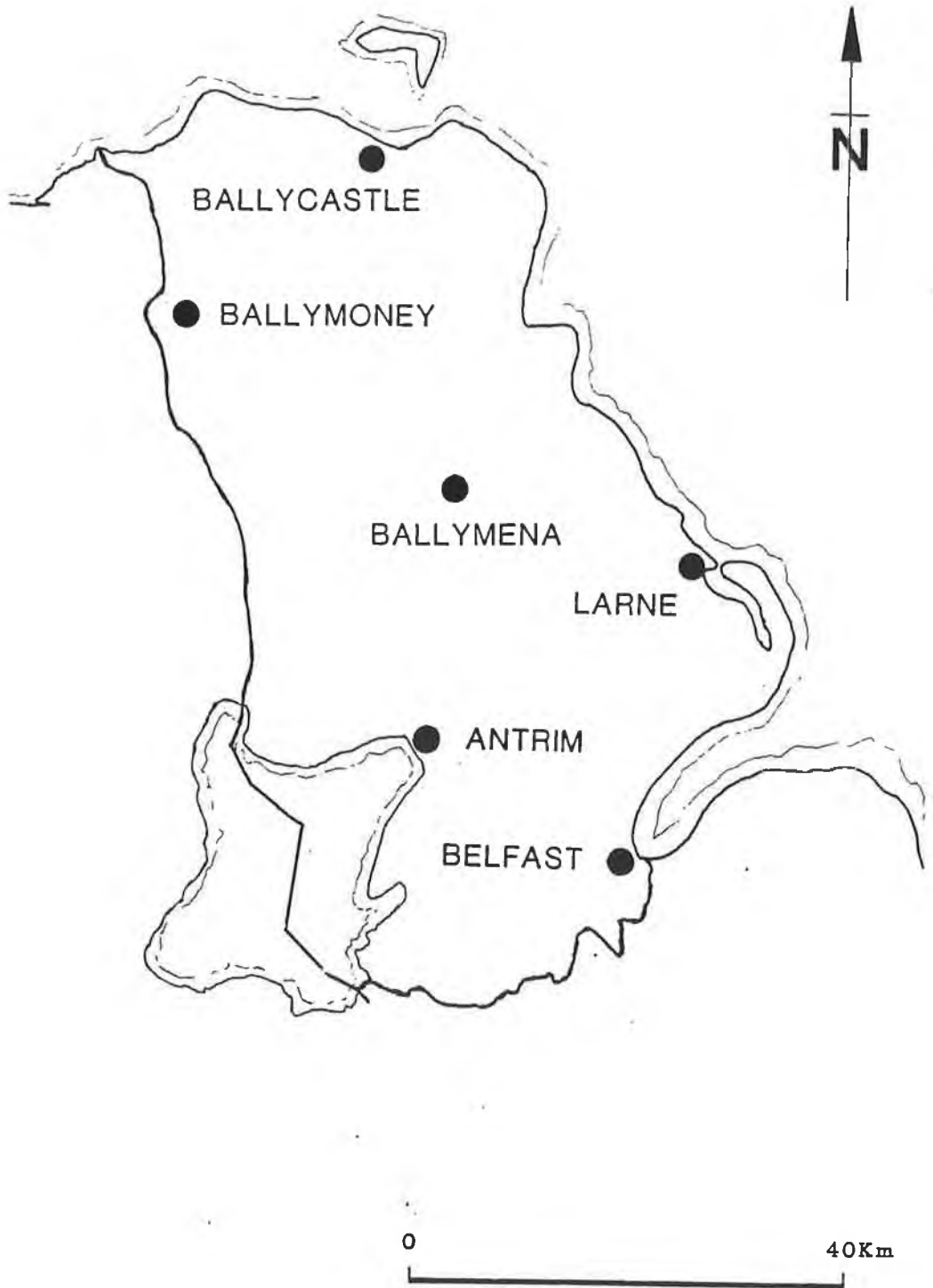
While Protestants were determined to uphold a constitution that enabled them to stay in the Union, most Catholics were equally determined to overthrow it, if necessary by violence, or by the traditional Irish weapon of the boycott. Gunmen and gangsters tried to wreck the regime by murder and arson, Southern Ireland sought to strangle it by a trade embargo, Roman Catholic prelates refused to recognise it, the six nationalist and six Sinn Fein members elected in 1921 to the house of commons declined to take their seats, local authorities with nationalist majorities refused to discharge their duties, and managers and teachers of some 300 Roman Catholic schools refused to recognize the new Ministry of Education or even to accept the salaries that it paid.<sup>64</sup>

Craig might have favoured conciliation, but hard-liners in his cabinet, such as Richard Dawson Bates, the minister of home affairs, and his parliamentary secretary, Robert Megaw,

thought otherwise.<sup>65</sup> The Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act passed in 1922 gave the government emergency powers for dealing with terrorists, and the Royal Ulster Constabulary was augmented by the so-called 'B-specials'. Thanks to these measures law and order was restored, but the sectarian tensions aroused were to cast long shadows in the history of Northern Ireland.

This was not a promising background for a northern venture by the Irish advisory committee. Yet there were certain impulses tending in that direction. The committee had received a rather vaguely worded letter from a resident of Ballymena, the county town (see figure six) asking for assistance to establish a library - evidence that a reading public existed in the county.<sup>66</sup> There was further and more concrete evidence from the north of the county, and here there was a connection with the co-operative movement. A successful co-operative society had existed for a number of years in the village of Dervock, not far from Ballycastle. Mrs Elizabeth Montgomery was a leading member of this society, and a subscriber to the Dublin book repository on behalf of the Dervock village library. She was also a woman of influence within the county, an ideal candidate to help in the early stages of the library scheme. On a more practical level, although they did not minute it, the committee members must have appreciated the advantages of initiating an experimental scheme in Northern Ireland, in order to establish their credentials as a non-political, all-Ireland organisation. Even the civil disturbances were not

Figure Six  
County Antrim



universal. On a crude sectarian head count the committee members would have known that, although the mountainous areas of the 'glens of Antrim' contained nationalist enclaves, the population of the county was over-whelmingly unionist,<sup>67</sup> and therefore it was relatively peaceful.

In September 1921, shortly after he received news of Frizelle's transfer to Spike Island, Robinson wrote to Mrs. Montgomery, asking her to suggest names of people who might agree to act on a county library committee. As had happened in Donegal these preliminary contacts identified a number of enthusiasts for rural libraries. One such was P.F. Gillies, principal of Ballymena technical school. As a teacher he had an obvious interest in encouraging reading, but, in addition, he was something of a local historian and had contributed an article on the development of technical education in Ballymena to the Journal of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction in 1908.<sup>68</sup>

On the joint initiative of Gillies and Mrs Montgomery a meeting of individuals supportive of a county library scheme was held in the board room of the technical school, Ballymena, on 14 October. The attendance included a number of people who were to play prominent parts in the experimental scheme, such as J. M. Beaumont, chairman of Ballymena UDC, and James Caruth, a district councillor. Mrs. Montgomery had invited the local members of parliament to attend the meeting. Robert Crawford, M.P. for mid Antrim, sent a letter of apology indicating his support for the idea,

but Senator Thomas MacGregor Greer<sup>69</sup> was present. As a former county solicitor for Antrim, he had been consulted by Mrs Montgomery at an early stage, and, during the course of the meeting, she publicly thanked him for his help. The Irish advisory committee was represented by Thomas McGreevy, who admitted that he had never previously visited Ballymena. He outlined how the experimental library scheme would work, referring to the CUKT's experience with such schemes in Britain. This presentation was favourably received, and a resolution was proposed by Caruth, and seconded by Beaumont, stating:

That this meeting of representatives of Ballymena urban district heartily approves of the offer of the Carnegie trustees being accepted, being confident that, at the expiration of the two years, the money for the upkeep of the scheme<sup>70</sup> will be found, either by the county rate or otherwise.

Although this resolution did not have the weight of a decision taken by a county council, it satisfied both the Irish advisory committee and the trustees, who agreed to the substitution of Antrim for Wexford, allocating £2,250, over a two year period, to finance the experimental scheme.

Robinson now proceeded to write to all the local authority bodies, members of parliament, educational and religious interests in the county, requesting nominations to the county library committee. The position of librarian to administer the rural service was advertised, and filled by Alexander Stewart Roy. Roy, who was a native of County Antrim, was assistant librarian at Kings Inns in Dublin, but, like Maguire, he had started his library career in the

Belfast city library service. Meanwhile, Mrs. Montgomery had assumed the position of the Irish advisory committee's unofficial organiser in County Antrim. At the start of February 1922 she wrote to Robinson, assuring him that there was considerable popular support for the experimental scheme. 'There is really a great interest being taken', she wrote 'we have got quite a good list of reading rooms and clubs that want books'.<sup>71</sup>

On 13 February, Robinson and McGreevy travelled to Ballymena to attend the inaugural meeting of the county library committee. They had a preliminary discussion with Mrs. Montgomery and Senator Greer, whose understanding of unionist sensibilities can be seen in the heavy emphasis in Robinson's speech to the meeting on the denominational balance of the book selection committee, and on its independence of Dublin. Gillies was appointed secretary of the committee, and the book selection committee included two clergymen and Mrs Montgomery. The atmosphere at the meeting was one of confidence. Not only had there been a good response at local level to the prospect of a county library service, but it seemed as if current legislative developments could be used to obtain for county councils the power to adopt the public libraries act which was still the prerogative of urban and rural district councils. In September 1921 the minister of education, Lord Londonderry, had appointed a committee, chaired by Robert Lynn, to enquire into the existing state of education in Northern Ireland. It was widely expected that the report of this committee would

result in new legislation. This seemed to offer an opportunity to extend library powers to county councils, and a resolution was passed calling on Londonderry to include a library clause in any proposed education bill.<sup>72</sup> The meeting was hopeful of a positive response from Londonderry (a County Down landowner, in spite of his title), who had wider experience than his cabinet colleagues, having held junior office at Westminster.<sup>73</sup>

The following week Roy arrived in Ballymena. His first library accommodation was in the technical school but by the end of March he had found rooms for the book repository over Kane's machine shop in Waveney Street. Here he set to work with the book selection committee on the standard catalogue supplied by McGreevy. Mrs Montgomery took most interest in the type of book to be ordered for the repository, censoring alike rationalist authors like Thomas Huxley, and the popular novelist Ethel M. Dell.<sup>74</sup> Apart from these objections, Roy encountered no difficulties, and was able to start to order books in August.

The determination of the Irish advisory committee to supply books to rural areas only, caused some difficulties for Roy at the start of the experimental scheme. Ballymena was an urban area and, as such, theoretically as much outside the scope of the scheme as the city of Belfast.<sup>75</sup> However, the townspeople did not appreciate this fine distinction and began to demand access to the book repository. An editorial in the Ballymena Observer of 10 March, complained that the



young people and students of the town could not benefit from this so-called library which, it grumbled, was 'not a free library but only an association of private libraries'.<sup>76</sup> At its March meeting, the Ballymena UDC passed a resolution asking the CUKT for funds to build a town library. This publicity was embarrassing for the library committee, and Gillies wrote to Robinson to ask if anything could be done to provide the townspeople with a library. Robinson's reply was that he should tell the UDC to adopt the public libraries act, and provide a rate-supported service, advice which Gillies knew to be impractical. As an alternative, he proposed to establish a reading club in the town, funded by subscriptions, which could borrow books from the repository. This scheme was approved by the library committee and, as a concession, Robinson agreed to let the town library committee members borrow books directly from Dublin, in addition to those they would receive through the experimental scheme.<sup>77</sup>

With this problem overcome, Roy was able to concentrate on establishing centres. He did this mainly through the issuing of circulars, although he also addressed a number of branches of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation. In places the response was disappointing. Only nine people turned up to attend a meeting he organised in Ballyclare, while at Kells the school teacher refused to act as librarian, and he had to ask the local clergyman to take charge of the village centre. However, these experiences were the exception, and, by the time Roy despatched the first consignment of book boxes in late May, he had received fifty

six applications for centres. Seventeen of these had been sanctioned by the library committee, and were supplied with books. By August, Roy's propaganda work had increased the number of centres to sixty four. 2,500 books had been despatched from the book repository, and he was able to assure Robinson: 'from conversations I have learnt that the books, on the whole, are being well read'.<sup>78</sup> As happened in Donegal, the books borrowed were mainly fiction, but there was a demand for non fiction, as statistics supplied to the advisory committee in December indicated. Based on records of issues from the first book boxes, which had been returned to the county repository for exchange, Roy noted that, although fiction, both adult and juvenile, accounted for three-quarters of the issues, there was a readership for books on science and the useful arts.

While Roy busied himself in placing the county experimental library scheme on a sound administrative footing, the Irish advisory committee was concerned with the scheme's future. In spite of the popular success of the experimental scheme, there was no guarantee that it would be taken over by a local government body at the end of the experimental period. Although the meeting which had requested the experimental scheme for the county had been attended by a number of councillors, it had no official status and involved no commitment by a public body. This was in contrast to Donegal, where the invitation had come from the county council. Furthermore, since Antrim had escaped

the disturbances of the Anglo Irish war, the relationship of the RDCs to the county council continued there as it had done throughout the island up to 1919. The RDCs still maintained their powers, which they guarded jealously. It was unlikely that they would acquiesce in any attempt to transfer their library powers to the county councils, and, due to the small size of Northern Ireland, such local issues could easily influence M.P.s. A library clause in a major piece of government legislation seemed to be more assured of success than a public libraries bill. Londonderry's education bill offered an ideal solution, as it was known that it would propose sweeping changes in educational administration. There was a precedent in Scotland, where the education act of 1918 had included a library clause. In September 1922 Plunkett wrote to Londonderry on behalf of the CUKT urging him to include a clause in the bill which would empower county councils to raise a library rate, a facility which, he pointed out, already existed in the rest of the United Kingdom.<sup>79</sup>

The members of the county library committee were also active in lobbying to have the education bill amended. In January 1923, on receipt of a letter from Robinson reminding them that the CUKT's responsibility for the experimental scheme would end in February 1924, they decided to send a deputation to meet Londonderry.<sup>80</sup> On 29 January, Senator Greer, Beaumont, Gillies, and Mrs. Montgomery, met Londonderry's private secretary in Belfast. They outlined the purpose of the experimental library scheme, emphasised how

successful it had been in Antrim, and explained the difficulties it would face if the legislation remained unchanged. They received a sympathetic hearing, and left feeling confident.<sup>81</sup> But their confidence was soon dashed when Londonderry introduced the education bill in parliament on 14 March, because it included no library clause. The members of the library committee were angered at this lack of commitment, 'I shouldn't like to express my thoughts about the Northern government', Roy confessed to McGreevy.<sup>82</sup> Greer undertook to introduce an amendment to the bill on its passage through the senate, but even the members of the library committee felt that this was a forlorn hope.<sup>83</sup> This belief proved correct. When Greer attempted to raise the library issue during the second reading of the education bill, Londonderry expressed the opinion that a library bill would be more appropriate than an education bill to deal with the question, and suggested that the library committee approach the minister of home affairs, Dawson Bates.<sup>84</sup>

The trustees were equally disappointed at the failure to amend the education bill, which they attributed to opposition by civil servants within the Ministry of Education.<sup>85</sup> Mitchell wrote to Londonderry, urging him to introduce the library legislation needed to bring Northern Ireland into the mainstream of United Kingdom library development; while A. B. Hyslop, the CUKT treasurer, on his way back to Dunfermline from Dublin, called to Londonderry's Belfast office, to further press the case for public library

legislation.

In the opinion of the county library committee, the case for a Northern Ireland public library bill was strengthened by the impending establishment of experimental schemes in the neighbouring counties of Derry and Fermanagh. In spring 1923, several private individuals in Derry, who had seen the success of the rural library schemes in Donegal and Antrim, wrote to Robinson to find out if a similar scheme might be adopted in their county.<sup>86</sup> Once again, Mrs Montgomery was asked to canvass local support and, as a result of her efforts, the county council passed a resolution of support for an experimental scheme in April.<sup>87</sup> The headmaster of the Coleraine technical school wrote to the Irish advisory committee, offering to help in any way he could, a decision that may have influenced Robinson to select Coleraine as the location for the county book repository. In November Maguire was transferred from Sligo as county librarian.

In March 1923, the secretary of the County Fermanagh technical education committee wrote to Robinson for details of the CUKT's experimental library schemes. A delegation representing the Fermanagh county council and various educational bodies attended the Irish advisory committee's meeting on 13 September, to ask for an experimental scheme to be initiated in the county. The Irish advisory committee recommended that the trustees sanction experimental schemes in Derry and Fermanagh, which Robinson had costed at £3,350 and £2,250, respectively. This recommendation was formally approved by the executive committee in November.

Although it was known that local government legislation was to be introduced in the next session of the Northern Ireland parliament, the Antrim county library committee, conscious of the impending termination of CUKT support, began to investigate alternative ways of financing the library scheme. Under the terms of the existing public libraries act, it was possible for adjoining districts to amalgamate the returns of their library rate. The county library committee now decided to approach each rural and urban district council in Antrim, and persuade them to individually adopt the public libraries act for their district, and pool the resulting rate to finance the county library scheme, a cumbersome arrangement, but one that could raise up to £1,200 a year, quite sufficient to finance the library service. This service would be administered by a joint committee, made up of nominees from the participating districts. The book repository would withdraw its service from the districts that opted out.<sup>88</sup>

Roy and Gillies set to work on the creation of this 'joint district method', as they called it. Their work was given added urgency when the anticipated local government bill, introduced in parliament during November 1923, contained no mention of library powers for county councils. Greer was once again prepared to propose an amendment, but the rural district councillors on the library committee, who saw their powers being eroded at every turn, dissuaded him.<sup>89</sup> This lost opportunity caused anger and disappointment in the

CUKT's Dublin office; while Roy gloomily predicted that the county library committee had 'missed the boat'.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, he pressed on with his work of persuading the district councils to adopt the public libraries act. By the end of 1923, Ballymena UDC, and five of the seven RDCs contained within the county, had done so; the exceptions being Belfast RDC, a small area on the periphery of the city, and Ballycastle RDC, where the motion to adopt was defeated by the chairman's casting vote.<sup>91</sup>

The next step was to get each council to agree to amalgamate its library rate. A suitable motion was drafted and circulated to the councils in February 1924. In outlining the composition of the proposed joint library committee, Roy was careful to point out that each council would have two representatives, thus ensuring the local control so valued by the RDCs. Meanwhile, Gillies attempted to get a grant from the CUKT to finance the scheme in its first few months. The trustees were not particularly enthusiastic about the system of administration which Gillies outlined. 'The joint district method, which is to be adopted in Antrim, is clearly less satisfactory than the establishment of the county as a public library authority', their Tenth Annual Report commented.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, they agreed to give £350 towards its maintenance.

While Roy was busy on the ground trying to cement together the precarious structure of the 'joint district method', the Irish advisory committee tried lobbying at a higher administrative level. On 5 February Maguire, as its

representative, met Major Harris, Dawson Bates's private secretary, on the question of a public libraries bill. The response was positive and Maguire was able to report that 'the public libraries bill is now at an advanced stage, but owing to the general opposition of the RDCs the Ministry is moving slowly'.<sup>93</sup> Harris had accounted for this opposition by the fear of the Northern Ireland councillors that the government wished to abolish them as had happened in the Irish Free State, a fear that caused them to oppose in principle all local government legislation. This diagnosis was proved correct when the King's speech, read at the opening of parliament on 11 March, promised a public libraries bill which would, in essence, transfer the existing library powers of the RDCs to the county councils. This was what the trustees wanted, but the district councillors had other views. Nor were their feelings soothed by Dawson Bates, who introduced the public libraries bill to the senate on 20 March as follows:

In the opinion of the government, it was never well advised to lay these onerous duties on the shoulders of the rural district councils. It was an extravagant system in the first place, but beyond all that, it was a system under which it was extremely unlikely that a proper provision of public libraries could ever be afforded to the people.<sup>94</sup>

The terms of the bill enabled county councils to adopt the public libraries act for all, or any, of the RDCs within the county, and thus become the library authority. In order to provide for urban areas, a clause enabled UDCs to transfer their library powers to the county council. The library rate



was fixed at a penny in rural areas, and three pence in urban areas. The bill provoked little debate in the senate, and passed quickly to the committee stage.

Reactions to the bill among rural district councillors in County Antrim varied considerably. The members of Antrim RDC immediately withdrew their motion to adopt the public libraries act, while other councillors confined themselves to expressions of anger.<sup>95</sup> The last meeting of the old Carnegie library committee, held on 22 March, still included representatives from most of the RDCs. Roy outlined the success of the scheme. Ninety eight centres had been established, sixty six in schools and twenty two at other locations (see table four). These centres had become:

literary workshops, providing the tools of knowledge for post-school studies and for the development of social life, for the advancement of learning, and generally for the creation of a desire for a higher moral and intellectual existence.<sup>96</sup>

Robinson, who was present to witness the hand over of the scheme, also spoke of the success of the experimental scheme, and expressed the hope that the joint district method would ensure that the library service could continue. He was careful to preface his remarks with a welcome for the library bill, which was in accordance with the CUKT's policy for county council-based schemes. Greer, Beaumont and Caruth, all pleaded with the rural district councillors not to withdraw from the joint district committee. Greer was confident that he could have the bill amended so as to ensure that the RDCs had a strong representation on the county library committees that would be established if the bill

Table Four

Location of library centres in County Antrim, July 1923<sup>97</sup>

Antrim	Glenariffe	Shanes
Ahoghill	Glenarm	Straid
Armoy	Glarryford	
	Garvahy	Torr
Ballintoy	Galgorm	Teeshan
Ballycastle	Gracehill	Toomebridge
Bushmills	Glenwherry	Troopers Lane
Benvarden		Tullygarley
Balnamore	Islandmagee	Templepatrick
Ballymoney		
Ballycraigagh	Joymount	Vow
Bellaghy		
Ballygarvey	Kilmoyle	Whitehead
Broughshane	Knocknacarry	
Bruckna	Knocknahollet	
Ballymena	Kilraughts	
Ballynure	Killymurris	
Ballycarry	Kilnagan	
Ballylimney	Killygore	
Ballymacash	Kilwaughter	
Ballyrickand	Kells	
	Kilroot	
Croaghbeg		
Castlecat	Lischohman	
Cushendun	Loughguile	
Cabra	Loan	
Culduff	Lisnamurrican	
Carrowreagh	Liminary	
Cloughmills	Larne	
Clough	Lislunna	
Cullybackey	Loanends	
Crebilly	Lyle Hill	
Cross	Lisburn	
Carrickfergus		
Crumlin	Mosside	
Castlerobin	Mullans	
	Moorfields	
Dunseverick	Martinstown	
Dervock	Magheramore	
Dunloy	Maghereagh	
Duneane	Muckamore	
Donegore		
	Portrush	
Doagh	Portglenone	
Dunadry	Parkgate	
Dunrod		
	Raskarkin	
Finvoy	Randalstown	
	Rathmore	
Giant's Causeway		
Ganaby	Stanocum	

became law.<sup>98</sup> Some of the committee, at least, ignored their pleas, as the following week a notice of motion to withdraw was handed in at Ballymena RDC.<sup>99</sup>

With an energy that belied his seventy one years, Senator Greer now lobbied government ministers to have the bill amended so as to appease the rural district councillors. He gained the support of Robert Megaw, parliamentary secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs, who was also M.P. for Antrim.<sup>100</sup> As a result, when the bill was introduced in the house of commons on 6 May, it included a provision that the library committee should be composed of the chairman and vice-chairman of the county council, two members from each RDC and one from each UDC, together with a number of county councillors equal to the number of rural districts within the county. This, Megaw maintained, would ensure that the influence of the RDCs would not be diminished.<sup>101</sup>

Only two M.P.s contributed to the debate which followed. Robert Crawford, who had been among those invited by Gillies and Mrs Montgomery to the preliminary meeting in February 1922, spoke in favour of the county libraries - 'It would be a magnificent thing if people could get hold of good literature for their spare time'.<sup>102</sup> But he also supported the claims of the RDCs to increased representation. Mrs Dehra Chichester, M.P. for Derry, made a more lengthy contribution. Maguire had already encountered her on the Derry county library committee 'She is undoubtedly a power to be reckoned with', he wrote to Robinson, 'and I had to be almost cringing for the sake of the bill which comes before

the commons next month'.<sup>103</sup> In fact she reserved her fire for the contents of the CUKT funded experimental library schemes rather than the question of rate-supported county libraries. She alleged that the books were based on a list

compiled in Trinity College and the National University with the result that, in one catalogue, there are upwards of sixty six books dealing with Irish history - a debatable subject.<sup>104</sup>

This intervention did not hold up the progress of the bill, which passed to the committee stage where Crawford succeeded in having it amended to increase the RDC representation to three. Following this, the bill encountered no further difficulties, and it received the royal assent on 29 May, to become law as the Public Libraries Act [Northern Ireland], 1924.<sup>105</sup>

The joint library committee was in confident mood when it met in Ballymena technical school on 17 May. Although no representatives from Ballymena or Antrim RDCs were present, Greer was convinced that the increased representation RDCs would now have on the county library committee following Crawford's amendment would encourage them to rejoin. This conviction was dramatically justified, when Joseph Maybin, chairman of Ballymena RDC, joined the meeting declaring (to applause), that he intended to propose a motion that his RDC rejoin the library scheme.<sup>106</sup>

On 22 July Antrim county council adopted the public libraries act for the four RDCs that had stayed loyal to the county library scheme. By the end of the year they had been joined by all the RDCs in the county except for Ballycastle,

as well as by Ballymena UDC. As had happened in Donegal, the Carnegie librarian became the county librarian, and Roy assumed a position he held until 1951.<sup>107</sup>

In the early months of the scheme Roy had reason to wonder if he had made the correct decision. The grant from the CUKT had ceased and he was faced with running a service without an income, for which he received no salary. Nor was this likely to be a quickly passing phase. During the last week of July, Colonel Patrick, the chairman of Antrim county council, told Roy that it would be November before he could expect any money from the library rate. The Irish advisory committee was naturally concerned about this situation. Robinson offered Roy a personal loan to tide him over until November.<sup>108</sup> Maguire was once more summoned to the rescue, - this time from Galway where he had been transferred in August 1924 to establish another experimental scheme. The advisory committee was considering the feasibility of a further loan to Antrim, and was glad to be assured by the Ministry of Home Affairs, via Maguire, that any money given would be refunded. In the event this was not necessary, as Maguire's discussions with the county council bore fruit and on 8 September he was able to assure Robinson that the councillors ('sticklers for rules and regulations'), had agreed to grant £200 to the library, which saved the day.<sup>109</sup>

With this difficulty solved, Robinson was able to write to the county council on 22 September formally handing over the scheme, paying tactful tribute to 'the interest and enthusiasm shown by the county [library] committee'.<sup>110</sup> On 2

December the new county library committee held its first meeting, thus inaugurating the rate-supported Antrim county library service, the first in Northern Ireland.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The spread of the county library movement, 1922-1924

(1)

The Irish advisory committee did not intend to suspend the initiation of experimental library schemes until the two pioneer schemes in Donegal or Antrim had proved successful, or otherwise. Even the threatening political situation did not deter Robinson from contacting Frizelle in March 1922, as soon as he learnt of his release from detention: 'I am anxious to know, within the next three weeks, whether we are going to be able to organise a scheme of book distribution in Wexford'.<sup>1</sup> Although Frizelle was in poor health from the effects of his imprisonment, he succeeded in having a motion expressing support for a rural library service proposed by Alderman Corish, the mayor of Wexford, at the county council meeting on 3 April.<sup>2</sup> This motion made no reference to supporting a library service from public funds, but, when coupled with a favourable report on the prospects of an experimental scheme in the county prepared by McGreevy, it was sufficient to persuade the Irish advisory committee to propose a Wexford experimental library scheme to the trustees.<sup>3</sup> In July, the committee received sanction to proceed.

The summer of 1922 was not an auspicious time for library work, and Frizelle's unenthusiastic reaction to this

news was in sharp contrast to his optimism of the previous year. 'We will do what we can to get most value out of our libraries', he wrote to Robinson, 'that is, assuming there will be any of us left when this cruel war is over'.<sup>4</sup> Aware of the disturbed state of the county, the Irish advisory committee decided to postpone attempts to get nominations for a library committee until more peaceful conditions prevailed. In the meantime, the position of librarian was advertised, and filled by Mary Monica Walshe, from the staff of Rathmines public library. On 13 November, the county library committee held its inaugural meeting in the Wexford court house, and a book selection committee, made up of clerical and educational interests, was appointed amid a distinct lack of controversy.<sup>5</sup> By January 1923, when Miss Walshe arrived in Wexford, a list of books had already been agreed on, and by the end of the following month the third Irish experimental scheme was in operation from the county book repository in North Main Street.

The purpose of experimental county library schemes, as proposed by Adams in his 1915 'Report on library provision and policy', was at once to show how a county library service should be run, and to create an interest in rural libraries among the general public.<sup>6</sup> This had happened in Britain. By the end of 1923 the CUKT was responsible for twenty one rural library schemes in England, twenty three in Scotland and eight in Wales.<sup>7</sup> In Ireland, the first experimental schemes had a similar result, and inquiries began to reach the Irish advisory committee from individuals who had seen the



advantages of assistance from the CUKT in creating a rural library service, and wanted to start similar schemes in their areas.

Whereas Donegal and Wexford had been virgin territory as far as rate-supported libraries were concerned, the next two schemes funded by the CUKT in the Irish Free State were in counties where there was already a public library in the county town. In October 1922, while McGreevy was labouring to persuade various local bodies in Wexford to provide a nomination to the county library committee, a letter arrived from the nearby county of Kilkenny which suggested the location for a new experimental scheme. In 1905 Kilkenny UDC had adopted the public libraries act and, with the aid of a grant from Carnegie, had opened a library in 1911. Prior to this the main source of books for the townspeople had been the Kilkenny Library Society, one of the subscription libraries established in the early nineteenth century. The Kilkenny Society had suffered from financial problems from an early stage, and by the turn of the century it was barely surviving as its trustees moved it from premises to premises in the town always looking for a lower rent. It was probably with some relief that, in December 1911, they resolved to move the library to rooms in the new Carnegie library, thus effectively ending its separate existence.<sup>8</sup>

The town library seems to have been well-managed. Drawing on his 1916 tour of Carnegie-funded libraries, Lennox Robinson classified it with those which were 'working well on the whole but capable of improvement'.<sup>9</sup> Thus when Edward

McSwenney, the librarian, wrote about subscribing to the Dublin book repository, Robinson replied suggesting that Kilkenny would be a promising location for a rural library scheme. McSwenney was enthusiastic, and did most of the necessary local propaganda. On 22 January 1923, the Kilkenny county council passed a resolution undertaking to support an experimental scheme. McSwenney's support obtained a home for the book repository in the town library, thus ensuring that the two schemes worked together from the start. In April 1923 the Irish advisory committee recommended that the trustees fund a scheme in Kilkenny, which they agreed to at their May meeting.<sup>10</sup>

At the same meeting the trustees sanctioned another experimental scheme, this time in County Sligo, (£2,400 being allocated to each county). Sligo UDC had adopted the public libraries act in 1880, but had never struck a library rate. A note in the Library Association Record for 1904 indicates that Carnegie offered the UDC a grant of £1,800, but, since the councillors wanted to use this money to purchase books and equipment, the grant was withdrawn.<sup>11</sup> During 1916 Robinson had visited the library which was housed in the town hall. His condemnation was succinct:

A curious institution. It has been established since 1880, no rate is levied, its total income is £1, and its expenditure £65. Its annual issue is sixty six books.<sup>12</sup>

During the civil war Free State troops occupied the town hall, completely disrupting such library service as existed.

In December 1922 a letter appeared in the Sligo Champion urging the advantages of a Carnegie rural library scheme for

the county. The writer was Geoffrey Phibbs, one of an Anglo-Irish family from Lisheen, just outside Sligo town. It is probable that Phibbs was not acting independently when he submitted this letter. He was not in fact resident in Sligo but in Dublin where he was on the staff of the College of Science. His interests were not confined to zoology and he had written a number of mystical poems which had come to the attention of George Russell, and thus inevitably the set which revolved around Plunkett House and the United Arts Club.<sup>13</sup> Consequently it is not surprising to note that Phibbs's letter showed a detailed understanding of how the CUKT funded schemes operated.

Whoever was the real inspiration for this letter, it clearly had the desired effect. McGreevy was invited to address both Sligo county council and corporation in January 1923. Martin Roddy, chairman of the county council, was very interested in the possibilities of an experimental scheme, as were the Labour representatives on the corporation, and both bodies passed resolutions promising support. Canon Butler offered rooms rent free in the Temperance Hall for the book repository and, as has been described, Maguire left Donegal for Sligo to prepare for the first meeting of the county library committee, which took place on 7 August 1923.

The Irish advisory committee had, by the summer of 1923, experimental library schemes under its control in Donegal, Antrim, Wexford, Kilkenny and Sligo. The ground work for schemes in Derry and Fermanagh was well advanced, while Mrs Montgomery, who had been nominated to the committee, pressed

the case of Derry city, and Lady Gregory hoped for a county library service in Galway. Robinson had not forgotten Limerick and Kerry, but the ferocity of the civil war in the south-west made library work there impractical, and the burning of the Carnegie library building at Listowel in March 1921 had destroyed the natural choice for a county book repository.

The organisation of so many library schemes created the difficulty for Robinson of finding sufficient trained librarians, who would be able to take over these schemes once they became administered entirely by the county councils. The pool of suitably qualified librarians in Ireland was extremely small, and already Robinson had noted the disappointing standard of applicants for the position in Wexford. In June 1923, the Irish advisory committee advertised for a librarian to administer the Kilkenny experimental scheme, and Florence Harrison, from the Dublin book repository, was appointed.

Following this appointment, the policy of advertising for librarians to administer experimental schemes was abandoned. A master and apprentice system was substituted whereby trainee librarians were engaged for two years at thirty shillings a week, with the prospect of taking over a county scheme and earning £250 a year if they completed their probation in a satisfactory manner.<sup>14</sup> In his autobiography Robinson explained his criteria of recruitment and its results:

For our librarians we picked young men and women of

education and intelligence, not necessarily demanding of them technical qualifications... Within a few years I had gathered round me a band of workers whose names fill me with pride, because they were of my picking.<sup>15</sup>

Since Robinson's social life revolved around the Dublin literary world, these early librarians tended to operate in that world also. Thus during the 1920s the CUKT was the employer of a number of talented individuals. Few made librarianship their career, and by the end of the decade most had moved on, but not without making an impact on the rural library service. Dermot Foley, the first county librarian of Clare, summed up the legacy of Robinson's recruits as follows:

What mattered in those days was book selection and distribution above all else, and if these pioneers had little time for Dewey's fifth place of decimals, or for the added entry, they tried very hard indeed to get the kind of books which in their view were needed to slake the thirst of a parched rural people.<sup>16</sup>

These early Carnegie librarians were individually as varied as the method of their recruitment. Robert Wilson, who was appointed to assist Maguire in Sligo with the vague recommendation that he was 'a promising young man with no library training',<sup>17</sup> may have come to Robinson's notice through Yeats, since he had written some verse heavily influenced by Yeats's vision.<sup>18</sup> Their correspondence about the Sligo scheme, which Wilson took charge of in November 1923 on Maguire's departure for Coleraine, indicates that they were friends. Geoffrey Phibbs, who had written eloquently in favour of rural libraries to the Sligo Champion, found himself unemployed when the Dublin College of Science closed in 1923.<sup>19</sup> By October he had been recruited

by Robinson and was in Kilkenny as Florence Harrison's assistant. Nor was Robinson above some nepotism. In the summer of 1924 he was visited in his Dublin office by Helen Roe, a distant relative who had recently graduated from Trinity College. She was somewhat surprised to be asked if she would like to earn £250 a year as a librarian.<sup>20</sup> Since the prospect of a teaching career did not appeal, she quickly accepted the offer and was sent to Coleraine where Hubert Butler was librarian. 'She is' wrote Robinson, 'a sort of cousin of mine, a graduate of T.C.D. and a girl I think you would find it easy to work with'.<sup>21</sup> Butler was another of these early recruits, this time a protegee of Plunkett. A member of a landed family from Kilkenny, Butler had seemed destined for a brilliant academic career when ill-health forced him to leave Oxford in his second year. He was considering emigration when he met Plunkett who remarked that it was a pity to see educated young men leaving the country.<sup>22</sup> By August 1923 Butler was in Antrim as Roy's assistant. Like Robinson, all these protegees had an Anglo-Irish background. Robinson also recruited from outside this circle. In spring 1924 he heard from the playwright Daniel Corkery, who lived in Cork, of a promising young writer Michael O'Donovan. O'Donovan was the son of an ex-member of the British army. He had himself taken a different path and had fought on the anti-treaty side in the civil war. He had just been released from internment when Robinson interviewed him in the Cork railway station bar in the spring of 1924. As a result of this interview, Robinson sent O'Donovan to

Sligo, although he candidly admitted to knowing nothing about libraries.<sup>23</sup>

The trustees did not query these methods of recruitment, and were satisfied to sanction payment of salaries to persons recommended by the Irish advisory committee. Their main concern was about the high level of expenditure involved in running their Dublin office. The book repository scheme, based in Harcourt Street, continued to attract new subscribers. Even though it was the policy of Christina Keogh to cease supplying subscribers in counties where there was an experimental scheme, in order to encourage use of the county repository, she was still able to report, in June 1923, that 118 groups or individuals were receiving book boxes twice a year.<sup>24</sup> The trustees wished to see this service amalgamated with the Co-operative Reference Library at Plunkett House, to which they had been granting £1,000 a year since 1915. The Irish advisory committee agreed to this amalgamation in principle, but took no definite action, apart from instructing Robinson to look for suitable premises large enough to accommodate both libraries.<sup>25</sup>

In fact, the committee proposed to extend the library services by establishing an Irish Library for Students, modelled on the Scottish Library for Students, which was run from Dunfermline. This service provided specialized textbooks to individual readers, thus compensating for deficiencies in the public library bookstock. Lady Gregory first suggested this idea to the Irish advisory committee, and it was approved by the executive committee in December

1922.<sup>26</sup> The trustees readily accepted this scheme, even though it would involve extra expense, because of their desire to offer the same library facilities throughout the United Kingdom. The Central Library for Irish Students, as the service was initially called, was run by McGreevy. It proved a success from the start, with 115 borrowers registering in the first year. The concept of individual students borrowing specialist works accorded well with the philosophy of self education, as espoused by Andrew Carnegie, and, in their Tenth Annual Report, the trustees took pride in recounting the incident of a carpenter, a subscriber to the Irish library, who offered to pay by installments for the cost of a book, valued at £3.3.0, which he had accidentally lost.<sup>27</sup>

(ii)

The first phase of the CUKT's commitment to experimental county library schemes was due to end in July 1923, and the Irish advisory committee was concerned that the continuing civil disturbance might cause the trustees to suspend the initiation of new schemes until peaceful conditons prevailed. Plunkett had expressed such fears to Lady Gregory as early as April 1922, as she noted in her journal

Horace Plunkett says the English and Scotch trustees scoff at anything being spent on libraries or books in Ireland now, in this disturbed time, and say that it is thrown away.<sup>28</sup>

It is easy to imagine how inexplicable the events in Ireland must have seemed from the perspective of Dunfermline. In the



Irish Free State pro-treaty and anti-treaty forces engaged in a conflict that increased in bitterness and fury as 1922 turned into 1923. In Northern Ireland a sectarian war was only averted by draconian legislation. Plunkett himself did not escape the effects of the civil war. He had accepted a nomination to the Irish Free State senate and as such became a target for reprisals by anti-treaty factions. On the night of 31 January 1923 Robinson, a rather nervous tenant in the gate lodge of Plunkett's estate at Kilteragh, was awakened by the sound of Gerard Heard, Plunkett's private secretary hammering at the door. In his autobiography Robinson recalled what followed:

[Gerard] begged me to come up and try to save the house. The republicans had got in and set off a bomb in the big central hall. There was a smell of fire, but he hoped no serious damage had been done. We ran back. It was a grim sight; the explosion had burst every window and the bitter wind blew right through the house. The burning was only a fused electric wire, and we quenched it.<sup>29</sup>

But the next night the raiders returned, this time armed with cans of petrol, and completed their work. At Heard's request, Robinson telegraphed Plunkett in America: 'House extinct'.

This mindless destruction appalled the trustees. Sir John Ross, addressing his last annual general meeting as chairman, expressed their bewilderment:

I would like to express our feeling of sadness in regard to the malicious treatment of our colleague Sir Horace Plunkett. I believe that no one has done more for rural Ireland and the prosperity of the country generally than Sir Horace, and it is most unfortunate<sup>30</sup> that men could be found to injure him as they have done

The Irish advisory committee felt the need to counter

this pessimism and instructed Robinson to draft a memorandum aimed at persuading the trustees to expand their Irish library policy during the period 1923 to 1925. This memorandum, presented to the Irish advisory committee on 12 April<sup>31</sup>, stressed the achievements of the previous two years: five county schemes organised at a period 'during which the country was in disorder, and the schemes novel and unproved'. These schemes were, Robinson argued, the most positive contribution the CUKT could make to the rebuilding of peaceful conditions in Ireland. £25,000, over a period of two years, would meet the expenses of financing seven experimental schemes and the Trust's Dublin operation, he estimated. This memorandum was forwarded to the executive committee in Dunfermline, where it was considered on 18 May. As Struthers, now convenor of the library sub-committee, was unable to recommend either acceptance or rejection of the estimate, and in the absence of Plunkett, it was decided to send a delegation to Dublin to assess the success of the Trust's work in Ireland.<sup>32</sup>

The delegation, consisting of Mitchell, Struthers and Elizabeth Haldane (a trustee with a particular interest in the preservation of rural life) travelled to Dublin in late June 1923. As on the occasion of the previous delegation's visit, their arrival coincided with an improvement in the political situation. A cease fire on 24 May ended the civil war, as Irregulars put away their weapons and went 'on the run'.<sup>33</sup> The visit of the trustees was arranged so that they could attend a conference organised by the Irish advisory

committee from 26 to 29 June. The committee intended to use this conference to publicise the experimental library schemes and highlight the need for legislation that would enable county councils to adopt the public libraries act.

The visiting trustees were impressed by the efficient organisation of the conference, and the enthusiasm of the participants. Maguire's paper 'Ireland's first county library' they considered admirable, and worthy of mention in the Tenth Annual Report.<sup>34</sup> But, when they met the Irish advisory committee on 28 June, they emphasised the need for economy in expenditure and, in particular, the importance of ensuring that no experimental library scheme would be initiated unless there was a reasonable expectation that some local authority would take it over at the end of the two year period. For their part, the members of the committee urged acceptance of their estimate for the following two years, and, further, requested that the trustees extend their grants to include support for music and physical welfare schemes in Ireland, as was already the case in Britain.

All of this was reported by the delegation to the executive committee in Dunfermline. The result was an acceptance by the trustees, not only of the estimate, but also of the extension of the Irish advisory committee's remit to cover music and physical welfare.<sup>35</sup> Mitchell's letter to Robinson informing him of this decision betrayed a certain sense of unease at the undue independence shown by the Trust's Dublin-based staff. 'The more closely your committee is able to keep the trustees informed, the better my trustees

will be pleased', he noted.<sup>36</sup> To increase the efficiency of their Dublin office, the trustees put increased pressure on the Irish advisory committee to push forward the amalgamation of the book repository and the Co-operative Reference Library and Robinson, with advice from Dermod O'Brien, began actively to look for premises near Plunkett House.

The confidence in the success of the experimental library schemes, which Robinson had expressed in his memorandum of April 1923, was justified by the developments of the following months. Resolutions supporting a county library scheme were passed by Derry county council, and by Coleraine and Portstewart UDCs. From May Maguire was spending much time travelling between Sligo, Donegal and Derry. In November he was transferred to Coleraine on a full time basis where he was joined by Hubert Butler. As well as assisting Maguire, Butler had been instructed by Robinson to compile the historical and geographical sections of the new standard list of 3,000 titles, which the Irish advisory committee intended to use as a basis for county library bookstocks.<sup>37</sup> (Butler's impeccably Anglo-Irish background proved Mrs Chichester's subsequent allegations about the nationalist bias of this list to be unfounded).

Maguire may have felt some relief at leaving Sligo where he had encountered more outspoken criticism of rural libraries than he had experienced in Donegal. Mrs Mary Mulcahy, principal of the Sligo technical school, accepted an invitation to join the county library committee, but objected to the appearance of 'United Kingdom' on Maguire's letter

heading. Relations with Dr Butler became strained when Maguire asked him to repair the leaking roof in the Temperance Hall where the county repository was located. Just days after the inaugural meeting of the county library committee on 7 August, Maguire and Wilson had an unexpected visitor to the repository, Dr Duignan, principal of Summerhill College, the diocesan seminary. According to an account Wilson wrote to Robinson

Dr Duignan roundly told them 'they were both English, that every Carnegie library was an outpost of the Empire, that their object was to kill Irish nationality, that they bought their supplies from Britain' and further 'that people were so uneducated it was unwise to let them loose on books, that all fiction was immoral, that the bishops were against it,<sup>38</sup> and, finally, that the people would not read anything.'

Having delivered this tirade, Dr Duignan invited the dumbfounded librarians to play a round of golf at Rosses Point golf club - 'the only Anglicising place around here' - Wilson added sourly. Whether Dr Duignan was serious or indulging in a joke at Wilson and Maguire's expense cannot be determined, but he was certainly incorrect in his prediction of failure for the scheme. By November eighteen centres had been supplied with books and twelve more were awaiting approval by the county library committee. The following April, Wilson was able to inform Robinson that 'all the large centres of population within the county, with the exception of Ballymote, have been organised'.<sup>39</sup>

The inaugural meeting of the Kilkenny county library committee took place on 15 September. Among its members was another outspoken cleric, Fr Ambrose Coleman, one of the

Dominican community in the city. Fr Coleman, who was the author of a number of CTS pamphlets and a frequent contributor to his Order's magazine the Irish Rosary, must have had a long standing interest in libraries, since he was a member of Cumann na Leabharlann, but his constant search for immoral books among the titles on the standard list created problems for Florence Harrison, the county librarian. Fortunately his influence was counterbalanced by the support of Fr McNamara, the bishop's nominee to the committee. By November, Miss Harrison was able to begin book distribution, and boxes were despatched to thirty eight centres. The Wexford scheme was progressing slowly. After a year in operation only fifty nine centres had been established, but Mary Monica Walshe reported a high level of issues from the first boxes, which had been returned to the county repository.

Just as the success of Donegal and Antrim had inspired enquiries from Sligo, Derry and Fermanagh, so the establishment of schemes in Wexford and Kilkenny awakened interest in neighbouring counties. In October 1923 the secretary of Wicklow county council called to the CUKT's Dublin office for details of the county library schemes, which the councillors wished to discuss. With the support of the council chairman, and through lobbying by Gaelic League branches in the county, the council passed a resolution in March 1924 requesting an experimental scheme, and undertaking to continue the library service when the CUKT ceased to fund it.<sup>40</sup>

In December 1923 Robinson had an enquiry from another county. William Dwyer, a solicitor from Roscrea, wanted to discuss the possibility of an experimental scheme for Tipperary North Riding. Count O'Byrne, the chairman of the North Riding county council was 'strongly in favour of the scheme',<sup>41</sup> and on 20 February 1924 the council adopted the usual preliminary resolution promising continued support for a library scheme. The Irish advisory committee however wished to organise a scheme that would cover the whole county, including the South Riding which had its own local government administration. M. J. Slattery, a teacher from Annacarty in the South Riding, who had become an enthusiast for rural libraries through attending the Dublin library conference in June 1923, provided some useful contacts. McGreevy spent much time during the early months of 1924 drumming up support in the South Riding. This proved uphill work, although the council chairman Louis Dalton expressed interest. McGreevy drafted a resolution requesting an experimental scheme which he hoped the recently appointed county secretary Liam Ryan would put before the South Riding council at its May meeting,<sup>42</sup> but to McGreevy's vexation Ryan lost the relevant letter and the councillors seemed to spend their meetings on just one topic - roads.

Robinson had not forgotten his original area of responsibility in the south west. In Limerick the service in Rathkeale and Newcastle West struggled on. Although the Rathkeale library committee had ceased to function during the Anglo-Irish war and many of the branch libraries had been

vandalised, statistics provided for the CUKT in 1922 indicated that the central library was still in operation with 6,000 issues during the year.<sup>43</sup> Work on rebuilding the Newcastle West library began in the autumn of 1923.<sup>44</sup> In Kerry, Matthew Byrne was as enthusiastic as ever and Robinson was still hopeful of starting a library scheme in the county.

Even the barrier of inadequate library legislation seemed about to be removed. In Northern Ireland the Public Library Act became law on 1 June 1924, while it was known that the Free State government proposed to introduce legislation which would re-assert centralised authority over the chaos that had developed in local government since 1919. Since E.P. McCarron, secretary of the Department of Local Government,<sup>45</sup> had already proved helpful in the matter of the Tipperary South Riding, it was probable that he would ensure the inclusion of a library clause in the bill.

Facing these optimistic possibilities Robinson was able to write to Maguire in February:

I have been in North Tipperary and feel that we will get going there. If we could get Clare and Mayo as well I should be happy. Then Galway and Kerry done and the rest is easy. Once the west coast is supplied I do not mind about the rest. A line from Cork city through Ennis, Athenry and Killlala and everything west of that reading, means the hardest and most important part of the Trust's library work is done. Everywhere else is wealthy enough to wait a while longer or to make a special effort to help itself.<sup>46</sup>

(iii)

Ten years had elapsed since the trustees' grant to the



Co-operative Reference library in July 1914 had marked their first involvement with Ireland, years that had witnessed a political and social revolution, and altered irrevocably the relations between Ireland and Britain. The principal reason which had first impelled the trustees to provide financial assistance to Irish rural libraries, namely the poor return of the library rate, no longer applied. The penny rate limitation was gone, and the county would soon be the library authority, as the rural district councils suffered the same fate as the Grand Juries which they had replaced in 1898. But, more fundamentally, the CUKT was now faced with the existence of two distinct legislatures within Ireland, each struggling to establish its own ethos and, in the process, to eradicate what it perceived to be alien influences. The establishment of the Irish Free State presented the trustees with a dilemma, as they were unsure whether that part of Ireland was not now beyond the writ of the CUKT's deed of covenant. In 1923 they sought counsel's opinion on the question, and were advised that the issue was so complicated, that it would be prudent to let it lie. Nevertheless, some trustees found the idea of a Dublin-based Irish advisory committee dealing with applications from Northern Ireland to be unwieldy, and potentially controversial. They would have preferred applications from northern counties to come directly to Dunfermline, or via the Ministry of Education in Belfast.<sup>47</sup>

As the trustees most recent financial commitment to the support of rural libraries in Ireland was due to expire on 1

July 1925, Mitchell was sent on an investigative visit to Dublin in July 1924. He inspected the book repository, which he found was being efficiently run by Christina Keogh. The number of subscribers now stood at eighty four. This decrease was a welcome sign, since it indicated the spread of the rate-supported library service. It was not the policy of the book repository to supply books to subscribers in counties with a public library service.<sup>48</sup> Accompanied by Robinson, Mitchell also visited the experimental schemes in the north and west, and was pleased to find them operating along lines similar to the county schemes in Britain. Even the books stocked were the same, apart from 'a proportion of distinctively Irish literature', as the Eleventh Annual Report noted.<sup>49</sup>

Of considerably less satisfaction was the tendency (deplored by Mitchell) of the Irish advisory committee to act independently, and without due deference to Dunfermline. In June 1924 the committee took up a scheme dear to the heart of Lady Gregory, when it recommended that an experimental scheme be initiated in County Galway, (although the Galway county council had merely adopted a motion expressing support for such a scheme, without making any commitment to financial assistance). Lennox Robinson had estimated that this scheme would cost £3,250 over two years,<sup>50</sup> but his failure to support this figure with details of population, or other relevant statistics, increased the trustees' conviction that the Irish advisory committee was indifferent to ordinary financial procedures. Mitchell had warned Robinson the

previous year that 'the collapse of an experimental scheme would be a damaging blow to the whole library policy', yet now the trustees were being asked to agree to a figure that seemed to have been plucked out of thin air. For once they were deaf to Plunkett's assurances that the members of the Irish advisory committee could be trusted to ask for the right sum, and, although they did sanction the County Galway scheme at their meeting in June, they insisted that, in future, Robinson must provide the same level of detail as they would require from an English county.<sup>51</sup>

The trustees were also alarmed when the Irish advisory committee obtained new premises without seeking their permission. This arose out of the trustees' insistence that the Irish advisory committee move to rooms large enough to accommodate the CUKT staff and the Co-operative Reference Library. In the late summer of 1924, a house became vacant at 32 Merrion Square, ideally convenient to Plunkett House, which was at Number 84. After a hasty consultation with Dermot O'Brien, Robinson took out a three months' lease on the building. The reaction in Dunfermline was one of dismay, as the minutes of the executive committee indicated:

the advisory committee had selected the new house and taken it on a quarterly lease without consulting the trustees. The impropriety of this had been pointed out and acknowledged.<sup>52</sup>

A number of apologetic letters from Robinson were needed to mollify the trustees, but their unease about their Irish involvement was further increased by the incident.

The members of the Irish advisory committee were also

aware that 1925 was likely to see a change in the CUKT's Irish policy, and they requested Robinson to draw up a policy document to be submitted to the trustees, in the hope of influencing their decision. This document<sup>53</sup> simply proposed that the trustees' policy continue as before:

No better library work can be done in Ireland than to continue the policy of experimental schemes, until every county possesses its own system of rural libraries.

Even with new public library legislation in place, Robinson argued, county councils would still require financial assistance from the CUKT, if only to purchase necessary equipment. Without such assistance, few county councils would start library services. Robinson did not envisage this assistance as a long term policy. He confidently predicted that, by 1928, all the counties in Ireland would have rural library schemes, thus enabling the CUKT to close the Dublin book repository. In conclusion, he submitted a budget for the years 1925 to 1928 of £12,500; which he divided as follows: £10,000 for county library schemes, £1,500 for administration, and £1,000 for music and physical welfare projects. With a complete indifference to the complaints of the trustees, he gave no indication as to how he had arrived at these figures.

Whether this document, which was accepted by the Irish advisory committee at their September meeting, would have won the trustees' approval is now a matter for speculation. In the summer of 1924, an ill-considered action by Robinson, caused a storm of controversy, which dramatically changed the CUKT's Irish library policy.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### The Madonna of Slieve Dun, -

The collapse of the Irish advisory committee, 1924-1925

(i)

Although the Irish advisory committee was supposed to be representative of Irish public opinion in general, its members were predominantly Anglo-Irish and from the south. This did not arise from a conscious decision, but from the circumstances whereby individuals were nominated. Most members were contacts of Plunkett, either personal friends like Dermot O'Brien and George Russell, co-operative enthusiasts like Mrs Montgomery and Lady Gregory, or associates from the Irish Convention, like Dr. Bernard. Even Fr. Finlay and Thomas O'Donnell, who joined the committee in 1923, were there through their friendship with Plunkett. Plunkett was aware of this imbalance, and tried to remedy it by nominating Dr. Thomas Gilmartin, the Catholic archbishop of Tuam, in November 1920. However, Dr Gilmartin never attended a meeting and, in April 1924, he resigned from the advisory committee, explaining that he was too busy to play an active part in its proceedings.

As was to be expected, the most regular attenders at committee meetings were all Dublin residents, Fr Finlay and Dr Bernard being particularly diligent in this regard. Mrs Montgomery and Harold Barbour, (a member of the Northern Ireland senate, who had been involved in promoting co-

operatives), seldom made the journey to Dublin. Thus the Irish advisory committee was vulnerable to criticism from both ends of the Irish political spectrum. From Northern Ireland unionists could argue, as Mrs Chichester had done, that the committee was a 'Free State' body, whose members had no sympathy with or understanding of the Northern Protestant tradition. Within the Irish Free State nationalists could argue that the committee was made up of southern unionists, - even a Catholic like O'Donnell was compromised through being tainted by his past as a Westminster M.P.

In common with most post-colonial states there persisted in the Irish Free State a conviction that nothing had changed, that power still remained in the hands of those who had held it under the old regime. In the Irish context these were identified as the Anglo-Irish, Trinity College, and the Dublin business and professional classes who were derisively dubbed 'West Britons'. These were accused of being involved in a conspiracy to subvert everything that was purely Gaelic, and, in the case of Trinity College, the doctrines of Catholicism. One of the most articulate, and most extreme, of those who held this view was J. J. O'Kelly, editor of a monthly quasi-political magazine, the Catholic Bulletin. This had been founded in 1911, probably as a result of the calls at successive CTS conferences for a literary review animated by Catholic principles. The editorial in the first issue stated that it would 'place Catholic literature, sanctioned and approved to the last page by the Catholic ecclesiastical authorities, within the reach of every

Catholic home in Ireland'.<sup>1</sup> O'Kelly, who was president of the Gaelic League between 1919 and 1923, used the Catholic Bulletin to 'wage a battle against Irish writers on the grounds of their alien immorality and pagan un-Irish philosophy', (as Terence Brown has put it).<sup>2</sup> By the mid 1920s, his vitriolic pen relentlessly lashed the English, the Anglo-Irish and the pro-treaty party which now formed the Free State government. Thus, when Yeats was awarded the Nobel prize for literature in December 1923, O'Kelly commented that

a reputation for paganism in thought and word is a very considerable advantage in the sordid annual race...for the substantial sum provided by<sup>3</sup> a deceased anti-Christian manufacturer of dynamite.

The Irish employees of the CUKT and the members of its advisory committee who were (in the majority) from an Anglo-Irish background could not help being aware of their vulnerability in a state that, following the separation of the six northern counties, was overwhelmingly Catholic. L. P. Curtis jnr. has thus described the situation of the Anglo-Irish at this time:

This, then, was the essence of their predicament: they had to choose between one side of their 'hyphenation' or the other. The middle ground that permitted them<sup>4</sup> to enjoy their ambivalence had virtually disappeared.

Many emigrated. Others took refuge in a closed world, mixing only with their own class. Others, like the more bohemian members of the United Arts club carried on their usual round of dinners, exhibitions and sexual intrigues.<sup>5</sup> Organisations involved in cultural or philanthropic work could not afford to ignore the new regime. Like the Royal Irish Academy and

Trinity College, the Irish advisory committee attempted to accommodate itself to the prevailing climate. One rule of survival was to avoid any action that might draw the fire of ultra-nationalists. Writing in 1944, W. B. Stanford, a leading member of the Protestant community, characterised the Church of Ireland's policy in the 1920s as 'lie low, say nothing and wait and see'.<sup>6</sup>

As a member of the Irish advisory committee who was also Provost of Trinity College, Dr Bernard knew that his university was widely regarded as both anti-national and anti-Catholic, an outpost of England in the heart of the Irish Free State's capital city. Consequently, when he decided to apply for a CUKT grant towards the cost of building a new reading room for the college library in June 1923, he did not submit this request through the Irish advisory committee, where it might have become public knowledge, but rather wrote directly to Mitchell. Mitchell was rather surprised that Bernard had not applied through the committee: 'The trustees', he noted in his letter promising to put Bernard's application before the October meeting of the library sub-committee, 'look upon the advisory committee as the recognised channel for all library proposals'.<sup>7</sup> The members of the library sub-committee shared Mitchell's surprise. A confidential memorandum from Plunkett to Dr Bernard written just after the meeting describes what happened. When Bernard's application was read, the other trustees naturally asked Plunkett why it had not come via the Irish advisory committee. Plunkett was at a loss for an



explanation, and asked Bernard to tell him in confidence what was on his mind. Bernard replied, with some lack of candour, that

There really is no mystery in the matter.... Any application which I made on behalf of Trinity College library is quite outside the purview of the advisory committee.

Several days later Mitchell wrote to say that the trustees had not sanctioned a grant for Trinity College library because they 'could not enter into the unlimited field of assisting university libraries'. They also indicated disapproval of Bernard's action.

The trustees found it a little difficult, having set up an Irish advisory committee, to consider a proposal dealing with the Irish library service which had not been before the committee. If the proposal should at any time be resumed, they would be glad if it could come through the committee.

In his memorandum, Plunkett had surmised that Dr Bernard had kept his application from the Irish advisory committee so that it would not become known in University College Dublin, through Fr Finlay who was professor of political economy at that college. Whatever about such academic secrecy, the November meeting of the Irish advisory committee saw both clerics unite to defeat an application from the Catholic Book Repository for a grant. Dr Bernard argued that this would create a precedent for applications from Protestant libraries which would stock 'books of controversy', and Fr Finlay supported him, as Lady Gregory noted with some surprise in her journal.<sup>10</sup>

The accusation that libraries were store-houses of books that were irreligious, immoral and atheistic had long dogged

the public library movement. In Ireland the political upheavals of the years since 1916 had pushed this controversy aside. Now with the return of peaceful conditions, the old debate re-emerged. The conservative nature of society in the Irish Free State encouraged such fears and prejudices. As Patrick Corish has commented:

Nationalist Ireland was never in greater need of an identity; it had to be either the Irish language or the Catholic church, and for most people it was in fact the church. Add to this the middle-class nature of the government, and the fact that all over Europe there was a conservative reaction to the loosening of traditional values that had happened during the Great War, and it is not surprising that life in the Irish Free State took on a certain conservative Catholic ethos.<sup>11</sup>

It appeared that the dominance of this Catholic ethos was never more secure than in the early years of the Irish Free State, given the denominational balance of the population and the impeccable Catholic orthodoxy of the Cumann na nGaedheal government of President W. T. Cosgrave.<sup>12</sup> Yet there persisted among moral activists, both clerical and lay, a belief that this ethos was vulnerable, that exposure to outside influences would completely sweep it away. Hence the 1920s were what K. T. Hoppen has described as 'a time of high moral nervousness',<sup>13</sup> which produced a number of acts of parliament aimed at keeping out alien influences. The cinema was the first to come under attack, and in 1923 the Censorship of Films Act<sup>14</sup> was passed without much controversy. Next the printed word came under scrutiny. The Lenten pastorals issued by various bishops in 1924 'strove to stir the Catholic conscience and to awaken the people to a sense of duty by vigorous denunciation of the cross-Channel

unclean press'.<sup>15</sup> No mention was made of the popular novel, but it was clear that, given the tone of much contemporary fiction, an attack on it, and consequently on the public library, could not be long delayed.

(ii)

From his involvement with the Abbey theatre, Robinson should have been aware of how easily public opinion could be inflamed against a work of literature, - the riots provoked by Synge's Playboy of the Western World in 1907 being a case in point. In 1923 Robinson wrote to Hubert Butler about the need for caution in book selection: 'remember, you are dealing with a Catholic country',<sup>16</sup> and, writing to Helen Roe's mother, he commented that 'Helen, being a Prot. would need tact in double measure in dealing with her county library committee'.<sup>17</sup> In a lecture on national taste, delivered in 1918, he showed that he was conscious of the type of censorship exercised by the Catholic church, which concentrated on the literal interpretation of the plot of a play or novel, while ignoring the spiritual intention of the author.<sup>18</sup> Robinson might also have recalled the reaction of the townspeople of Delvin, County Westmeath, to the novel The valley of the squinting windows, on its publication in 1918. Brinsley Macnamara, the author of this savage expose of small town hypocrisy, was, in fact, John Weldon, a former actor at the Abbey. His father, a national teacher in Delvin, was the victim of a boycott, and took a court case against his school

manager in December 1923. Yeats and George Russell were among those who raised funds to help pay his legal expenses.<sup>19</sup>

Evidently, none of these warnings weighed on Robinson's mind when, in the early summer of 1924, he was invited by the writer Francis Stuart (whose wife, Iseult, was the daughter of Yeats's first love, Maud Gonne), to contribute to his new literary magazine Tomorrow. Instead of writing something new, Robinson gave the Stuarts a short story, which had already caused some controversy. This story, a slight piece, had been written in 1911, when Robinson was in America with the Abbey players. A brief summary of the plot of the story, which was entitled The Madonna of Slieve Dun, will help to illuminate its impact on readers.

The plot centred around Mary Creedon, a pious and impressionable young girl, who lived in a remote mountainous part of Ireland. The people of the area were notoriously lawless, ignoring the exhortations of their parish priest to repentance. In a particularly fiery sermon, the priest declared that, even if Christ were born in the village of Lisree, and called the people to repent, He would be ignored. This idea came to obsess Mary, so that she forgot even her impending marriage to Joseph Brady. On the feast of the Annunciation, Mary travelled as usual to the fair at Lisree, where she was horrified by the drunkenness and violence she witnessed. On her way home she lingered on the slopes of Slieve Dun, to meditate about the priest's prediction. Darkness fell, and she hurried on her way, but,

before she could reach her house, she was attacked and raped by a tramp. From the shock of this experience, Mary came to believe that she had been chosen to be the mother of the Christ child, who would save the villagers. Gradually all were convinced by her sincerity, and the villagers gave up their evil ways. On Christmas Eve, Mary's child was born, but she died before she could be told that the baby was a girl. In an epilogue the tramp was depicted cadging for drink with tales of his sexual exploits.

Robinson had initially sent the story to an English magazine, but the editor had rejected it, because of its theme. Some years later it was published in an American journal, without provoking criticism. In his autobiography, Curtain Up, Robinson claimed that, when he gave the story to the Stuarts, he had forgotten its content, and its potential to cause offence.<sup>20</sup> However, this defence is weakened by the fact that, although the Madonna of Slieve Dun had been written thirteen years previously, as recently as 1920, the Talbot Press (a Dublin publishing house), had refused to include it in a collection of Robinson's short stories.

True, Robinson was unusually busy during the summer of 1924. While McGreevy endured the inefficiencies of Tipperary South Riding county council,<sup>21</sup> Robinson acted as midwife to the Galway experimental scheme, possibly at Lady Gregory's request. On 2 August he was present at the inaugural meeting of the county library committee held in the Galway court house. Lady Gregory also attended, while Dr Gilmartin sent an apology, but agreed to join the county library committee.

Maguire had been transferred from Fermanagh to take charge of the scheme - the last of his career moves. His introduction to Galway was unfortunate; his wallet and cheque book were stolen at Galway races, as Robinson gleefully informed Wilson,<sup>22</sup> but he soon had the scheme in operation and by the end of September he was able to tell Robinson 'I am getting out boxes by all kinds of transport'.<sup>23</sup> Robinson was also busy preparing a memorandum on future library policy which the Irish advisory committee hoped to submit to the trustees, and he was also recruiting apprentice librarians. In August both Michael O'Donovan and Helen Roe joined the library service, as did Maguire's first assistant, James Brennan. Other events lessened Robinson's spare time that summer. At the invitation of Yeats, who was now a member of the Free State senate, he had become involved in the organisation of the Tailteann Games, a festival of sport and culture held in the first fortnight of August. There was a special programme of plays at the Abbey theatre, and Robinson was judge of the English literary competition, responsible for awarding medals in various classes.<sup>24</sup> In addition, since the lodge at Kilteragh was no longer so attractive, now that Plunkett's house was a burnt out ruin, he had started to look for alternative accommodation, a move that may have been hastened by his romantic involvement with Dolly Travers-Smith, a young scene painter at the Abbey who later became his wife.<sup>25</sup>

If Robinson had indeed forgotten the content of his short story, he soon received a reminder. The printers

employed by Stuart to print Tomorrow refused to do so unless the offending story was removed. At this stage either Robinson or Stuart could have withdrawn the story, but they did not do so and instead Stuart had the paper printed in Manchester. Furthermore, Robinson, as if in a perverse determination to draw attention to the Madonna of Slieve Dun wrote an indignant letter of protest to the Irish Statesman. This was the paper which had succeeded the Irish Homestead with George Russell continuing as editor and supported by Plunkett. It enjoyed a far wider circulation than the self-consciously aesthetic Tomorrow was likely to reach. 'The story was written in good faith, and in Christian faith', he complained, 'and is now stigmatised as blasphemous and indecent',<sup>26</sup>. Robinson's story was not the only item in Tomorrow likely to arouse controversy. The leader, written by Stuart and the artist, Cecil Salkeld, declared:

we proclaim that we can forgive the sinner, but abhor the atheist, and that we count among atheists bad writers and bishops of all denominations [and continued] What devout man can read the pastorals of our hierarchy without horror at a style rancid, coarse and vague, like the art of our daily papers.

In the small Dublin circle where politics, religion and literature met and interacted, this obscure magazine, which lasted only two issues, came to acquire considerable notoriety. People who had not read it whispered that it was 'horribly indecent' as Mrs W.B. Yeats, embarrassed because her husband's poem, Leda and the swan, had been published in the first issue, complained to Lady Gregory.<sup>27</sup> Tomorrow even came to the notice of the government, and President Cosgrave

considered suppressing the paper, until he was assured by Yeats that Robinson was not involved in a plot to corrupt the nation.<sup>28</sup> Stuart was unrepentant, and, in the second number of Tomorrow, published in September, he defended his decision to print Robinson's story. In a leader, provocatively headed 'In the hour before dawn', he stated that the creative imagination alone could save the world, and suggested that Yeats's poems could uplift church congregations far more than many sermons.

The second issue of Tomorrow was the last, and, with its demise, the controversy should have ended, like the nine days' wonder it was. But militant Catholic opinion had been inflamed by what was perceived to be an anti-clerical campaign by Stuart. Robinson's story seemed just another expression of this attack on the Catholic church. Public opinion was not inclined to distinguish what Robinson might do in his role as an author from what he did as organiser of county libraries financed by the CUKT. Guilt by association involved not only Robinson, but also the Irish advisory committee, the CUKT and the county libraries. All became the objects of suspicion and innuendo.

On 9 September, Wilson and O'Donovan were confronted by Canon Butler after a meeting of the Sligo county library committee. He angrily complained that Robinson, an employee of the CUKT which was funding the county library service, had written an indecent story. They both hastened to assure the Canon that the story was not blasphemous, and he seemed satisfied. But Wilson was sufficiently concerned to write a



warning letter to Robinson. 'What the Madonna of Slieve Dun has to do with Carnegie libraries is more than I can tell',<sup>29</sup> he concluded. Wilson's unease may have been fuelled by his knowledge that the second issue of Tomorrow contained one of his poems, and that an article on promising Irish writers praised his work for its 'virile classicism'.

The minutes of the Irish advisory committee's meeting of 24 September gave no indication that the members felt apprehensive about the future. They were concerned with more routine matters. Robinson's memorandum on library policy for the following three years was formally adopted. It was decided to invite Dr James McCaffrey, president of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth to fill the vacancy caused by Dr Gilmartin's resignation of the previous April. There was good news from Wicklow and Tipperary. In Wicklow the county council had passed a resolution agreeing to take over the experimental scheme after the usual two year period. Even the impasse in South Tipperary was about to be solved. E. P. McCarron, secretary of the Department of Local Government, had decided to intervene on behalf of the county library scheme. On 15 September he informed Robinson that the department's local inspector had been instructed to arrange the agenda of the South Riding county council so that the necessary resolution would be reached, and passed, at the meeting called for 2 October.<sup>30</sup> Based on this information the Irish advisory committee decided to recommend that the trustees sanction new experimental schemes in both

counties.<sup>31</sup>

However, the absence of Fr Finlay, without an apology, foretold difficulties to come, and, a fortnight later, Dr Bernard received his letter of resignation. Fr Finlay gave as his reason for resigning from the committee Robinson's editorial connection with 'a publication of a blasphemous character, which included an improper attack on the Roman Catholic episcopate'.<sup>32</sup> (Since there is no evidence to indicate that Robinson was in anyway connected with the editorial content of Tomorrow, this misconception indicated how truth had succumbed to rumour). In regard to the Madonna of Slieve Dun, Fr Finlay wrote

it is, in my opinion an offensive and blasphemous parody of the scripture story of the Incarnation, which will shock and wound every Christian soul who reads it. With the author I could not continue to hold the relations which membership of the committee would involve.<sup>33</sup>

This letter caused consternation in the CUKT's Irish office. McGreevy wrote to Dermod O'Brien asking him to come up to Dublin as quickly as possible. He believed that Fr Finlay had been pressurised into resigning and that a witch-hunt was about to commence with Robinson as the scapegoat for all 'anti-clerical' writers.<sup>34</sup> On the advice of the trustees, Dr Bernard summoned an emergency meeting of the Irish advisory committee for 22 October 1924.

Lady Gregory travelled to attend the meeting in a state of considerable irritation with Robinson for his injudicious action.<sup>35</sup> She feared for its repercussions on the Abbey theatre, as well as on the fledgling Galway county library scheme. As usual, she went first to Plunkett House, at 84

Merrion Square, where she met the 'co-operative' members of the Irish advisory committee. The forthcoming meeting was the main topic of conversation. George Russell asserted that Dr Bernard had been as affronted as Fr Finlay, not only by Robinson's story, but by another piece, which also appeared in the first issue of Tomorrow. This story, by Margaret Barrington, concerned the sexual fantasies of a white woman about a black jazz musician. Some mirth was generated when Dermot O'Brien informed the gathering that Margaret Barrington was the wife of Edmund Curtis, who was professor of history at Trinity College. All hoped that Robinson would resign, thus allowing Fr Finlay to rejoin the committee, but, just before they left to cross Merrion Square to No.32, McGreevy arrived to tell them that Robinson had stubbornly decided to stand his ground on principle. The latter had, however, written a letter of apology to Fr Finlay, assuring him that it had never been his intention to offend anyone's religious susceptibilities, and pointing out that the story had been published in America, without causing offence.<sup>36</sup>

As was to be expected, the meeting that followed was an acrimonious affair. Dr Bernard was highly critical of Robinson's story and Margaret Barrington's contribution. His anger was increased when Lady Gregory tactlessly revealed that Margaret Barrington was the wife of a Trinity professor. It became obvious that Dr Bernard intended to obtain Robinson's dismissal. Robinson's chief supporter in the debate was Thomas O'Donnell, who praised The Madonna of

Slieve Dun, claiming that his sisters, both pious Catholics, regarded it as a beautiful and moving story. For her part Lady Gregory wished to protect the county library by distancing the Irish advisory committee from Robinson, but at the same time (in spite of her private reservations), was reluctant to see him dismissed. Eventually a resolution was passed deploring the publication of the story, noting Robinson's expressions of regret, and calling on Fr Finlay to reconsider his resignation in the interest of the CUKT's work in Ireland.<sup>37</sup> But the members knew this was a forlorn hope, and, on his way out, Dr Bernard told Lionel Smith Gordon that, if Fr Finlay did not withdraw his resignation, he himself would also resign from the committee.

The members of the Irish advisory committee knew that, if Fr Finlay's resignation was given wide publicity, the consequences for their work could be disastrous. Canon Butler, who had accosted Wilson and O'Donovan in September, was a prominent member of the Catholic Truth Society, and Wilson anticipated that he might use the Society's annual conference in October to launch an attack on the Carnegie libraries. In fact, public libraries were not mentioned, but Dr Gilmartin's call for the introduction of state censorship of books and newspapers<sup>38</sup> showed how delicate the position of rural libraries could be.

The first attack on Robinson came, rather predictably, from J. J. O'Kelly, editor of the Catholic Bulletin. The affair of The Madonna of Slieve Dun provided him with an opportunity to castigate all his pet aversions at once from

his usual standpoint of militant Catholicism. His attack on Tomorrow in the November Bulletin gives some idea of his style:

The fourteen lines of Senator Yeats [i.e. the poem 'Leda and the swan'], are a minor indecency among the contents of the new literary cesspool. Pride of place in that unsavoury netherworld is preserved for Mr Lennox Robinson. His Madonna of Slieve Dun, a sustained and systematic outrage on all that is holiest in our religion,<sup>39</sup> outclasses Senator Yeats in repulsiveness and villainy.

The Irish Rosary, the publication of the Dominican Order, which was campaigning in its editorials for a censorship act, was less outspoken. Robinson was not named, but there was a trenchant attack on 'The Plunkett House clique of pagans, theosophists and log rollers who...love to pose as the intelligensia of the country and [whose] influence is highly dangerous.'<sup>40</sup>

On 19 November, a small group of committee members gathered for what was to be the final meeting of the Irish advisory committee. Robinson read two letters to the meeting. One was from Fr Finlay, declining to withdraw his resignation: 'I have found no reason to modify my first appreciation [of Robinson's story], or to alter the course of action I felt it necessary to take'.<sup>41</sup> The other was from Dr Bernard, resigning from the committee. Although he gave no further explanation, Smith Gordon indicated that Dr Bernard felt he should support Fr Finlay, a fellow clergyman. Lady Gregory was in favour of trying a personal appeal to Dr Bernard, but in the end the members simply drafted an expression of regret.<sup>42</sup> Ironically, news of library

developments continued to be positive. The trustees had agreed to fund experimental schemes in Wicklow and Tipperary, while the county councils in Sligo and Wexford had agreed to take over full financial responsibility for their county library services now that the experimental period had expired.<sup>43</sup> In Dail Eireann, the local government bill was being debated. On 3 December, section 51, which would enable county councils to adopt the public libraries act, was passed, unamended, on its first reading.<sup>44</sup>

(iii)

As indicated in chapter seven, the trustees had been contemplating changes in their Irish library policy to commence in July 1925. Now Robinson's short story, and the consequences of its publication, obliged them to act sooner than they had anticipated. The Irish advisory committee had collapsed, and the trustees lacked the commitment to the concept of such a committee to start again. Furthermore, they were alarmed to learn that the resignations had provided ammunition for critics of the public libraries to frustrate attempts to initiate county schemes.

In County Wicklow the library service seemed destined to be still born. The Catholic bishop's nominee to the county library committee told Geoffrey Phibbs, who had been sent to supervise the development of the service, that he would use

procedural tactics to prevent the transaction of library business.<sup>45</sup> The December meeting of the county library committee was an unpleasant experience for Phibbs, as Robinson wrote to McGreevy:

There was a resolution to abandon the scheme, which was defeated by only one vote - his own. They wrangled for a couple of hours and subjected him to a most minute and unwarranted cross examination about us all, - I expect he gave them as good as he got.'<sup>46</sup>

Phibbs was also in the firing line in County Laois, where Robinson's ground work for an experimental scheme had reached the stage of calling a meeting of representatives of public opinion in the county. It was intended that, as had happened in all other counties, the meeting would pass a resolution calling on the county council to request such a scheme. However, this meeting, held in Tullamore in mid-December, did not go according to plan.<sup>47</sup> A concerted attack on the Carnegie Trust was mounted by the representatives of the Catholic Church. A letter from the Catholic archbishop of Killaloe was read stating:

I will have nothing to do with a Carnegie library. They are store houses of wretched novels and semi-pagan stuff from England.

The fact that Dr Gilmartin had resigned from the Irish advisory committee was mentioned as evidence of its anti-Catholic spirit, although he had actually resigned from the committee several months before Robinson's story was published. Yeats's poetry, Fr Finlay's resignation, and Robinson's connection with Tomorrow, were all cited as reasons why a county library service would be a bad influence in Laois. In spite of a spirited defence by Phibbs, and the

support of local political and educational representatives, the clerical party prevailed, and the meeting broke up without passing the intended resolution.

In County Kilkenny, Fr Ambrose Coleman, who had been a thorn in Florence Harrison's side for some time, announced his intention of writing a critique of the public library movement in the Irish Ecclesiastical Record, a more influential journal than the idiosyncratic Catholic Bulletin<sup>48</sup> In County Sligo, Robert Wilson had another uncomfortable interview with Canon Butler, who brushed aside his assurances that no complaints had been received about books supplied by the Sligo county repository, and warned that 'the library would go to the wall, unless something was done'. 'The truth is', Wilson concluded in a confidential letter to Robinson, 'if they are out to down us, they will seize on any excuse'<sup>49</sup>. Both the Catholic Bulletin and the Irish Rosary renewed their attacks on the Irish advisory committee in their December issues. The editor of the former accused the committee of purveying 'immoral novels of French origin, and rationalist attacks on the very foundations of Christianity',<sup>50</sup> while 'x.y.z.' in the Irish Rosary patronisingly dismissed the idea of a county library service 'We are all aware that country people have no taste for book reading'.<sup>51</sup>

Faced with this sudden and embarrassing controversy, the executive committee of the CUKT, meeting on 12 December, decided that the most prudent action was to disband the Irish



advisory committee. Robinson was suspended for six months on full salary. It was by no means a unanimous decision, as Plunkett assured him: 'The executive committee, or at any rate a considerable majority of them, were genuinely grieved at having to part with your services.'<sup>52</sup> Mitchell was instructed to write to each member of the advisory committee to convey this decision. A copy of the letter was sent to the editors of the Dublin daily newspapers, who published it without comment, much to the relief of the trustees.<sup>53</sup> Only the editor of the Catholic Bulletin rejoiced at the passing of the Irish advisory committee, although, with some lack of consistency, he now complained that Irish library schemes were to be managed from Britain. This absence of debate was in keeping with the general public apathy about the whole affair. The daily papers largely ignored it until late December. It was not mentioned during the debate on the local government bill. Even the Church of Ireland Gazette, which might have used it to make points about the undue influence of the Catholic Church in the Irish Free State, made no comment on the incident.

It was a difficult time for individuals involved in the new county library schemes. Although Robinson wrote confidently to Lady Gregory that the affair was only a temporary victory for obscurantism,<sup>54</sup> he later came to bitterly regret the episode. 'It alienated many of my Catholic friends', he wrote in his autobiography, 'and with some of them the breach will never be healed'.<sup>55</sup> His relation, Helen Roe, now in Coleraine as Hubert Butler's

assistant, was advised not to protest when she heard Robinson described at a county library committee meeting as 'the aesthete of the sewer'. Butler himself sent Robinson a formal note, regretting that he was no longer involved in the Carnegie Trust's library work. Privately he blamed Robinson for placing the county library service at risk in a stubborn refusal to back down.<sup>56</sup> In Sligo Wilson reacted in a dramatic fashion to news of Robinson's dismissal - burying his head in his hands, and moaning 'oh Ireland, how thou stonest thy prophets' - a gesture the cynical O'Donovan thought overdone.<sup>57</sup> 'What are we going to do without Mr Robinson' Florence Harrison lamented from Kilkenny; 'the work! - nothing can be the same again!'<sup>58</sup>

Samuel Maguire, the most experienced of the Carnegie librarians, realised that the affair had placed the entire county library service in jeopardy. As the meeting at Tullamore had proved, the county library schemes would have little chance of success without the approval of the Catholic hierarchy. Since the Dublin office was in disarray, he decided to intervene and head off disaster by convincing the hierarchy that the books in the county libraries were selected by committees that were predominantly clerical, and therefore could not be a threat to the religious beliefs of Catholic readers. While in Belfast for Christmas, he called on Cardinal MacRory, explained to him how the county library schemes worked, and presented him with a copy of the Dublin book repository catalogue.<sup>59</sup> On his return to Galway in

January 1925, Maguire called on Dr Gilmartin, who received him in a friendly fashion, and assured him that, provided book selection was carefully supervised, he was in favour of rural libraries.<sup>60</sup> With the help of Professor Ryan of Maynooth, who was an old friend, Maguire was able to meet most of the Catholic bishops. By February he was in a position to inform Mitchell that there was no longer any need to anticipate serious ecclesiastical opposition to the county library schemes.<sup>61</sup>

In fact there is evidence to show that the impact of the Madonna affair was by no means universal. This was argued by James Wilkinson, the Cork city librarian, in his letter of protest at the disbanding of the advisory committee. He pointed out that Cork county council had passed a resolution agreeing to the establishment of a county library scheme at its December meeting while the controversy was at its height.<sup>62</sup> Elsewhere the same enthusiasm prevailed. The inaugural meeting of the Tipperary county library scheme was scheduled for 24 January 1925 in the Confraternity hall, Thurles. This could have been a repetition of what had happened in Tullamore, and both James Brennan, the newly appointed county librarian, and Helen Roe who had, to her relief, been transferred to Tipperary from Fermanagh, were advised to remain in the background, leaving the conduct of the meeting to local library enthusiasts. Prominent among these was Brother J. C. Carew, headmaster of the local boys' school. Helen Roe stayed at the back of the hall, from where she observed the proceedings conducted without rancour, and a

predominantly clerical book selection committee appointed.<sup>63</sup>  
Nor was clerical support wanting in Donegal, as MacIntyre wrote subsequently to Mitchell:

I have the Catholic priests on the side of the library, I may say to a man. They have been its friends even when recent events in Dublin threatened to wreck the whole movement in Ireland. I must say it was their support that saved us here, and nothing else.<sup>64</sup>

Even Fr Coleman's article in the Irish Ecclesiastical Record<sup>65</sup> proved a damp squib, laying more emphasis on public libraries as financial burdens on ratepayers, than as purveyors of atheism. His opposition to Carnegie libraries was shortlived. On 16 February Florence Harrison wrote to McGreevy that

There is really a great deal of enthusiasm. Even Fr Coleman seems to have come round in the last two weeks, and changed his mind, and gives it as his opinion that the rural libraries really do good.<sup>66</sup>

(iv)

Robinson was under no illusion about the real meaning of his six months' suspension. 'I've been sacked', he wrote to Wilson on 23 December.<sup>67</sup> A change of scene might have seemed prudent, and he travelled to London where one of his plays was running in a West End theatre. McGreevy was now left in charge of the staff at Merrion Square. Mitchell was quick to assure them that their jobs, at least, were in no immediate danger, and Christina Keogh wrote an acknowledgement:

Thank you very much indeed for your assurance that my work with the Trust will continue without interruption. I can assure you that I will do my utmost to assist in every possible way.<sup>68</sup>

The standard catalogue, which Butler had worked on during 1923, was at the printers by early 1925. Since book selection was a source of potential controversy, Christina Keogh 'took the precaution of revising the proofs for the purpose of eliminating any book likely to be criticized'.<sup>69</sup> Mitchell was impressed by her forethought. 'She has shown considerable sanity throughout the period of stress, and is loyal to the Trust'.<sup>70</sup> he wrote later.

By the end of January 1925 all the files and financial accounts had been transferred from Merrion Square to Dunfermline, and McGreevy spent a number of weeks in the CUKT offices setting up an Irish section. The scaling down of the Irish office increased the significance of the trustees' Irish sub-committee. This was an informal group which had been established from members of the executive committee shortly after the visit of Ross, Robertson and Mitchell to Dublin in July 1921. Now it was re-constituted as a standing sub-committee, and entrusted with the task of carrying out the decisions of the executive committee. The first meeting of the re-constituted Irish sub-committee took place on 26 February 1925, to decide what direction the CUKT's policy should now take in both parts of Ireland.

Mitchell had assured the members of the Irish advisory committee that the trustees intended to continue their work to develop rural library schemes in Ireland, and the Irish sub-committee accepted this commitment. The trustees, however, decided to recognise the existence of two states on

the island, by dealing with Northern Ireland directly from Dunfermline, in line with the rest of the United Kingdom. County library schemes in the Irish Free State were to be administered through a sub-office in Dublin, which would also include the book repository and the Irish Central Library for Students [hereafter ICLS]. But there was to be no new Irish advisory committee, and, although the trustees allocated £12,500 a year for expenditure on Irish library schemes down to 1927, with a provisional commitment to a similar allocation annually to 1932, all payments were to be made directly from Dunfermline.<sup>71</sup>

With the departure of Robinson, McGreevy had become the Trust's Irish representative, in fact if not officially. It was in this capacity that he travelled to Lifford during the first week of March to report on a disaster that had befallen the Donegal county library service. On the night of 27 February fire broke out in the county secretary's office in the county house. Although it was quickly noticed, it spread so rapidly that the building was destroyed, including the entire contents of the county repository.<sup>72</sup> McGreevy's report was surprisingly optimistic. He was convinced that MacIntyre would be able to re-organize the service and 'show what he was made of'.<sup>73</sup>

The trustees had already decided to terminate Robinson's contract on the grounds that 'it would be against the interest of the work to retain [his] services'.<sup>74</sup> McGreevy was the obvious choice as a successor and on 5 March, Mitchell wrote to him in the following terms:

the trustees have decided to maintain a sub-office in Dublin, and to ask you to act as assistant secretary in charge of that office at a salary of £400, at all events for a year.<sup>75</sup>

McGreevy declined this offer, partly out of loyalty to Robinson, to whom, as he explained in his response, he owed his position in the Dublin book repository. This was not his only motive. He had been deeply upset by the whole episode, and in particular by the way in which those clergy who favoured the public libraries had failed to speak out in defence of Robinson. As an Irish Catholic, he wrote to Mitchell,<sup>76</sup> he felt ashamed of the vicious, unjust and unChristian attack made on Robinson in the name of Catholicism. The only way he could distance himself from this was by resigning from the CUKT. In spite of appeals by Hyslop (the CUKT treasurer), and Plunkett, he refused to change his mind. Robinson had made it clear to McGreevy that he did not expect such loyalty, particularly as McGreevy had no immediate prospects of employment. But a letter written in June showed that he understood McGreevy's disillusionment:

I don't blame you for leaving, but you must let me have my regrets that things have turned out as they have - that I am I and you are you, and that Ireland is Ireland. And that is all about it, and I want to say no more.

McGreevy suggested Wilson as a suitable replacement, but the trustees decided to let the position lapse. Instead, they increased Christina Keogh's salary and responsibilities, and appointed her as a local correspondent.<sup>78</sup> This was not simply a reward for her loyalty during the crisis of the previous year. Mitchell would have realised that she was

unlikely' to take any initiatives in regard to county library schemes, and in fact, her attitude towards the staff at Dunfermline was always that of a subordinate.

While those involved in the county library service adjusted themselves to life without Robinson or an Irish advisory committee, Dail Eireann continued to debate the local government bill, which finally passed all stages on 18 March 1925, and received the King's assent eight days later. The Local Government Act <sup>79</sup> was probably the most important piece of legislation passed by the Cumann na nGaedheal government. It abolished the RDCs and created 'a highly centralised system of both central and local government',<sup>80</sup> giving the Department of Local Government sweeping powers, which included the power to abolish councils or corporations. Section 65 of the act stated:

The council of any county shall have power by resolution to adopt the public libraries (Ireland) acts for the whole or any specified part or parts of their county. [and further] The council of any urban district may relinquish in favour of the county council their powers and duties under the public libraries (Ireland) acts, 1855 to 1920.<sup>81</sup>

The legislative basis of the county library service in the Irish Free State was now identical to that which existed in Britain. The implications for the future policy of the CUKT were spelt out by Mitchell in a letter to Maguire dated 29 May, 1925

The main fact is that in future the trustees' function will simply be to make grants to approved schemes, all administrative responsibility being in the hands of the duly constituted authorities..The Trust's grants will be for initial expenditure only, as in the case<sup>82</sup> of Scotland since 1918 and England and Wales since 1919.



This change was outlined by Mitchell to a conference of the county librarians and their assistants held at 32 Merrion Square on 1 July. There would be no new experimental schemes or voluntary county library committees. Nor, in spite of protests by Phibbs and Wilson, would there be an Irish organiser.<sup>83</sup>

The trustees had already taken steps to set their new library policy in train. With the permission of Kevin O'Higgins, the minister for local government, a circular was sent to all county secretaries in the Irish Free State, outlining the conditions under which the CUKT would henceforward assist in the establishment of rural library services. The text of the circular indicated clearly that the trustees had turned away from the old method of experimental library schemes.

The Local Government Act marks a new era and puts the Trust in a different position, since the county council becomes the statutory library authority. Henceforth it would be<sup>84</sup> an intrusion for any outside body to act in the matter.

While the trustees were still prepared to give grants for library maintenance to counties which applied before 31 December 1925, after that date grants would be given to cover only the capital costs of establishing county library schemes. This, the circular pointed out, was already the situation for county library schemes in Britain.

As if to emphasise their determination to withdraw from as many Irish involvements as possible, the trustees decided to cease all financial support for the Co-operative Reference

Library, the recipient of their first Irish grant. For some months the fate of the library hung in the balance. Its eventual saviour was the Horace Plunkett Foundation, a trust which Plunkett had established in 1919 to continue his life's work of promoting agricultural co-operation.<sup>85</sup> The trustees of this Foundation included W. G. S. Adams, Dermot O'Brien and Lionel Smith Gordon. The latter raised the plight of the Co-operative Reference Library with his fellow trustees, arguing that it would be a tragedy to let it die of neglect.<sup>86</sup> An additional impulse came from a resolution that had been passed at the Conference on Agricultural Co-operation in the British Empire held in connection with the 1924 Empire Exhibition. This resolution had called on the Plunkett Foundation to 'set up in London a clearing house as a centre of information for the widely scattered agricultural co-operative movement'. One need seemed to answer the other and in October 1925 the Foundation offered to accept responsibility for the Co-operative Reference Library on condition that it was transferred to their London head office.<sup>87</sup> Plunkett agreed and, in spite of protests from within Ireland, the library was moved to London, ironically with the aid of a final grant from the CUKT.

## CHAPTER NINE

'New needs are constantly arising as the masses advance'<sup>1</sup> - the county library service, 1925-1935.

(i)

The controversy that surrounded the collapse of the Trust's Irish advisory committee did not lessen the trustees' commitment to the Irish county library service. Only the method whereby they would further this policy was changed. Some changes were, in any case, inevitable, given the political developments that had taken place since the advisory committee was first established in 1917. Then, Ireland was for administrative purposes no different from any other part of the United Kingdom. Now, it comprised two separate states, each with its own public library legislation. The structure of local government had also changed. In 1917 over 200 rural districts were potential library authorities, making some local filter necessary if the trustees were not to be overwhelmed by applications. By 1925, all this had been reduced to a maximum of thirty two county councils, a number quite easily managed from Dunfermline.

The trustees lost little time in putting this new method of administration into practice. At a meeting of the library sub-committee on 30 June 1925, approval was given to a grant of £5,000 to Cork county council for its library service.<sup>2</sup> This was the first grant to be made under the terms of the

Local Government Act. At the same meeting, Mitchell was instructed to send a circular to each county secretary in the Irish Free State, giving details of the financial assistance available from the CUKT to councils that adopted the public libraries act. This circular<sup>3</sup> was posted on 8 July, just a week after Mitchell had told the county librarians and the staff at the Dublin book repository that the Irish advisory committee would not be re-convened. The circular was carefully drafted to take account of nationalist sensibilities:

I am informed by the minister for local government and public health that it is now appropriate to communicate to the newly elected county councils the terms upon which my trustees are prepared to make grants for the establishment of county library schemes.

Having described how the experimental schemes had worked, and acknowledging the changes that the Local Government Act had brought about - 'hence forth it would be an intrusion for any outside body to act in the matter' - Mitchell outlined the trustees' current offer:

To counties setting up schemes, and applying for a grant before December 31st 1925, they are prepared to offer grants... to cover capital costs and the cost of maintenance for two years... To counties applying after December 31st, the maintenance grant would not be given, only the capital cost, since, under the new act, councils are empowered to levy a rate.

These grants were not offered unconditionally. Councils were required to undertake to maintain the library service out of the rates, to submit an annual report to the CUKT, and to appoint as county librarian someone with experience of library work who would be paid at least £250 a year. This

latter condition was aimed at protecting the library service by establishing the county librarian on an equal footing with other professionals in the public service such as the county surveyors.

The response from the county councils to this offer was disappointing. Leaving aside counties that had already been organised by Robinson or McGreevy, only Laois, Mayo, Offaly, Dublin and Kerry adopted the public libraries act during 1925 and 1926.<sup>4</sup> This slow progress of the county library movement reflected the continued apathy among councillors to the idea. But it also resulted from the many difficulties which county councils faced during the early years of the Irish Free State. They were now responsible for a wide variety of matters including public health and road maintenance, all of which drained their resources, leaving little enthusiasm for raising extra rates for libraries. As Thomas Armitage has written:

Libraries however did not rank high on the list of local or national priorities; there was an understandable preference for the practical and more tangible results to be gained from the other services, and libraries<sup>5</sup> had no formal connection with the education authorities.

Nor was the current financial climate helpful to libraries. The financial policy of Cumann na nGaedheal, who remained in power from 1922 to 1932, was one of ruthless economy in public expenditure. Leon O'Broin, recalling<sup>6</sup> the Department of Finance in the late 1920s, noted an obsession with balancing the national books at all costs by, as he put it, trimming fat from bones that had already been plucked bare. Libraries were likely to be among the first victims of such

trimming exercises.

Given the highly centralised system of local government now in operation in the Irish Free State, a positive attitude from the Department of Local Government was likely to help the spread of the county library service. With this in mind, a CUKT deputation, consisting of Mitchell, Thomas Gorrie and Robert Wilson met E. P. McCarron at the department's Dublin office on 4 February 1927. According to a memorandum on the meeting prepared by Wilson, McCarron undertook to positively encourage county councils to apply for the capital grants which were available from the CUKT up to the end of 1930.<sup>7</sup> This response seems to have satisfied Mitchell. 'Your department', he wrote to McCarron, 'is taking a keen interest in the county library movement'.<sup>8</sup> In order that McCarron would have ready information to give to county councils, the trustees commissioned Wilson to write a pamphlet encouraging councils to adopt the public libraries act. This pamphlet, entitled The county library service in Ireland: a summary for the guidance of local authorities, and for the general reader,<sup>9</sup> was widely circulated, both by McCarron and the CUKT, but again, results were disappointing. Kildare and Monaghan were the only counties to adopt the public libraries act, in 1927 and 1928 respectively.

As Mitchell had promised in 1925, the Trust continued to fund the Dublin book repository, and the ICLS. The latter, now administered by Christina Keogh, was particularly successful, and continued to expand. From 1925 the service

was opened to readers in all rate-supported libraries, not merely those in rural areas.<sup>10</sup> The book repository, on the other hand, was scaled down (as Robinson had envisaged), as more county libraries were established. In March 1927 the trustees decided that the despatch of book boxes from the repository should cease in June 1928,<sup>11</sup> a move that was supported by Christina Keogh.<sup>12</sup> Most of the books were given to the newly established Dublin county library service, although some 2,000 books were sent to the Wexford county library.<sup>13</sup>

Christina Keogh did not travel to the provinces, or negotiate with county secretaries, as Robinson and McGreevy had done. When it was felt necessary that a representative of the Trust meet councillors or address council meetings, the task usually fell to Robert Wilson, or to Roisin Walsh, who became Dublin county librarian in 1926. She did, however, undertake some propaganda on behalf of the CUKT when, in 1928, she revived Robinson's practice of taking a stand at the Dublin Spring Show. 'The Spring Show', she explained to Mitchell, in her letter asking for permission to rent a stand, 'attracts people of the farming and county councillor type, who are just the people we want on our side'.<sup>14</sup> The stand featured a large map, on which library counties were coloured blue, while counties without a library service remained a blank white, a shrewd appeal to the inter-county rivalry that remains a part of Irish life. A leaflet (see figure seven), outlining grants available was distributed, and, overall, Christina Keogh felt it was a

'What the county library service means' -  
information circular, 1928.

## WHAT THE COUNTY LIBRARY SERVICE MEANS

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THE object of the County Library is to bring books within the reach of readers all over the County. In the County town or other suitable centre a room is provided by the County Council to act as a storehouse or "Repository" for the books and County headquarters of the library. From this Repository boxes of books are sent out periodically to local centres in the smaller towns and villages for distribution amongst readers in the immediate neighbourhood of these centres. The collections of books at local centres are exchanged every three or four months, new supplies being sent out from the Repository.

No charge is made for the loan of books, nor for transport to or from the County headquarters. In most counties the books are packed in boxes and are sent by rail, motor lorries, carts, etc., but in County Dublin and County Cork, a special motor library van fitted with bookshelves has been provided.

### **The County Dublin Van is on view outside this stand.**

The County library belongs to the ratepayers of the County, and is administered under the supervision of the County Council.

Each County possesses its own stock of books, which are selected by a Book Selection Committee appointed by the County Council. It cannot be too strongly emphasised that the matter of **choice and selection of these books is left entirely in their hands.** Each County Committee has an absolutely free hand in the matter of selecting and purchasing books and it is their duty to see that the books provided are in every way suitable.

Within the past six years the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees have defrayed the initial heavy expenses entailed in the establishment of County Libraries in the following Counties :—

Antrim, Cork, Dublin; Fermanagh, Galway, Kerry, Kildare, Kilkenny, Leix, Londonderry, Mayo, Monaghan, Offaly, Sligo, Tipperary, Tirconail, Tyrone, Wexford and Wicklow.

These Counties now have progressive library schemes in operation. In addition to the above-named Counties, a grant has recently been made to County Armagh in which County a library service is being established at present.

County Councils and the public generally of Counties that have not yet received grants from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust for similar library services are reminded that the time is drawing near when the offer of financial assistance will be withdrawn.

**All applications must be made before 31st December, 1930.**

**After that date no further grants will be available.**

Make enquiries at this stand (No. 221), or at the Irish Offices of

The CARNEGIE UNITED KINGDOM TRUST  
32 MERRION SQUARE - - - DUBLIN

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*O'Loughlin, Printer, Fleet Street, Dublin*



valuable exercise, although she privately complained to Mitchell that Roisin Walsh's stand, with its new library van, had acted as an unfair rival attraction.<sup>16</sup>

(ii)

The leaflet distributed from the Trust's stand at the Spring Show indicated that the trustees continued to view Ireland as a single entity for library purposes. The same grants were offered to all thirty two counties, while the ICLS and the Dublin book repository, operated on an all-Ireland basis. Yet the dissolution of the Irish advisory committee did act as a watershed. After 1925, the library systems in the two states, inevitably, began to follow different paths. Hubert Butler (who left the library service in the late 1920s) discerned this, as he wrote, years later:

When the Dublin central body went, the last cultural bridge between the twenty six counties and the six counties was broken down. There had not been much traffic on that bridge, but, at least it existed.<sup>17</sup>

Not that there was, for the period covered by this study, much noticeable difference between the library services in Northern Ireland and in the Irish Free State. The same low level of service was universal. Many of the problems that weakened the library services in the Irish Free State were evident also in the four Northern counties that had adopted the public libraries act. In Antrim, generally acknowledged to be the most progressive Irish county, the council refused to increase the library rate, so that A. S.

Roy, the county librarian, was unable to establish centres in a number of villages.<sup>18</sup> The county library service was further weakened when the UDCs in the county failed to follow the example of Ballymena in striking a library rate. In Fermanagh, Margery Wray, the first county librarian, had continual problems with her councillors, who persisted in complaining of the unnecessary waste of ratepayers' money involved in the library scheme.<sup>19</sup> Butler's library committee in Derry feared that the library might be a source of Irish Free State propaganda. Looking back from the 1940s, he recalled how;

The sectarian and political section in our Northern library was scrutinized suspiciously by the committee members, but scarcely anyone took books from it.<sup>20</sup>

On one occasion Butler was suprised to notice a particular member of the county library committee closely examining the non-fiction shelves in the county repository

At last his eye caught the long green row of the Irish Texts Society.<sup>21</sup> He snorted angrily, and said that he objected, as a rate-payer, to supporting political propaganda from Dublin.<sup>22</sup>

Tyrone county council had adopted the public libraries act in 1926, but Armagh and Down county councils remained unmoved. The case of Down illustrated the problems that beset libraries in Northern Ireland. There were already five rate-supported libraries in the urban districts, three of which had been built through grants from Andrew Carnegie. The county council, however, was bitterly split on sectarian lines, resulting in the inevitable defeat of all motions to adopt the public libraries act.<sup>23</sup>

The poor return of the library rate made the Northern Ireland library services, both urban and rural, heavily dependent on the stocks of the ICLS to satisfy their more specialised readers. Early in 1927 a rumour (which proved to be without foundation) that the Department of Education in Dublin intended to take over the ICLS caused some consternation. Obviously, in the contemporary political climate, it might not be possible to borrow books from an Irish Free State institution. In order to explore alternatives, and to promote the cause of the library service generally, A. S. Roy and the Antrim county library committee, together with the Belfast city librarian, organised a library conference, which met in the Belfast city hall on 24 March 1927. The attendance included representatives of all library authorities in Northern Ireland, as well as a CUKT delegation made up of Mitchell, Thomas Gorrie, and Hugh O'Neill, the speaker of the Northern Ireland house of commons, who had been appointed a trustee in 1926.

The discussion, as reported in the Belfast Newsletter,<sup>24</sup> was rather rambling, probably because most of the speakers were members of Belfast corporation, rather than librarians. But there was an evident desire for the establishment of a system of inter-library lending, based, it was proposed, on the non-fiction stock of Belfast city library. The conference concluded with a resolution to set up a committee which would investigate how such a scheme could be started. Financial assistance from the CUKT was expected, and vaguely promised by Mitchell.

The recommendations of this committee were submitted to all library authorities as well as to the CUKT. The trustees were sufficiently impressed to include them, in toto, in their Fourteenth Annual Report for 1927, with the comment that they embodied 'the most comprehensive scheme of regional co-operation which has yet been conceived for a large area including all types of public library'.<sup>25</sup> The main recommendation was that Belfast public library should agree to lend non-fiction to students in Northern Ireland through the county libraries, while individual county systems were urged to twin with neighbouring counties for direct inter-library loans.

It may have been Hugh O'Neill who brought this proposal to the notice of the Northern Ireland government. In any event, it seems to have captured the interest of Hugh Pollock, the finance minister, who was the prime mover in having a parliamentary commission appointed to enquire into library provision in Northern Ireland. The decision to establish the commission was taken in December 1927, but it was not constituted until the following June, by which time Armagh county council had adopted the public libraries act. The delay was due to the difficulty Pollock experienced in getting anyone to chair the commission. A number of prominent British librarians were approached, but all declined, and eventually Pollock had to be satisfied with Robert Lloyd Praeger, who had lately retired from the National Library of Ireland.

It is clear from the commission's brief, as outlined in the published report,<sup>26</sup> that Pollock's library plans were more elaborate than mere schemes of inter-library loan. The commission was not only to 'inquire into the library provision in Northern Ireland', but also 'to consider the means of extending and improving library facilities.... by the establishment of a state library'.<sup>27</sup> The idea of a National Library in Belfast was bound to appeal to unionists, as a means of promoting their integrity as a distinct entity which was as much a part of Britain as Wales and Scotland, both of which had their National Libraries. Consequently, the commission's report did not deal at length with the public library system, although it acknowledged the inadequacy of library provision. Nor did it make any recommendations about the need for a central library for students based in Belfast. Indeed, the commission seemed to accept that Northern Ireland libraries should still use the facilities of the Dublin service. Its main recommendation was that 'a state library be established in Northern Ireland to be known as the Ulster Library'.<sup>28</sup> This library should build up a collection of books bearing on 'the special interests and problems of the province'.<sup>29</sup> Given the economic conditions of 1929, such a proposal had no hope of success, and the report remained a deadletter. More progress was made at a library level, and Belfast public library agreed to be the centre of a regional scheme of non-fiction lending.<sup>30</sup> But, for financial assistance, the public library system had to continue to rely on the CUKT.

(iii)

This study has concentrated on the CUKT's support for public libraries, especially in rural areas. This did not however represent the only interest of the trustees. From the outset they had assisted a wide variety of projects, both social and cultural, all aimed at improving 'the well being of the masses of the people of Great Britain and Ireland', as their deed of foundation had expressed it. The physical welfare of children was always a major concern, and was generously funded. Welfare centres were built and staffed in a number of cities, including Dublin, as well as in depressed regions like the Rhondda Valley. Music and drama were assisted. Funds were given to the National Institute for the Blind to increase the range of books transcribed into braille. Theatrical tours in rural areas were subsidised - a scheme Lennox Robinson utilised to arrange his concert tour of Limerick and Kerry in 1916.<sup>31</sup>

From the beginning, the trustees had seen their assistance to rural libraries as part of the overall rehabilitation of the countryside, as the following extract from their Fourth Annual Report for 1917 shows:

Well organised schemes, by means of which supplies of wholesome books are put within the reach of inhabitants of more or less remote areas, will help materially towards<sub>32</sub> bettering the conditions which at present obtain.

By the 1920s, as noted above, the trustees' interest in rural rehabilitation had broadened out from simply funding experimental county library schemes. This change of

direction was encouraged when the Trust was invited in 1921 to participate in a conference organised by the National Council of Social Services, and chaired by Professor W.G.S. Adams, to consider the social needs of country dwellers. Following this conference, the trustees began to grant-aid rural community councils<sup>33</sup> and, within a few years they had revived Carnegie's policy of part funding village halls.<sup>34</sup> The phrase 'rural development' began to replace the rather patronising concept of 'rehabilitation' in the Trust's publications.

The trustees' foundation deed had observed that 'new needs are constantly arising as the masses advance'. The new housing estates, built under various housing acts in the 1920s, attracted their attention. Most estates had been built without any recreational facilities and, in 1927, the trustees began to grant aid the provision of playing fields, in conjunction with the National Playing Fields Association<sup>35</sup> By 1930 their total expenditure in this area had risen to £27,911 5s Od.<sup>36</sup>

The movement of the Trust's policy away from public libraries from the mid 1920s was no more than the logical consequence of their earlier efforts. By 1926 fifty six of the sixty two counties in England and Wales had adopted the public libraries act,<sup>37</sup> and were moving towards a stage where they would no longer need financial assistance. To take account of these changes, the administrative structure of the Trust was reorganised following the annual general meeting of 1926. A number of sub-committees were discontinued,

including the Irish sub-committee, which had been formalised in 1925 following the dissolution of the Irish advisory committee. When Plunkett queried this decision at an executive meeting on 10 July, he was politely assured that 'the trustees would undoubtedly desire to have the advice of Sir Horace Plunkett and Mr Hugh O'Neill on all Irish questions'.<sup>38</sup>

This did not mean that the CUKT ceased to assist county libraries, but their annual reports began to show a decline in the amount granted to libraries from £109,048 19s. 6d. in 1926<sup>39</sup> to £59,474. 2s 8d in 1930.<sup>40</sup> In fact the trustees' library policy for 1925-1930 had envisaged that after 1930 grants to public libraries would cease. However, as the end of the five year period approached, it became obvious that the county service was not yet able to survive without funds from the CUKT. In particular, the county libraries needed help to expand in the newly developed garden suburbs, and to absorb the libraries, mostly dating from Carnegie's time, in the small country towns. Accordingly, the trustees decided in October 1929 to extend their library policy for a further three years. This time they would give grants on a proportion of six pounds for every 1,000 inhabitants living in library rated parts of a county. These grants could only be used by librarians for expansion as outlined above, and were to be restricted to counties that had proved themselves efficient.<sup>41</sup> As was usual with the CUKT, they extended this policy to Ireland, allocating £4,000 for library development



projects in Irish counties.

The continued inclusion of the Irish Free State in the Trust's library policy was encouraged by active lobbying on the part of the county librarians who now began to follow the example set by British librarians in the nineteenth century, by acting as a professional body rather than a collection of individuals. The annual meeting with Mitchell at Merrion Square assisted this feeling of solidarity, as did the constant threat to their library services, and personal salaries, from county councillors and council officials. In 1927 they joined the Local Government Officers' Union, forming a librarians' branch. In 1928 a professional association was established, with financial help from the CUKT. The title chosen, Cumann Leabharlann na hEireann, harked back to the organisation founded in 1904, as did the title of the body's new journal, An Leabharlann.<sup>42</sup> Thus the Cumann saw itself as continuing the work of its pre-war namesake. In fact the Cumann of 1928 was strictly a professional organisation, modelled on the British Library Association, and the majority of its members were full time librarians. It was owing to propaganda work by the Cumann that no less than five counties, Meath, Carlow, Cavan, Roscommon and Waterford, adopted the public libraries act in 1930, just in time to avail of the Trust's 1925 offer of a grant towards the capital costs of establishing a county library scheme.<sup>43</sup>

The establishment of a professional association in Dublin was mirrored in Belfast. In 1928 the Library

Association of Northern Ireland was established, but it soon merged with the British Library Association to form a regional branch.<sup>44</sup> Although both Cumann na Leabharlann and the Northern Ireland Library Association were independent organisations, they did have a liaison committee which prevented a complete separation of the profession in the two states.

(iv)

By 1930, when the CUKT's offer of assistance towards the initial costs of county library schemes expired, twenty two of the twenty six counties in the Irish Free State had adopted the public libraries act. This progress, which was in keeping with the situation in Britain, was not without its setbacks and failures. Waterford was a setback. Waterford county council had been prepared to adopt the public libraries act in 1927, but Roisin Walsh, who acted as the Trust's representative in meetings with the councillors, pressed so strongly for a rate of one penny that the councillors took fright and abandoned the idea. Three years later Robert Wilson took over negotiations, and the act was adopted with the rate levied at one penny.<sup>45</sup> Galway met a temporary setback. As one of the early experimental schemes it dated from before the Local Government Act, and had to be taken over by the council at the end of its two years of CUKT support. Accordingly, Samuel Maguire, the county librarian, arranged that a motion to adopt the public libraries act be

placed before the county council on 31 October 1925. In spite of the evident success of the scheme, under which eighty four centres had been established, the council rejected the motion by a narrow majority. The low return of the county rate and the council's heavy overdraft were the opponents' main arguments.<sup>46</sup> It was not a popular decision: 'Back to the Dark Ages', proclaimed the Connacht Tribune,<sup>47</sup> and Councillor Corbett, chairman of the library committee, at once handed in a motion to rescind the decision. In order to ensure that this motion would be carried, Maguire, as he put it to Mitchell, 'mobilised the intellectual element'.<sup>48</sup> He arranged that two members of the academic staff of University College, Galway, Drs Dillon and Howley, be allowed to address the councillors on the advantages of a public library. Following this appeal, the councillors withdrew their previous motion, and adopted the public libraries act at the November meeting. However, they showed their lack of enthusiasm for the idea by confining the library rate to one half penny. Two years later the council attempted to reduce Maguire's salary, and were only dissuaded by pressure from the CUKT.<sup>49</sup>

The events in Galway showed that the existence within a county of a library service was no guarantee of council support. This was further proved by the most notable failure of a county library service in the 1920s, which happened, ironically, in Limerick, the scene of the CUKT's first Irish venture during the previous decade.

Since the library rate was being levied in those parts of County Limerick that comprised the former rural districts of Rathkeale and Newcastle West, it would have seemed a simple step for the county council to extend this rate to the rest of the county, and thus qualify for CUKT assistance. In fact, the councillors were happy to let things continue unchanged, until, by the end of the decade, the poor condition of the former Carnegie libraries caused them to look for a source of funds. In April 1929 the county secretary, Liam O'Donnell, wrote to the CUKT asking if any 'free grants' existed for repairs and the purchase of bookstock. Mitchell's reply expressed some surprise that O'Donnell was not aware of the CUKT's current library policy, as outlined in the circular he had sent to all county secretaries in July 1925. After recapitulating the main terms of the policy, Mitchell informed O'Donnell that, if the council adopted the public libraries act before the end of 1930, it could receive a grant of up to £1,800 from the CUKT.<sup>50</sup>

O'Donnell duly read this letter to the council at its next meeting. The response was most unenthusiastic, only one councillor thinking it worth taking advantage of the Trust's offer. The debate soon developed into a light hearted dispute between councillors from Rathkeale and Newcastle West about which library system was the best. Eventually, it was decided that O'Donnell should visit all the Carnegie libraries and report back.<sup>51</sup>

This report, which was presented to the July meeting,<sup>52</sup>

showed how the libraries were faring a decade after Robinson had left Cahirmoyle for Dublin. The central library in Rathkeale was open every day for exactly the same hours as in 1908. The bookstock numbered 1,000 volumes, a considerable decline from the number that had been there when Robinson had reorganised the system in 1915. Yet, O'Donnell was impressed by what he found: 'The library was kept in a splendid condition, and reflects great credit on the (un-named) librarian'. The hall, which Carnegie's secretary James Bertram had considered too large, was still being used for social functions, - and even as a cinema. During the day it was occupied by a private secondary school. O'Donnell's report showed that the system whereby books were distributed to the branch libraries and replaced at intervals had been abandoned. The branch libraries were used for occasional meetings, but were generally in poor repair. A similar situation existed in Newcastle West. The central library had been repaired after the fire of 1921, and re-opened. Michael Nix, who was still librarian, had made some exchanges of books with his branch libraries, a though O'Donnell hinted that recent activity was caused by news of his impending visit. Only the branch library at Athea impressed O'Donnell, although his remark that it contained 'fifty books, one of which was lent to a borrower', suggests that it was not much used.

The councillors' reaction to this report was to castigate the branch library committees for not maintaining

their buildings. They were particularly incensed that the committees did not light fires in the libraries, although they were receiving a coal allowance. That the 'libraries' contained no books caused no adverse comment from the councillors. It was decided to reprimand the committees for allowing the buildings to fall into disrepair. There the matter rested. Even a letter (which Mitchell may have prompted), from E. P. McCarron suggesting that the council 'appoint a qualified whole time county librarian on an adequate salary'<sup>53</sup> was ignored.

In October 1930, as the deadline for the Trust's grants to new schemes approached, Mitchell wrote once more to the council, pointing out that unless a preliminary application was received in Dunfermline by 31 December, Limerick would not be eligible for a grant.<sup>54</sup> This impressed the councillors, and Roisin Walsh was invited to address the November meeting. Her advocacy of the county library service persuaded them to agree to strike a library rate, but, at the December meeting, this decision was rescinded.<sup>55</sup>

By now the county library movement had won the support of councillor E. J. Mitchell, from the village of Hospital, in the east of the county. He periodically proposed adoption of the public libraries act, until, in November 1933, his persistence was rewarded, and the motion was passed. The following March the council struck a library rate of one penny. The councillors now attempted to get a grant from the CUKT, but were firmly told that, since the deadline had long since passed, this was not possible.<sup>56</sup>

(v)

Max Broome, county librarian of Hertfordshire, writing in the Library Association Record of August 1989, notes that, while all public services suffer from the vagaries of public finance

library services are more vulnerable than most, and the library service provided by county councils perhaps more so than that provided by district and city councils.<sup>57</sup>

Broome's remark is inspired by the cutbacks in government support of libraries in the 1980s, which have occurred in Ireland, no less than in Britain. But he could also have been speaking of the library service during the 1930s. The positive development of the county service during the 1920s was brought to a halt by the world economic depression that followed the Wall Street crash of 1929. Even the CUKT was not immune from the effects of the financial crisis. The Trust's Eighteenth Annual Report for 1931 noted the trustees' decision not to embark on a number of new social schemes that had been planned.<sup>58</sup> This decision, in fact, assisted the county library service. As the trustees felt that 'it would be inappropriate at such a time to hoard resources',<sup>59</sup> they decided to continue their previous policy of giving grants for the maintenance of library services, rather than simply for extension in urban areas, as they had decided in October 1929. In addition, they extended their library policy for a further two years to 1935. As a result of this decision, £97,000 was granted by the CUKT to county libraries in Britain and Ireland between 1930 and 1935.<sup>60</sup>

These grants undoubtedly enabled many county library services to survive the worst years of the depression. Yet, even with the assistance of CUKT grants, many county services struggled to survive. W. A. Munford, looking back from the 1950s, recalled that

Headquarters staff were still exiguous, sometimes unqualified, and invariably poorly paid. Headquarter buildings were mostly unsatisfactory makeshifts, and occasionally<sup>61</sup> lacked even a private office for the county librarian.

Contemporary accounts agreed:

The idea has gone abroad that any old barn or classroom may be<sup>62</sup> made to serve as the home of the county library.

complained Robert MacLeod, librarian at the CUKT offices in Dunfermline. Ironically, the CUKT itself, with its emphasis on economy and aversion to the old Carnegie-style library building, had helped to foster such attitudes. The Survey of Libraries, compiled by members of the Library Association during 1936 (usually called the McColvin report, after its editor), gave ample evidence of a service operating under very poor conditions, particularly in the parts of Britain that were furthest from the large centres of population.

The report did not concern itself with library conditions in the Irish Free State, but it did include a section on Northern Ireland written by A. S. Cooke, the county librarian of Kent. She was not impressed by the state of the library service that she found there:

Conditions in Northern Ireland are very bad indeed from every point of view. With the exception of Belfast itself, Bangor, and one or two of the counties (which



are very small), there are no libraries worthy of the name. Usually the libraries are in the charge of part time or caretaker librarians, and it is obvious from the look of the book stock that no money is spent on books.

Her solution was that all Northern Ireland, with the exception of Belfast, should be treated as a single county for library purposes, a proposal which anticipated (though in a more radical way) the plan subsequently introduced by the Northern Ireland government in 1973.<sup>64</sup>

Had Miss Cooke crossed the border to the Irish Free State she would have found a service no better, but not much worse, than that which she had observed in Northern Ireland. Articles in An Leabharlann, the personal recollections of librarians and, in particular, the Report on public library provision in the Irish Free State, compiled by Christina Keogh in 1935, with the assistance of CUKT funds, all give evidence of a poorly developed service. Christina Keogh's conclusion was:

Notwithstanding the fact that the county library service has extended to all but two counties the most that can be said is that the present service represents merely the framework of public library provision.<sup>65</sup>

The same problems noted in the McColvin report were mirrored in the Irish county library service. In Monaghan, Carlow, Laois, Leitrim, Roscommon and Cavan Miss Keogh found inadequate accommodation for the county book repository.

The county librarians themselves were more explicit. In an article on county library headquarters published in An Leabharlann, Maguire noted that:

If the local county council offices are fully occupied, the unfortunate county librarian finds himself in the

queerest places imaginable - three of them in the vacated local jails, one in the local infirmary, some others in private residences, and the remainder in two rooms over business premises of various kinds.<sup>66</sup>

Dermot Foley, who left the library in the Dublin suburb of Ballsbridge in 1931 to be county librarian in Clare, never forgot his introduction to the book repository in Ennis.

The walls were shelved to the ceiling, twelve feet high. There was no ladder, but there was a table<sup>67</sup> acquired on loan, I was told, from the lunatic asylum.

Other county library services were burdened by an overabundance of branch libraries built by Carnegie grants. Roisin Walsh inherited thirteen such libraries when she became Dublin county librarian, and, as a result, had to operate two types of service, one through the branch library buildings, and one through centres in schools or village halls.<sup>68</sup> Daniel Doyle was faced with a similar situation in Limerick where he had to deal with the libraries in Rathkeale and Newcastle West. He had previous experience of the rural library service as assistant librarian in Wicklow, and therefore he looked at the branch libraries from a different standpoint than Liam O'Donnell had in 1929. Only six of the branch libraries were deemed worthy of inclusion in the county library service, namely those in good condition and located in centres of population. The library at Kilcolman was not selected.

In the autumn of 1935 I went in search of the Kilcolman building, and found it on the slope of a deserted hill, with no houses near. It had no windows, a broken door, a potholed roof and a rotting floor.<sup>69</sup>

It was abandoned to its fate (see plate V).<sup>70</sup>

It was to be expected that librarians would be concerned

Plate V

Former branch library, Kilcolman, County Limerick.



about the condition of the library buildings in which they had to work. But they were also concerned about the poor quality of the book stock, one of the effects of the low return of the library rate. The trustees agreed: 'Many libraries have far too small a fund...and popular books are allowed to become soiled and worn'.<sup>71</sup> More seriously, librarians could not afford to build up a good reference collection or stock more expensive specialist books or periodicals. Hence, as the McColvin report noted, the county library service had difficulty in attracting the more selective reader or researcher. Furthermore, public librarians, or more precisely their book selection committees, tended to avoid purchasing controversial books, in particular those dealing with sexual matters. Janet Tomlin, writing on book selection in the Library Association Record of June 1935, admitted frankly that many librarians would neither stock books on sex nor supply them on request, while other librarians would only keep them under the library counter.<sup>72</sup> Alec Craig, a campaigner against censorship, agreed.

In the vast majority of [public libraries], no books dealing with sexual matters are allowed on the shelves, or at best only those by the most orthodox and old fashioned writers.<sup>73</sup>

In Britain book selection was curtailed by the laws of obscenity, and by the personal opinions of librarians and their committees, as well as by financial considerations. Librarians in the Irish Free State had, from 1929, to deal with restrictive state censorship. It is outside the scope

of this thesis to deal with the circumstances that led to the passing of the 1929 Censorship of Publications Act.<sup>74</sup> In brief, it was at once the culmination of lobbying by the Irish Vigilance Association, the CTS and individuals such as Father Robert Devane, and the product of the climate of public opinion that had been scandalised by The Madonna of Slieve Dun. Some judicious pressure encouraged the government to appoint a Commission on Evil Literature in February 1926. Its report, issued the following December, included a recommendation that the government introduce legislation to control the importation of books, periodicals, and other printed material. In due course the Censorship of Publications Act was passed, which established a Censorship Board consisting of five ministerial appointments. The Board cast a wide net. As Alec Craig noted, with amazement more than anger, the Register of Prohibited Publications had, by 1937, expanded to include 695 books and eleven periodicals.<sup>75</sup>

Commentators have differed as to the effect of the Censorship Act on the reading public. Terence Brown writes of 'the perpetuation of cultural poverty in the country as a whole, left without the leaven of serious contemporary literature',<sup>76</sup> while Michael Adams, author of the standard work on state censorship in Ireland, maintains that 'few readers consciously felt that their reading was being controlled.'<sup>77</sup> While individual readers could find ways, legal or illegal, to get the books they wanted (and here Dublin residents had an advantage), those who relied on the

public libraries, particularly the county libraries, felt the full effects of the act. As Dermot Foley complained

My library was whipped into serving up an Irish stew of imported westerns, sloppy romances, blood and murders, bearing the nihil obstat of fifty two vigilantes, and anything escaping them was lying in un<sup>78</sup>read bundles on the shelves of dusty halls and schools.

Other librarians learned to live with the act. Daniel Doyle noted in his annual report for 1936

No book has been placed in our stocks unless it, or its author, was personally known to me, or it had been recommended,<sup>79</sup> or reviewed by someone on whose judgement I could rely.

In Donegal, Andrew MacIntyre, the county librarian, had been taking this precaution even before 1929. He was able to assure Mitchell in June 1926 that, apart from an objection to John Galsworthy's novel Beyond ('the story is one of those sex-problem types'), he had received no complaints about the county library bookstock. This was not suprising since he admitted to favouring detective and mystery stories because 'they were usually clean'.<sup>80</sup>

British librarians could afford to be more adventurous, - although Dover corporation may not have been the only local authority that found the Register of Prohibited Publications to be a useful aid for book selection.<sup>81</sup> Their readers continued to prefer fiction rather than non-fiction. The Report on Public Libraries in England and Wales, presented to parliament in May 1927, contained exhaustive statistics on public library usage, including the fact that issues from county libraries were seventy five per cent fiction, twenty five per cent non-fiction.<sup>82</sup> Irish readers had similar

tastes. The CUKT's publication, County libraries in Great Britain and Ireland, reports 1925, contains several candid admissions by Irish county librarians of their readers' appetite for fiction, of which James Brennan's comment is typical.

I have noticed in the local centre in the town of Thurles that many first class books on science, travel and literature leave their places on the shelves but seldom.<sup>83</sup>

The same trend continued into the 1930s, and was the cause of much heart searching among librarians, uneasy about the similarity between the bookstock in their libraries and in the commercial libraries (the twentieth century descendants of the circulating libraries). Heated debate on the 'fiction question' erupted periodically in British library journals.<sup>84</sup> Those who tolerated popular novels in the public library, and those to whom they were anathema debated the pros and cons of the question, but in the end agreed to differ, and their libraries continued to stock the works of Ethel M. Dell and Edgar Wallace.

Irish readers also used their public libraries as sources of recreational reading. The annual report of the Kilkenny county library committee for 1938 included the following statistics of book issues for the year; fiction 50,405; non-fiction 5,136.<sup>85</sup> In May 1934 A. S. Roy told the Antrim county library committee's annual meeting that J. B. Priestley, Hugh Walpole and John Galsworthy were the authors most frequently borrowed from the county library, although the popular travel writer H. V. Morton had his devotees.<sup>86</sup>

At the other end of the country Dan Doyle's readers favoured Canon Sheehan's novels, while Kickham's Knocknagow maintained its popularity.<sup>87</sup> Public library users in Carlow preferred best sellers. The Nationalist and Leinster Times for 13 November 1937 reported the following comment by the Carlow county librarian on books issued from the library:

Among the most sought for books during the year we find 'Gone with the Wind' by Margaret Mitchell, The Citadel, by Cronin, They seek a country, by Francis Brett Young, San Michel, On another man's wound, all books by Brigadier General Crozier, Belloc, Gibbs, Frankau, etc....

The preoccupation of the first county librarians with the thorny question of book selection can be seen from the number of articles on the subject which appeared in the early issues of An Leabharlann. The members of the Library Association, whose journal tended to deal mainly with library management and professional training, thought the inclusion of a list of censored publications in a professional journal rather odd. However, an unsigned review of An Leabharlann in a 1931 issue of the Library Association Record, noting that the list included 'the two or three most popular and most degrading English Sunday newspapers', remarked in parenthesis '(could we but do the same)'.<sup>89</sup> But the members of Cumann na Leabharlann were aware of their own vulnerability as public officials. As Dermot Foley put it, the Censorship Act had 'exposed libraries as seed beds of corruption', and attacking them 'became a statutory inexhaustible bean feast for the bigots and obscurantists'.<sup>90</sup> Just how insecure the position of librarians could be, was shown by a controversy that



became known as the Mayo library boycott.

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Summarising his account of the Mayo library case in Church and State in modern Ireland, 1923-1970, J. H. Whyte asserts that 'the importance of the case lies not in what was done, but in what was said'.<sup>91</sup> Since the episode occurred at a time of political change in the Irish Free State, and since those who took public stands on it included members of the Catholic hierarchy and the leaders of the two main political parties, the salient points of the controversy are to be found in many histories of the period.<sup>92</sup> These accounts have concentrated on the significance of the affair for church-state relations. But it also had an impact on the county library service, which justifies its inclusion in this study.

J. J. Lee, whose recent work Ireland, 1912-1985: politics and society, contains the most detailed published treatment of the affair, considers that its origins are 'shrouded in the murky depths of local Mayo politics'.<sup>93</sup> Certainly local politics played a part, but a reading of the CUKT correspondence file relating to Mayo suggests that the groundwork for the controversy may have been laid several years previously.

The county library service in Mayo had a stormy existence from the beginning. That the service commenced at all was owing to the enthusiasm of M. J. Egan, the county secretary. If he had had his way, Mayo would have had an

experimental scheme as in Sligo and Galway, but the county councillors, having requested such a scheme in March 1924, rescinded their motion the following July.<sup>94</sup> Mitchell's circular offering capital and maintenance grants to councils applying before 31 December 1925, re-activated Egan, and he used this financial inducement to ensure that the Mayo county council adopted the public libraries act at its November meeting.<sup>95</sup> The following month the trustees agreed to a grant of £3,550 for the establishment of the Mayo library scheme.<sup>96</sup>

Since all Robinson's trainee librarians now had positions in the library service, the trustees were unable to recommend anyone for the position of county librarian. Accordingly, the post was advertised, and the council duly appointed Brigid Redmond. She was academically well qualified, but she had no experience of either libraries or Mayo. Robert Wilson, who had seen the Sligo county library service through the experimental period, was dubious about the council's choice. 'Even an experienced librarian would have a tough time there' he wrote to Mitchell, 'and I fear that Miss Redmond hardly knows what she has taken on'.<sup>97</sup>

In a rather gushing article written for the Capuchin Annual<sup>98</sup> of 1932, Brigid Redmond painted a rosy picture of her days in Mayo. Organising the library was an easy task, she asserted, mainly due to the enthusiasm of the Catholic clergy for the scheme. The CUKT correspondence file tells a different tale. During the summer of 1927, Mitchell became

alarmed at the slow progress of the Mayo scheme, and asked E. P. McCarron to investigate. His report was not reassuring:

Miss Redmond is literary and bookish, but quite lacking in organising capacity. The movement makes no progress, and will<sup>99</sup> fail to endure unless a new atmosphere is secured.

Mitchell now became seriously alarmed. The county library scheme in Wexford had collapsed due to the incompetence of the librarian who succeeded Mary Monica Walshe.<sup>100</sup> Now it seemed that Mayo would be another failure. He asked Wilson to investigate and offer advice. Unfortunately, this mission ended in disaster, as the two librarians took an instant dislike to each other. Wilson found that, although thirty eight centres were being serviced from the book repository, conditions were primitive, and even Monsignor D'Alton, the chairman of the county library committee, admitted that Brigid Redmond was tactless, wouldn't listen to advice, and had quarrelled with Egan,<sup>101</sup> (an unfortunate development, since the book repository was located in the council offices in Castlebar). Nor was this the extent of her misdemeanours. The minutes of the Trust's library sub-committee noted that 'Miss Redmond bought books through a source which brought commission to her sister, and was absent for six weeks writing a text book'.<sup>102</sup>

McCarron, through his departmental staff, and no doubt prompted by Mitchell, now took steps to have her dismissed, but Brigid Redmond was not one to go without a fight. She may have alienated Egan, but she had the support of the Catholic clergy, including Dr Naughton, bishop of Killala,

one of the two Catholic dioceses which covered Mayo. Dr Naughton chaired a special meeting of the county library committee held on 31 January 1928 in support of the librarian. A motion expressing complete confidence in her was passed unanimously, and forwarded to the Department of Local Government. Meanwhile Brigid Redmond produced evidence to explain her absence from Mayo, and to justify her action in giving business to her sister, a bookshop proprietor. Faced with this barrage, the department climbed down, and abandoned its plans to dismiss her.

The incident may have had a salutary effect, since by the time Brigid Redmond left Mayo in 1929, to take the position of county librarian in Wicklow, vacated by Geoffrey Phibbs, she had organised over one hundred library centres. But it made the Mayo library service a focal point for passions that had little to do with the provision of reading material. To the county councillors, the attempt to remove Brigid Redmond was a further example of the interference by the Dublin civil service in council business. This injured local pride united with clerical support for Brigid Redmond, a staunch Catholic and nationalist, as her Capuchin Annual article indicates. This was a potent mixture, and the events of the following year quickly enflamed it.

On 4 April 1930, an interview panel under the Local Appointments Commission<sup>103</sup> met to interview applicants for positions as county librarian in a number of counties, including Mayo. One of the candidates was Laetitia Dunbar-Harrison, a graduate of Trinity College, who had some

experience of library work in the Dublin municipal service. The panel, which included Christina Keogh, was impressed by her general knowledge and library experience, but she knew little Irish and this reduced her overall grading to 320 marks out of 700. It appears that successful candidates were allowed to select the counties to which they wished to be assigned. When Mayo and Monaghan were not selected, a second interview was held on 12 July at which Miss Dunbar-Harrison once more presented herself. This time, following the panel's recommendation, the departmental officials decided to waive the Irish qualification, which had been an essential requirement, and to appoint Miss Dunbar-Harrison to Mayo on condition that she acquire a competence in Irish within three years.<sup>104</sup>

It was not until November that the Mayo county library committee received the name of the person recommended by the minister of local government to be county librarian. Opposition to Miss Dunbar Harrison quickly emerged, based on two issues. The first concerned her lack of knowledge of Irish, Mayo being a county which included areas where Irish was still the everyday language. Secondly, but more importantly, on the grounds that she was a Protestant. In addition, the councillors were annoyed because the academic qualification had debarred Anthony Hamrock, the council official who had been running the service since Brigid Redmond's departure, from applying for the post. Monsignor D'Alton, for his part, had favoured Ellen Burke from Tuam, an

unsuccessful applicant.<sup>105</sup>

A meeting of the county library committee held on 1 December gave councillors and clergy an opportunity to vent their anger. A motion was passed, calling on the Department of Local Government not to send Miss Dunbar-Harrison to Mayo. Only two of the eleven committee members present opposed the motion: one was Rev. Jackson, a Church of Ireland clergyman, the other a general practitioner from Westport, Dr MacBride. Of those who supported the motion all but one were Catholic clergymen, of whom the most outspoken was Dr Naughton of Killala. He mounted a vigorous attack on Miss Dunbar-Harrison on the grounds of her lack of knowledge of Irish, her religion, and her general unsuitability for the position of librarian in Catholic Mayo.<sup>106</sup> The appointment was also denounced as an intrusion by the Dublin based Local Appointments Commission into the affairs of Mayo, and rumours spread that Miss Dunbar-Harrison was related to an unspecified government minister, allegations categorically denied by President Cosgrave in Dail Eireann on 12 December.<sup>107</sup>

In the climate of public opinion that existed at the time, the county councillors could be expected to take their lead from Dr Naughton. At their December meeting they too refused to ratify the appointment. They were aware of the possible consequences of this action, since under the regulations establishing the Local Appointments Commission, county councils were legally obliged to accept the candidates recommended to them by the minister.<sup>108</sup> The Cumann na

nGaedheal government had already shown itself ruthless in dealing with recalcitrant councillors, - even such an august body as Dublin corporation was abruptly dissolved in 1924, - and Mayo was treated no differently. During the first week of 1931, Richard Mulcahy, the minister of local government, issued a dissolution order against the council and appointed P. J. Bartley, a departmental official, as commissioner. One of Bartley's first actions was to confirm Miss Dunbar-Harrison's appointment,<sup>109</sup> and shortly afterwards she arrived in Castlebar to take up her post.

The county councillors had based their objections to their new librarian on her failure to meet the required standard of Irish. They maintained that, since this requirement had been clearly stated in the job description, her appointment was therefore illegal. However, it was quite clear that the main opposition to her was on the grounds that she was perceived to be an Anglo-Irish Protestant. Even her unusual Christian name, and hyphenated surname seemed calculated to raise hackles. But, if the councillors tried to avoid open sectarianism, others within the county did not. Father O'Connor, a member of the Ballina library sub-committee was quite blunt about the matter:

A Protestant young lady has been appointed as our library adviser. Her culture and philosophy is on many vital questions diametrically opposed to Catholic principles, and therefore we, as Catholics, cannot be guided<sup>110</sup> by her in selecting the literature that we read.

Fr O'Connor's solution was simple: collect all books in circulation from the Ballina library centre, and return them

to the county repository. Thus began the Mayo library boycott. Fr O'Connor's action was imitated by his fellow clergymen throughout the county and, by the end of January, the Western People was able to report that

South and west Mayo centres had all returned their books with a note, occasionally written in Irish, to say that the centres were abolished and the committees would not meet again until the Mayo librarian suited the people of Mayo.<sup>111</sup>

Nor did the clergy confine their protest to the local library committees. They also withdrew from other county council committees such as the vocational education committee and the old age pensions committee. This effectively dissolved the committees, as the remaining members could not form a quorum.<sup>112</sup>

The events in Mayo made headline news in papers both north and south of the border. Catholic newspapers, such as the Catholic Standard<sup>113</sup> and the Catholic Mind<sup>114</sup>, supported the action of the county council, the former declaring that the appointment of a Protestant to the position of county librarian in Mayo was 'a grave affront to Catholics', and 'an assault on the integrity of Catholic education'. The affair provided J. J. O'Kelly with more material for diatribes in the Catholic Bulletin. The entire cover of the February issue was taken up with the caption 'Well done, Mayo', while inside O'Kelly berated Cumann na nGaedheal for attempting to

intrude a Protestant graduate of a Protestant English college operating in Dublin into control of the county library system in Mayo.<sup>115</sup>

The attack was continued in subsequent issues in a similar



vein.

The government had taken a firm stand against the Mayo county councillors, as it had done against other refractory elected bodies. However, the library boycott, led by the Catholic clergy, was an unwelcome development. President Cosgrave, and his Cumann na nGaedheal party, had hitherto enjoyed the support of the Catholic hierarchy, indeed many Catholic priests were active on behalf of the party at local level. The loss of such support would be damaging at any time, but particularly so in 1931. Cumann na nGaedheal had now been nearly a decade in government and an election was due by June 1932 at the latest. The government was aware that popular support for the party was lessening, as the effects of the world economic depression came to be felt in Ireland. Furthermore there was now a well organised opposition party, Fianna Fail, led by Eamon de Valera.<sup>116</sup> In these circumstances the government could not afford any embarrassing conflict with the Catholic Church.

Consequently, Cosgrave lost little time in seeking a face-saving compromise. His first concern was to keep the controversy confined to Mayo, and thus prevent the hierarchy in general from making any statement on the affair, which would be very damaging to his party. He therefore sought a meeting with the most influential of the Connaught bishops, Dr Gilmartin of Tuam, whose archdiocese covered a large part of County Mayo, as well as County Galway. Dr Gilmartin, whose resignation from the Irish advisory committee in 1924 had been so widely misinterpreted, had not lost his interest

in libraries. He was chairman, both of the Galway county library committee, and of its book selection sub-committee.<sup>117</sup> Sir Joseph Glynn, a prominent Catholic businessman, acted as a go-between for Cosgrave and a meeting was arranged in a Dublin hotel on 25 February.

A letter, which Dr Gilmartin wrote to Glynn<sup>118</sup> a few days after the meeting, indicates his uncompromising attitude: 'Until Miss Dunbar-Harrison leaves, the people cannot use the library, on principle'. He further insisted that the council be re-instated, and that the position of librarian be re-categorised as an educational post, which would have allowed the councillors to interview and appoint the candidates themselves. Cosgrave's response<sup>119</sup> was quite accommodating. Miss Dunbar-Harrison, could be found a position elsewhere if clerical attacks on the government ceased. Mayo county council's position would then be considered after a suitable interval of time had elapsed. On one issue alone he would not yield, namely on reducing the power of the Local Appointments Commission.

These matters rested for a number of months. Mayo county council remained suspended and, if the pages of the Western People represented a barometer of public opinion, it was not unduly lamented. Laetitia Dunbar-Harrison continued as county librarian, although her library had shrunk to the county repository and four centres.<sup>120</sup> Although all those who criticised her appointment were at pains to stress that they bore no personal malice, and usually prefaced their

attacks with pointed tributes to her culture and academic qualifications, her position cannot have been pleasant, particularly since one of the most outspoken boycotters was the parish priest of Castlebar.<sup>121</sup>

The whole affair was debated at length in Dail Eireann on 17 June 1931. Michael Davis, the chairman of Mayo county council, who was also a Cumann na nGaedheal T.D., must have felt the pressure of his constituents because he used the occasion of the second reading of the local government bill to propose a motion deploring the dissolution of the council. More heat than light was generated by the lengthy, and at times disorderly, debate that followed. Davis attempted to argue that the council was within its legal rights to reject Miss Dunbar-Harrison, because she had failed to reach the required standard of Irish. But the debate soon focused on the religious issue. Old grievances were re-stated. Evangelical proselytising, and oppressive landlords of the nineteenth century were condemned along with Protestant doctors' views on birth control,<sup>122</sup> and the alleged refusal of the Provost of Trinity to allow the national anthem to be played at a college function. As back benchers on both sides of the house became more vocal, Richard Mulcahy maintained an air of ironic detachment, and William Cosgrave protested that Mayo county council had been the author of its own downfall. Several deputies called on Eamon de Valera to state his attitude to the affair. Not surprisingly, as he too had his eye on the Mayo electorate, he deplored the government's action in dissolving the county council. On the religious

question he adopted a legalistic approach, declaring that, if the function of a librarian was simply to hand out books to borrowers, then the matter was irrelevant. However, if the librarian engaged in what he termed 'active work of a propagandist educational character',<sup>123</sup> by recommending that people read certain books, or by speaking about the library in schools, then the religious opinions of the librarian would be relevant, and the people of an overwhelmingly Catholic county like Mayo were justified in demanding that their librarian be a Catholic. Eventually, the debate wandered into a wrangle about standing orders and, by the time the original motion came to the vote, its proposer, Michael Davis, had left the chamber, realising quite correctly that it was certain to be defeated.

When the Dail reassembled after the summer recess, election fever was in the air. It was obvious that a general election would be held sooner rather than later. Laetitia Dunbar-Harrison was now merely an embarrassment to Cumann na nGaedheal, since her presence in Mayo provided a ready made source of political ammunition to the opposition. A confidential memo to the minister of defence, dated 24 December 1931, stated:

The executive council consider that it would be in the public interest that Miss Laetitia Dunbar-Harrison should be appointed to the post of librarian in the Department of Defence.<sup>124</sup>

In Mayo the library boycott was stale news. An editorial in the Western People of 9 January 1932 stated: 'The county has long sickened of a controversy from which

Mayo's reputation suffered the more, the longer it was protracted'. Even Monsignor D'Alton, when interviewed by a reporter from the same paper, declared that 'he was tired of all the controversy', although he still insisted that the boycott had been right in principle.<sup>125</sup> Miss Dunbar-Harrison was no doubt relieved to accept the position offered to her, although she loyally told the Irish Independent that she was doing so only because her presence in Mayo was depriving the people there of access to their library.<sup>126</sup> On 7 January she resigned officially, and by the end of the month she had left Castlebar.<sup>127</sup>

The anticipated general election was held on 8 February 1932. The result was the defeat of Cumann na nGaedheal, and the return of a Fianna Fail government under de Valera. Mayo county council was duly re-convened, and at its first meeting on 30 April, it appointed a new county library committee, overwhelmingly composed of Catholic priests. On the proposal of Councillor Moclair, Reverend Jackson, and Dr MacBride, Miss Dunbar-Harrison's two supporters, were specifically excluded from the new committee.<sup>128</sup>

That there should be a county library service was taken for granted, and Anthony Hamrock was once more seconded to administer the scheme. By October seventy five centres had been re-established and provided with books. The October meeting of the county library committee accepted without demur the Local Appointments Commission's recommendation as Miss Dunbar-Harrison's replacement. This was Katherine

Ronaldson, a native of Tuam, who had previously been Maguire's assistant in Galway.

The effects of the boycott on the Mayo library service were not as bad as might have been supposed. Despite the many difficulties the service had encountered, Katherine Ronaldson was able to report that 127 library centres were in operation by May 1933. Her annual report for the same year, which she submitted to the CUKT, contained a fitting epitaph for a controversy that was based so much on the alleged power of a librarian to influence readers. It appears that the books most in demand by the people of Mayo were not works of philosophy, theology, or science, but westerns and thrillers.<sup>129</sup>

The Mayo library boycott throws some interesting light on the development of a Catholic ethos in the Irish Free State. Being widely reported (it even merited an editorial in the London Times<sup>130</sup>), it strengthened the conviction of Ulster unionists that the Irish Free State government was dominated by the Catholic Church.<sup>131</sup> But it did not result in any major set back for the county library movement. When the county councillors in Leitrim refused to strike a library rate in January 1931 to show solidarity with Mayo, public protest soon forced them to change their minds.<sup>132</sup> In Clare the councillors tried to reject Dermot Foley on the grounds that he too had been given three years by the Local Appointments Commission to acquire fluency in Irish, but, when the council was threatened with dissolution, they withdrew their objection.<sup>133</sup> Even Mayo county council never

considered abandoning the library service. Miss Dunbar-Harrison had hardly left the county when the members of the library committee started to reorganise the distribution of books.<sup>134</sup>

Nor did the dispute cause the trustees to lessen their commitment to Ireland, although Mitchell prudently abandoned his plans to tour all the Irish library counties during the summer of 1931.<sup>135</sup> At the height of the Mayo controversy, the trustees decided to allocate £4,000 to library development projects in Ireland during the quinquennium 1931-1935.<sup>136</sup> Even the abolition in 1932 of the requirement that Dail deputies take an oath of allegiance to the crown did not cause the trustees to change their policy, although they did seek counsel's opinion, since the Irish Free State had now constitutionally left the United Kingdom.<sup>137</sup> Perhaps they still felt an obligation to Horace Plunkett, whose death, on 16 March 1932, was mourned in their annual report:

His life long advocacy of agricultural co-operation, with its threefold principle 'better farming, better business, better living', naturally led him to take the keenest interest in the trustees' rural development policy, and his deep loyalty to Ireland made him a zealous supporter of worthy applications from that country.<sup>138</sup>

Perhaps the most lasting effect of the events in Mayo was on the psyche of the library profession. It clearly demonstrated to librarians that, should they alienate the Catholic Church, they could rely neither on the support of their own local authority nor of the government. Thus librarians, as we have seen, tended to extreme caution in

book selection, and works that had been passed by the Censorship Board were often censored by librarians. Indeed Father Stephen Brown, in his book Libraries and literature from a Catholic point of view, published in 1937, stated that Cumann na Leabharlann had an advisory committee on book selection which circulated to members of the Cumann lists of books passed by the Censorship Board carefully annotated as 'safe' or 'dangerous'.<sup>139</sup>

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From its establishment, the CUKT had organised its policy in five year periods. 1935 marked the end of one such period. It also marked the centenary of the birth of Andrew Carnegie, and was therefore an appropriate year for the CUKT to cease its policy of large scale assistance to the public library service. 'The trustees' county library policy, which began in 1914-1915, is now complete', noted the Twenty Second Annual Report for 1935.<sup>140</sup> This did not mean that grants to libraries were abruptly terminated, but they were confined to assisting regional co-operation in book purchase and the absorbing of any remaining small town libraries into the county services.<sup>141</sup> Social services, adult education and rural development were to be the Trust's priorities in future. Some concerns typical of the 1930s attracted the trustees' attention. They decided to commit £150,000 over the period 1936-1940 for land resettlement schemes which would provide the unemployed with small holdings and allotments.<sup>142</sup> The youth hostel movement was generously



funded, even during the depression. In Northern Ireland the trustees assisted projects which they rather naively hoped would bridge the sectarian divide, such as drama festivals, young farmers' clubs and Womens' Institutes.

The trustees were able to note in their Twenty third Annual Report for 1936 that 'This is the first report since the foundation of the Trust in which library policy plays a relatively unimportant part'.<sup>143</sup> This change was reflected in the much reduced part that the Irish Free State played in the Trust's deliberations. Outstanding commitments to county schemes were honoured, and when, in the 1940s, Longford and Westmeath formed a joint library system this was grant aided, just as Down county council was, when it adopted the public libraries act in 1940. The Trust's main assistance went to the ICLS which it continued to support financially. In the early 1930s, the library moved from the house Robinson had leased in Merrion Square to nearby Upper Mount Street, In 1947 the Trust handed over the library to An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council), which had been established by the Public Libraries Act of 1947.<sup>144</sup> This effectively ended the CUKT's involvement in the administration of Irish library services, which had begun in 1915.<sup>145</sup>

Apart from the centenary of Carnegie's birth, 1935 also marked the silver jubilee of George V, an occasion celebrated by the Library Association in a commemorative issue of the Library Association Record. In an article surveying developments in the county library service, R. V. Wright

noted that

At the accession of King George V, the provision of a public library service to rural areas was spoken of by but an enthusiastic few, [whereas] today the most remote hamlet in rural Britain has its regular book service.<sup>146</sup>

No such claim could have been made on behalf of the Irish county library service in 1935. In Down, the library service was still confined to the old Carnegie libraries in the towns. As late as 1934, an attempt to start a county wide service collapsed when only four of the eight RDCs would agree to strike a library rate.<sup>147</sup> In the Irish Free State, the services in Limerick and Louth were only in their infancy, while Longford and Westmeath remained outside the library net. Even in the established schemes it is unlikely that every centre of population was reached by the library service. The poor return of the library rate, unsuitable library headquarters,<sup>148</sup> inadequate staffing, lack of interest on the part of councillors and council officials, the activities of censors, both official and self-appointed affecting the quality of the bookstock, all combined to prevent the public library service from reaching its full potential. No doubt many Irish librarians would have re-echoed the sentiments expressed by an English colleague in the Library Association Record of May 1931

County librarians, in their thinking moments, might well doubt whether they were achieving more than a mere reading service which might be equally well provided by a box of books housed in a village store, and lent out at two pence a week.<sup>149</sup>

Thus it could be argued that it was not Yeats, Plunkett

or the members of the IRLA who correctly foresaw the use country people would make of their libraries, but rather the members of the CTS or Father Ambrose Coleman. But there did exist in rural areas another reading public, which required more from its county library than westerns and romances. Harold Speakman, an American who travelled through Ireland in 1924, noted the existence of this public:

There will be shy people at the gate to listen, and there will be those in the library to receive the book...Ireland will grow slowly to its new life, but very surely.<sup>150</sup>

It was the existence of these people that kept Dermot Foley in Clare:

for somewhere a teacher, or a lonely curate, or a roadmender, will be found standing at a ditch or a half door waiting for a new word, an idea, a puff of fresh wind.<sup>151</sup>

Andrew MacIntyre experienced a similar reaction, although he expressed it in a typically prosaic way. In August 1936 he sent the trustees an account of his tour of inspection of library centres in the more isolated parts of Donegal. Here he found that history and biography were more in demand than fiction. In the village of Keadue he called on Brian Ward, a farmer, who was in charge of the village library centre. His elderly mother, who was 'deaf but alert', told MacIntyre that 'if it hadn't been for the books, she would have been in the asylum over the winter'.<sup>152</sup>

The county libraries also filled the role of information centres. Brigid Redmond's experience in Mayo must have been typical:

People came with all sorts of queries, ranging from the

best method of treating swine fever or the warble fly pest, to queries on trade marks, land acts, egg-testing and dry fly fishing.<sup>153</sup>

Dermot Foley promoted amateur drama; Daniel Doyle started a gramophone library; Helen Roe gave evening lectures on local history, Brigid Redmond (in Wicklow), organised study circles, all activities aimed at improving the quality of life in rural areas.

When R. V. Wright, in the passage quoted above, referred to the 'enthusiastic few', he was thinking of individuals such as John MacLaughlin, librarian of Dundee, who, as early as 1880, urged the Library Association to take up the cause of the county library,<sup>154</sup> or Robert MacLeod, whose position as the CUKT's own librarian enabled him to influence the standard of service provided by county libraries; or the first county librarians, like Miss A. S. Cooke of Kent. Ireland too had her library enthusiasts. Horace Plunkett was the most influential of these. His conviction that better living was as important for the regeneration of the countryside as better farming or better business, ensured that the Irish co-operative movement would have a broad view of its role, encompassing not merely creameries and credit unions, but also libraries and village halls.

Plunkett was not the first to express concern about the decay of rural society, nor did he invent the idea of the village library as a solution to this decay. His significance lies in the fact that he was uniquely positioned to ensure that the rural library movement achieved a prominence in Ireland during the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries that was not paralleled elsewhere in the United Kingdom. In these years Plunkett enjoyed an international reputation. President Theodore Roosevelt corresponded with him on the problems of rural America. Co-operative enthusiasts from overseas sought his advice on how to emulate the success of the IAOS. In Ireland (where an international reputation often counts for nothing), he seemed, for a time at least, to draw together the opposing strands of unionist and nationalist opinion.

Andrew Carnegie was one of Plunkett's contacts. As has been noted, Carnegie singled out the co-operative movement for praise during his 1903 visit to Ireland. When he commissioned his Trust to work for 'the well-being of the masses of the people of Great Britain and Ireland', Carnegie was almost ensuring that Plunkett would be invited to become a trustee, indeed he may have issued that invitation himself. In its turn, Plunkett's acceptance of this invitation ensured that Ireland would feature prominently in the Trust's activities. Plunkett was not the most regular attender at meetings of the trustees, but, when he was present, he was able to influence their decisions. Was it by chance that, of all the possible candidates, the trustees selected W. G. S. Adams, Plunkett's old colleague from the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction to conduct their 1913 survey of local authority facilities? Adams's background produced a natural inclination towards the cause of rural areas, and his report was to determine the Trust's policy for

the following twenty years. The respect that Plunkett received from his fellow trustees is proved by their continued commitment to Ireland, which did not falter even at times when they could have been forgiven for suspending, if not actually abandoning, their library schemes in a country which they repeatedly described as 'peculiar'.

Plunkett's Irish contacts - the 'Plunkett House clique', so disliked by J. J. O'Kelly - also helped to influence the direction of the CUKT's library policy. The trustees' appointment of a library organiser in County Limerick - a unique appointment on their part - can be directly attributed to Plunkett's contacts in the area: Lord Monteagle and Dermot O'Brien. The latter introduced Plunkett to Lennox Robinson, who was thus rescued from teachers' pensions to become an organiser of rural libraries. Robinson was not modest about the part he played, when he wrote in The Bell

Those petty squabbles in West Limerick led to bigger and better things: led eventually to the establishment of county libraries all over Ireland.<sup>155</sup>

This was not mere exaggeration. The CUKT's Irish advisory committee was initiated, and destroyed, by Robinson. This committee further involved the Trust in promoting county libraries in Ireland at a pace that would not have been possible if all correspondence had had to go directly to Dunfermline.

There were other enthusiasts for rural libraries. In the 1890s Yeats and the members of the Young Ireland League had planned to despatch boxes of books to country branches of the League - a scheme that foreshadowed the Dublin book

repository. Although Yeats's plans came to nothing, his belief in the importance of libraries influenced others who wanted to revive the national consciousness. Hence the diverse collection of people involved in the first Cumann na Leabharlann, and the number of writers, poets, and well educated, but unemployed, young men and women who became Carnegie librarians.

Many individuals helped to further the spread of the county library movement during the period covered by this study. Some were politicians, like Thomas O'Donnell or Senator Greer; others were public servants like T. B. Naughton or E. P. McCarron, or simply private individuals like Mrs Montgomery or Matthew Byrne. Then there were those such as Maguire or Roy, for whom librarianship was a full time career. These ensured that the library service continued through difficult times, when the more intellectual element had moved elsewhere.

Without the existence of the CUKT the enthusiasm of these individuals would have achieved little. The Trust's financial contribution to the Irish county library service was remarkable (see appendix two), and was essential for the establishment of individual library systems. But the fate of many libraries built with grants from Carnegie showed that finance alone was not sufficient, and the supervisory role of the trustees, although at times it seemed over beaucroatic and cautious, was needed to ensure that the early county libraries were organised along efficient lines. The

trustees' insistence that properly qualified individuals be appointed as county librarians helped to secure a status for the service within the administrative hierarchy of the county councils.

The members of the Library Association used the occasion of George V's silver jubilee to look back over the development of the library service from 1910 to 1935. In the case of the Irish library service a similar retrospection would have shown a development perhaps even more remarkable than what had occurred in Britain. In 1910 the Irish rural service was confined to a few rural districts on the east coast and in the south west. Many of these districts were still in the process of erecting an over abundance of branch libraries with money provided by Carnegie. In Rathkeale the system, only four years in operation, was already beginning to falter. Twenty five years later only Down, Longford and Westmeath were without rate-supported library services. And in between there had been a world war followed by an economic depression, while Ireland had experienced her own upheaval and emerged as two states each facing the difficulties of the 1930s.

In the early 1900s the correspondence columns of the Irish Homestead were filled with complaints about the lack of social and educational facilities in the countryside. By 1935 the county library had been added to the facilities available. This was not the only change. The motor car and the cinema were making an impact on rural life, while many homes had a wireless receiving the new national station 2RN.



Yet the flight from the land continued, and the problem of the regeneration of the countryside remained unresolved, as it does today. Indeed, organisations such as Foras Eireann, which was founded in 1949 to 'assist and promote the social, cultural and economic development of rural Ireland', have been financially assisted by the CUKT in more recent times, thus providing a link between the concerns of Plunkett and those relevant today.<sup>156</sup>

The vulnerability of the library service in times of economic decline has been noted by commentators including Max Broome. His remark, previously quoted, applied to Britain. In Ireland, the public library service has been no less affected. Library charges have been introduced, thus breaking with the principle, so stressed by Carnegie, of the free public library. The mobile library service, which replaced the library van and the school room centre, has been withdrawn in some counties. Librarians in Ireland and the United Kingdom find themselves fighting the battles their predecessors thought they had won. Thus the point made by Paul Kaufman, and quoted in the introduction to this thesis, provides a fitting conclusion: 'library history perforce is a fascinating image of the complete social history of a particular community or nation.'<sup>157</sup>

## Appendix One

Principal statutes applicable to public libraries in Ireland,  
1853-1935

Public Libraries Act (Ireland and Scotland), 1853 (16 and 17  
Vict. c 101).

Public Libraries Act (Ireland), 1855 (18 and 19 Vict. c 40).

Public Libraries Amendment Act, 1877 (40 and 41 Vict. c 15).

Public Libraries Act, 1884 (47 and 48 Vict. c 37).

Public Libraries (Ireland) Act, 1894 (57 and 58 Vict. c 38).

Public Libraries (Ireland) Act, 1902 (2 Edw. VII c 20).

Public Libraries (Ireland) Act, 1920 (10 and 11 Geo. V. c  
25).

Public Libraries Act (Northern Ireland) 1924 (15 and 16 Geo.  
V c 10).

Local Government Act, 1925 (No. 5 of 1925).

## Appendix Two

CUKT grants paid to county libraries in Ireland, 1922-1935.

Initial Grant	County	Amount
1921	Donegal	£2,543
	Antrim	£2,990
1922	Wexford	£3,950
1923	Kilkenny	£2,789
	Sligo	£3,275
	Derry	£3,915
	Fermanagh	£2,850
1924	Galway	£4,381
	Wicklow	£2,132
	Tipperary	£4,420
1925	Cork	£6,900
	Offaly	£2,250
1926	Dublin	£5,900
	Laois	£2,200
	Kerry	£3,300
	Mayo	£3,550
	Tyrone	£4,500
1927	Kildare	£2,200
	Armagh	£1,850
1928	Monaghan	£2,200
1930	Meath	£1,150
	Carlow	£ 900
	Cavan	£1,250
	Waterford	£1,490
	Roscommon	£2,250
1931	Clare	£2,110
	Leitrim	£ 950

## NOTES

Abbreviations are generally as set out in 'Rules for contributors to Irish Historical Studies', I.H.S. Supplement I (1968).

The following is a list of abbreviations used throughout:

CTS	Catholic Truth Society
CUKT	Carnegie United Kingdom Trust
DCA	Dublin Corporation Archives
IAOS	Irish Agricultural Organisation Society
NA(SPO)	National Archives (State Paper Office)
NLI	National Library of Ireland
SRO	Scottish Record Office
TCDL	Trinity College Dublin Library.

## INTRODUCTION (pp ix-xvi)

1. Thomas Kelly, A history of public libraries in Great Britain 1845-1935 (London, 1935), p.7.
2. *ibid.*, p.6.
3. Paul Kaufman, 'Community lending libraries in eighteenth-century Ireland and Wales', in Library Quarterly xxxiii, no.4 (Oct. 1963), p.305.

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1. W.R. Aitken, A history of the public library movement in Scotland to 1955 (Glasgow, 1971), p.79.

2. Hansard 4, xii, 1211 (18 May 1893).
3. Report from the select committee on public libraries... 1849, H.C. 1849 [548], xvii, ii.
4. Public Libraries Act, 1850 (13 and 14 Vict. c 65).
5. H.A.L. Fisher, History of Europe (London, 1965 ed.), ii, p. 986.
6. W.A. Munford, Penny rate: aspects of British public library history (London, 1951), p.2.
7. Alan Armstrong, Farmworkers: a social and economic history, 1770-1980 (London, 1985), p.88.
8. W.H.B. Court, Concise economic history of Britain (Cambridge, 1954), p.182.
9. ibid., p.246.
10. Asa Briggs, The age of improvement (London, 1959), p.403.
11. J.W. Adamson, English education, 1789-1902, (Cambridge, 1930), p.347.
12. ibid., p.35.
13. Armstrong, Farmworkers, p.105.
14. Briggs, Age of improvement, p.336.
15. Jeremy Bentham, Deontology, or the science of morality (London, 1834).
16. Bhikhu Parekh, Jeremy Bentham, ten critical essays (London, 1974), p.xiii.

17. John Roach, Social Reform in England, 1780-1880 (New York, 1978), p.110.
18. Asa Briggs, Victorian people (Harmondsworth, 1965), p.262.
19. Anthony Wood, Nineteenth century Britain (London, 1949), p.453.
20. Samuel Smiles, Self help: with illustrations of character and conduct (London, 1859).
21. Quoted in Eric J. Evans, Social policy, 1830-1914: individualism, collectivism and the origins of the welfare state (London, 1978), p.30.
22. Thomas Kelly, Early public libraries: a history of public libraries in Great Britain before 1850 (London, 1966), p.228.
23. *ibid.*, p.224.
24. *ibid.*, p.128.
25. *ibid.*, p.204.
26. *ibid.*, p.220.
27. *ibid.*, p.215.
28. *ibid.*, p.222.
29. For an account of the Mechanics' Institute movement in Britain see Thomas Kelly, A history of adult education in Great Britain (Liverpool, 1970), pp112-33.
30. During the period under discussion, the term 'mechanic' meant a skilled worker, but it was frequently loosely used to signify workers in general.

31. Charles Singer [ed.], A history of technology (Oxford, 1958), v, p.777.
32. T.E. Cliffe-Leslie, An inquiry into the progress and present condition of the Mechanics' Institutes (Dublin, 1852), p.4.
33. Singer (ed.), History of technology, v, p.777.
34. Kelly, Early public libraries, p.230.
35. Quoted in Cliffe-Leslie, op. cit., p.7.
36. This act originated as a private member's bill 'to enable town councils to establish museums of art in corporate towns', introduced by Ewart in March 1845. H. C. 1845 [142], iv.
37. Edward Edwards, Remarks on the paucity of libraries freely open to the public in Britain (London, 1849).
38. Michael Stenton and Setphen Lees (eds.), Who's who of British members of parliament (Brighton, 1978), i, p.176.
39. Hansard 3, cx, 158 (10 Apr. 1850).
40. For the history of this library see Muriel McCarthy, All graduates and gentlemen: Marsh's library (Dublin 1980).
41. ibid., p.36.
42. T. O'Raiiftearaigh (ed.), The Royal Irish Academy: a bicentennial history, 1785-1985 (Dublin, 1985), p.10.
43. R.C. Cole, 'Community lending libraries in eighteenth century Ireland', in Library Quarterly, xliv, no.2 (1972), p.120.
44. Marie Kennedy, 'The Cork Library Society of 1801', in Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society, xciv, no.253 (1989), p.58.

45. Kaufman, 'Community lending libraries in eighteenth century Ireland and Wales', p.302.
46. The Society of United Irishmen, established in Belfast on 21 October 1791 with the aim of reforming 'the common name of Irishman' was initially an open debating society, resembling in many ways the literary and scientific institutions of the time.
47. Kaufman, op. cit., p.302.
48. ibid., p.304.
49. Cole, 'Community lending libraries in eighteenth century Ireland', p.112.
50. ibid., p.113.
51. Kaufman, op. cit., p.300.
52. Kaufman repeats an anecdote from Montague Summer's The Gothic quest (London, 1938), concerning Mrs. Lord, the proprietress of a Dublin circulating library. When an irate father complained about the shocking novels his daughter had borrowed from her library, Mrs Lord replied that she was careful to underline all questionable passages so readers would know what to skip.
53. O Raiftearaigh, (ed.), The Royal Irish Academy, p.321.
54. James Meenan and Desmond Clarke, The Royal Dublin Society, 1731-1981 (Dublin, 1981), p.1.
55. ibid., p.81.
56. Slater's Directory, 1846, p. 360.
57. 'A member' (Henry Montgomery), An essay towards investigating the causes that have retarded the progress of literature in Ireland, (Belfast, 1840).



58. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the phrase 'public library' was often used to describe a subscription library. This was one of the reasons why the early rate-supported libraries were called 'free public libraries'.
59. Montgomery, op. cit., p.50
60. ibid., p.49.
61. Kennedy 'The Cork Library Society of 1801', p. 56.
62. Mary Casteleyn, 'A history of literacy and libraries in Ireland (Aldershot, 1984), pp111-9.
63. Alexander MacWilliam, 'The Dublin Library Society, 1791-1882' in Bibliographical Society of Ireland, ii, no.6 (1925), pp122-3.
64. Montgomery, op. cit., p.50.
65. ibid., p.72,
66. Report from the select committee on public libraries...1849, p.166.
67. idem
68. ibid., p.170.
69. H. Kingsmill-Moore, An unwritten chapter in the history of education (London, 1904), p.60.
70. William Fitzpatrick, The life, times, and correspondence of the Right Reverend Doctor Doyle (Dublin, 1861), ii, p.116.
71. Martin Brenan, Schools of Kildare and Leighlin, 1775-1835 (Dublin, 1935), p.38. Brenan describes these books, which he discovered stored in the convent, as including 'the best known and most solid treatises on the spiritual life'.

72. 'Minute book, register of members, and accounts of the Killeigh book society, County Offaly, 1839-1867' (NLI, MS 19.449).
73. Fitzpatrick, Life of Dr. Doyle, ii, p.11.
74. For an account of the temperance crusade in Ireland, see Elizabeth Malcolm, Ireland sober, Ireland free: drink and temperance in nineteenth century Ireland, (Dublin, 1986).
75. Brennan, Schools of Kildare and Leighlin, p.16.
76. No comprehensive history of the Mechanics' Institute movement in Ireland has been published. Two post graduate studies have dealt with specific aspects: Kieran Byrne, 'Mechanics' Institutes in Ireland before 1855' (unpublished M.Ed., University College, Cork, 1976) and Seamus Duffy, 'Mechanics' and similar Institutes in Counties Antrim, Armagh and Down, 1820-1870' (unpublished Ph.D., University of Ulster, Coleraine, 1986).
77. Byrne, 'Mechanics' Institutes in Ireland before 1855', p. 3.
78. *ibid.*, p. 140.
79. Cork Mechanics' Institute, Syllabus of a course of lectures on mechanical and experimental philosophy to be delivered at the Cork Mechanics' Institute (Cork, 1826).
80. Cork Mechanics' Institute, Catalogue of books contained in the library of the Cork Mechanics' Institute (Cork c. 1837).
81. R.G. Morton, 'Mechanics' Institutes and the diffusion of useful knowledge in Ireland', in Irish booklore, ii, no. 1 (1972), p.65.
82. *ibid.*, p. 66.
83. Byrne, *op. cit.*, p. 221.
84. Thoms' Directory, 1850, p.263.

85. Cecil Webb 'Technical instruction in Clonmel', in Journal of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, xi no.4 (1910-11), p.688.
86. Reproduced in Casteleyn, A history of literacy and libraries in Ireland, p.52.
87. Charles Gavan Duffy, Young Ireland: a fragment of Irish history (New York, 1881), p.156.
88. K.T. Hoppen, Elections, politics and society in Ireland, 1832-1885 (Oxford, 1984), p. 459.
89. Richard Davis, The Young Ireland movement (Dublin, 1987), p.135.
90. Report from the select committee on public libraries...1849, p.249.
91. Stenton and Lees (eds), Who's who of British members of parliament, i, p. 74.
92. Hansard 3, cxiii, 481 (30 July 1850).
93. Public Libraries Act (Ireland and Scotland), 1853 (16 and 17 Vict. c 101).
94. Public Libraries Act (Ireland), 1855 (18 and 19 Vict. c 40).
95. Kelly, History of public libraries in Great Britain, p.151.
96. Library Association, Minutes of the council, 1909 (London, 1910), p.5.
97. Michael Adams, Censorship: the Irish experience (Dublin, 1968), p.15.
98. Munford, Penny rate: p.34.

99. Source Returns showing the names of all places in England, in Scotland, and in Ireland that have adopted the public libraries act, H.C. 1884-1885 (106), lxi, 267, and Returns showing the names of all places in England, in Scotland, and in Ireland in which the public libraries acts have been adopted,, H.C. 1890-1891 (5) lxi, 561.
100. Morton, 'Mechanics' Institutes and the diffusion of useful knowledge', p.67.
101. Returns showing the names of all places...that have adopted the public libraries act, pp 26-7, H. C. 1884-1885 (106), lxi, 292-3.
102. Munford, Penny rate, p.33.
103. *ibid.*, p.39.
104. *ibid.*, p.41.
105. *ibid.*, p.40.
106. Hoppen, Elections, politics and society in Ireland, p.119.
107. Report from the select committee on public libraries...1849, p.166.
108. Hoppen, *op. cit.*, p. 168.
109. L.P. Curtis jnr., 'The Anglo-Irish predicament' in Twentieth century, iv (1970), p.41.
110. Hoppen, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
111. Nora Robertson, Crowned harp (Dublin, 1960), p.101. This opinion is supported by F.S.L. Lyons in Culture and anarchy in Ireland, 1839-1929 (Oxford, 1979), p.21.
112. T.W. Grimshaw, Facts and figures about Ireland (Dublin, 1893), i, p.55.

113. 'Reading has been for so many years backward in this country, that one might be tempted to regard it as beyond cure' is typical of inspectors' reports published in the Sixty first report of the commissioners of national education in Ireland, p.77 [c 7796], H.C., 1894.
114. James Wilkinson, 'Irish public libraries and the penny rate' in New Ireland Review, xviii (Sept. 1902), pp 55-6.
115. Returns showing the names of all places in England, in Scotland and in Ireland, in which the public libraries acts have been adopted, H.C. 1890-1891 (5) lxi, 561.

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1. J. Pope Hennessy, 'What do the Irish read?' in Nineteenth Century, xv, (1884), p.925.
2. W. P. Ryan, The Irish literary revival: its history pioneers and possibilities (London, 1894), p.16.
3. Fanny Parnell (1845-82) was a sister of Charles Stewart Parnell. As well as contributing to newspapers in Ireland and America, she wrote poetry in a romantic nationalistic vein.
4. Ryan, op. cit., p.29.
5. George Russell (1867-1927) was a native of County Armagh. He met Yeats while both were students at the Metropolitan School of Art. From an early stage he adopted the pseudonym AE for his writings and paintings, this being an abbreviation of the gnostic term 'aeons'.
6. Marcus Bourke, John O'Leary: a study in Irish separatism (Tralee, 1967), p.15.
7. Ulick O'Connor, Celtic dawn (London, 1985), p.108.

8. Freemans' Journal, 18 Sept. 1891.
9. William Butler Yeats, Letters to John O'Leary and his sister, ed. Allan Wade (New York, 1953), p.11.
10. Yeats wished to publish original material in order to re-kindle the national imagination, while Gavan Duffy merely planned to reprint the writings of Davis and his circle. When Gavan Duffy's views prevailed, Yeats abandoned the scheme. See W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies (London, 1936), pp 277-85.
11. Public Libraries [Ireland] Act, 1894 (57 and 58 Vict. c 38).
12. Report from the select committee on the public libraries [Ireland] act amendments bill...1894, p.i., H.C. 1894 (223), xv, 7.
13. Local Government [Ireland] Act, 1898 (61 and 62 Vict. c 37).
14. Andrew Gailey, 'Unionist rhetoric and local government reform' in Irish Historical Studies, xxiv, no.93 (1984), p.58.
15. Louis Paul-Dubois, Contemporary Ireland (Dublin, 1908), p.193.
16. K. T. Hoppen, Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity (London, 1989), p.98.
17. See L.M. Cullen, An economic history of Ireland since 1660 (London, 1972), Chapter 6, pp 152-63, for a treatment of this revival.
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19. Paul-Dubois, Contemporary Ireland, pp367-8.

20. Moritz J. Bonn, Modern Ireland and her agrarian problem (Dublin, 1906), p.24.
21. Gerald O'Donovan, Father Ralph (London, 1913).
22. Quoted in Patrick Corish The Irish Catholic experience: a historical survey (Dublin, 1985), p.236.
23. Harold Perkin, The origins of modern English society, 1780-1880 (London, 1969), p.223.
24. For a history of the Irish co-operative movement, both before and after Plunkett, see Patrick Bolger The Irish co-operative movement: its history and development (Dublin, 1977). Plunkett's life is documented in Margaret Digby, Horace Plunkett: an Anglo-American Irishman (Oxford, 1949) and Trevor West Horace Plunkett: co-operation and politics, an Irish biography (Gerrards Cross, 1986) while Carla Keating's unpublished Ph.D. thesis 'Horace Plunkett and rural reform, 1889-1914' (University College, Dublin, 1984), treats in detail of Plunkett's involvement with agricultural co-operation.
25. Digby, op.cit., p.17.
26. Goldwin Smith, Irish history and Irish character (Oxford, 1861).
27. Horace Plunkett, Noblesse oblige: an Irish rendering (Dublin, 1908).
28. Hoppen, Ireland since 1800, p.104.
29. See H.F. Norman, 'Father Finlay, an Irish co-operative pioneer' in Year Book of Agricultural Co-operation, (1941), pp3-13.
30. See L. Kennedy, 'The early response of the Irish Catholic clergy to the co-operative movement' in Irish Historical Studies, xxiv, no 81 (1978), pp55-74, for a consideration of this subject.

31. West, Horace Plunkett, p.23.
32. Horace Plunkett, Ireland in the new century (London, 1901), p.199.
33. IAOS, Annual report, 1899-1900 (London, 1901), p.130.
34. Irish Homestead, 12 Aug. 1899.
35. *ibid.*, 9 Dec. 1899.
36. *ibid.*, 1 Mar. 1902.
37. *ibid.*, 2. Nov. 1901.
38. Kelly, History of public libraries, p.100.
39. Public Libraries Act 1892 [55 and 56 Vict. c 53].
40. Kelly, *op. cit.*, p.111.
41. Public Libraries Amendment Act 1893 [56 Vict. c 11].
42. Kelly, *op. cit.*, p.210.
43. Wilkinson was city librarian in Cork from 1892-1932, making him one of the longest serving city librarians in Britain or Ireland. He was the most prominent of the librarians employed in the public library system in the years up to 1921, contributing articles in support of public libraries to various Irish journals and representing their interests on the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust's Irish Advisory Committee.
44. Obituary in the Irish Times, 13 Dec. 1922. Among the young writers assisted by Lyster during his time at the Royal Dublin Society and the National Library was Yeats. At the unveiling of a plaque to Lyster in the National Library in 1926, Yeats acknowledged that Lyster had encouraged him to submit his first play to the Dublin University Review. See the Irish Times 29 Mar. 1926. I



am grateful to Donal O'Luanaigh of the National Library of Ireland for drawing my attention to these references.

45. see Meenan and Clarke (eds), The Royal Dublin Society, pp82-4, for an account of the transfer.
46. Library Association Record, ii, no.10 (1899), p.562.

### CHAPTER THREE (pp 56 - 113)

1. Public Libraries Ireland Act, 1902 (2 Edw. vii c 20).
2. See below p.211.
3. Thirty second annual report of the Local Government Board for Ireland for the year ending 31 March 1904, p.50 [c 2320], H.C., 1905, xxxii, 806.
4. James Wilkinson, 'Irish public libraries and the penny rate', p.55.
5. Library Association Record, iv, no.6 (1902), p.341.
6. Dillon's commitment to the Library Association appears to have been an informal one. A check by this researcher through the index to the Dillon papers, in the Manuscript Library, Trinity College, Dublin located no correspondence on the matter.
7. F.S.L. Lyons, John Dillon (London, 1968), p.227.
8. J.A. Gaughan, A political odyssey: Thomas O'Donnell (Dublin, 1983), p.66.
9. Thomas O'Donnell, Parish libraries (Dublin, 1903), p.4.
10. Stenton and Lees (eds.), Who's who of British members of parliament, ii, p.37.

11. New Ireland Review, i (Mar. 1894), p.3. The Review ran until 1911, when it was replaced by the literary review Studies.
12. John Boland, 'Rural libraries in Ireland', in New Ireland Review, xvii (June 1902), pp193-202.
13. Library Association Record, vi, no.6 (1904), pp.318-9.
14. See below, p.99 ff.
15. Irish Rural Libraries Association, The organisation of rural libraries in Ireland (Dublin, 1904), p.15.
16. Irish Homestead, 3 Mar. 1906.
17. IAOS, Annual report, 1908-1909 (Dublin, 1910), p.39.
18. Irish Homestead, 3 Mar. 1906.
19. O'Doherty to Hetherington, 2 Apr. 1915 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD281/11/12).
20. Irish Homestead, 24 April 1909. Grants were allocated to Columbkille (Longford), Cushinstown (Wexford), Effin (Limerick), Kilskeery (Tyrone), Templecrone (Donegal), and Whitecross (Armagh).
21. Patrick Bolger (ed.), And see her beauty shining there: the story of the Irish Countrywomen (Dublin, 1986), p.38.
22. Irish Homestead, 1 Feb. 1913.
23. An Leabharlann, i (1905-06), p.75.
24. ibid., ii (1906-07), p.204.
25. Sean T. O Ceallaigh, 'Arthur Griffith' in Capuchin Annual, xxxiii (1966), p.135.

26. Carlton Younger, Arthur Griffith (Dublin, 1981), p.29.
27. An Leabharlann, i (1905-06), p.137.
28. Diarmuid Coffey, Douglas Hyde, President of Ireland (Dublin, 1938), p.58.
29. see Tom Garvin, 'Priests and patriots: Irish separatism and fear of the modern, 1890-1914' in Irish Historical Studies, xxv, no.97 (1986-7) for a consideration of the social background of Gaelic Leaguers, especially pp72-5.
30. O Ceallaigh soon forsook librarianship for politics. His political career culminated in two terms as President of Ireland between 1945 and 1957.
31. S.T. O Ceallaigh, 'Cuis na Gaedhilge agus leabharlann tuaithe' in An Leabharlann, ii (1906-07), pp145-6.
32. An Leabharlann, ii (1906-07), p.96.
33. See below, p.90 ff.
34. An Leabharlann, i (1905-06), p.290.
35. *ibid.*, p.193.
36. Balrothery RDC, 'Minutes of the public library committee', 21 Dec. 1904 (DCA, DCC/L/24).
37. An Leabharlann, iii (1908-09), p.116.
38. Kelly, History of public libraries, p.210.
39. Library Association Record, vii, no.3 (1905), p.190.
40. An Leabharlann, iii (1908-09), p.118.

41. Library Association Record, x, no.9 (1908), p.471.
42. ibid., xv, no.1 (1913), p.58.
43. An Leabharlann, iii (1908-09), p.105.
44. A. L. Hetherington, 'The late Dr. Andrew Carnegie', in Library Association Record, xxi, no.2 (1919), p.284.
45. Manual of the public benefactions of Andrew Carnegie (Washington, 1919), p.317.
46. Quoted in Kelly, History of public libraries, p.116.
47. B.J. Hendrick, Life of Andrew Carnegie (New York, 1932), i., p.230.
48. This motto may still be seen over the entrance to the Edinburgh Central Library in George IV Street.
49. Cork Examiner, 21 Oct. 1903.
50. Hendrick, Life of Carnegie, ii, p.223.
51. Manual of public benefactions, p.306.
52. Hendrick, Life of Carnegie, ii, p.207.
53. James Bertram to James Stack, 23 Nov. 1908 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/3/18).
54. Balrothery RDC., Minutes of the Malahide library sub-committee, 23 Mar. 1909 (DCA, DCC/L/28).
55. Bertram to A.J. Byrnes, 19 Feb. 1913 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/31).
56. Cork Examiner, 22 Oct. 1903.

57. ibid., 20 Oct. 1903.
58. ibid., 21 Oct. 1903.
59. Hendrick, Life of Carnegie, ii, p.196.
60. Source: Return showing the names of all places in England, in Scotland, and in Ireland in which the public libraries acts have been adopted. H. C. 1912-13 [266], lxviii, 347.
61. R.A. Walker, Rating provisions of the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898 (Dublin, 1903), *passim*.
62. W.G.S. Adams, Report on library provision and policy (Edinburgh, 1915), p.66.
63. An Leabharlann, i (1905-06), p.19.
64. As at Tipperary no.2 RDC, reported in the Limerick Leader, 25 Oct. 1911.
65. J. S. Powell, 'Social and political influences on library provision in Ireland' in Library Review, xxix (1980), p.20.
66. Francis Hackett, Ireland: a study in nationalism (New York, 1918), pp238-9.
67. Paul-Dubois, Contemporary Ireland, p.194.
68. Seanad Eireann debates 4 (1925), 21.
69. Thomas Lyster 'Benefits to be derived from free public libraries' in Irish Builder, xli (1899), pp8-9.
70. Limerick Leader, 8 July 1904.
71. ibid., 9 Feb. 1904.
72. ibid., 9 Sept. 1903.

73. Irish Homestead, 31 Mar. 1906.
74. Garvin, 'Priests and patriots: Irish separatism and fear of the modern, 1890-1914', p.69.
75. The Limerick Leader of 30 Oct. 1911 recounts one such incident involving the Limerick Vigilance Committee.
76. W.P. Ryan, The Pope's green island (London, 1912), p.100.
77. This novel of rural life in County Tipperary struck a chord among Catholic readers both in Ireland and America and was, from its publication in 1873, one of the most popular books ever published in Ireland. Between 1887 and 1949 it went through thirty impressions, indicating a sale of 100,000 copies. See R. V. Comerford, Charles J: Kickham: a study in Irish nationalism and literature (Dublin, 1979), especially pp196-206.
78. Garvin, 'Priests and patriots: Irish separatism and fear of the modern, 1890-1914', p.70.
79. Freemans Journal, 29 Nov. 1906.
80. CTS, Annual record of conference, 1905 (Dublin, 1905), p.76.
81. ibid., 1906 (Dublin, 1906), p.55
82. Patrick Corish 'The Catholic Truth Society', in The Catholic Truth Society of Ireland: first fifty years (Dublin, 1949), p.13.
83. ibid., p.14.
84. CTS, Annual record of conference, 1913 (Dublin, 1913), p.24.
85. ibid., 1903 (Dublin, 1903), p.5.

86. *ibid.*, 1905 (Dublin, 1905), p.65.
87. Authorized report of the Church of Ireland conference, 1902 (Limerick, 1902), p.142.
88. Church of Ireland Gazette, 14 Aug. 1903.
89. *ibid.*, 15 Apr. 1904.
90. *ibid.*, 23 Dec. 1904.
91. Irish Homestead, 9 Mar. 1907.
92. Patrick O'Connor, 'The maturation of town and village life in County Limerick', in W.J. Smyth and Kevin Whelan(eds.), Common Ground (Cork, 1988), p.157.
93. M.J. Egan, Life of Dean O'Brien (Dublin, 1949), p.94.
94. O'Connor, *op.cit.*, p.156
95. Munster News, 15 Sept. 1906.
96. *ibid.*, 10 Oct. 1906. From remarks by Desmond to the CTS conferences, it is likely that the town in question was Naas, County Kildare. Here the UDC had adopted the public libraries act in 1899, and opened a library in 1905.
97. *ibid.*, 15 Sept. 1906.
98. Egan, Dean O'Brien, p.ix.
99. Obituary in the Limerick Leader, 2 July 1923.
100. Munster News, 19 Sept. 1906.
101. Irish Peasant, 1 Sept. 1906.

102. Munster News, 10 Nov. 1906.
103. idem.
104. An Leabharlann, i (1905-06), p.198.
105. Church of Ireland Gazette, 16 Nov. 1906.
106. For a full account see Irish Peasant 29 Dec. 1906, and Brian Inglis 'Moran of the Leader and Ryan of the Irish Peasant' in C. Cruise O'Brien(ed.), Shaping of modern Ireland (Dublin, 1960), pp 108-23.
107. G. E. Roebuck, 'A consideration of the opportunities of the minor public libraries', in Library Association Record, xv, no.2 (1913), p.114.
108. Lennox Robinson, Curtain up: an autobiography (London, 1942), p.83.
109. O'Connor, 'The maturation of town and village life in County Limerick', p.156.
110. Ward Lock's popular and practical guide to Limerick (London, 1905), p.49.
111. These buildings were burnt during the Civil War. All records of the district council were destroyed in the blaze.
112. Munster News, 12 Sept. 1906.
113. Limerick Leader, 9 Feb. 1903.
114. Munster News, 12 Sept. 1903.
115. Limerick Leader, 3 July 1903.



116. SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/3/263.
117. *ibid.*, Lady Monteagle to Carnegie, 3 Sept. 1903.
118. Limerick Leader, 2 Nov. 1903.
119. Naughton to Bertram, 3 Oct. 1904 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/3/263).
120. Limerick Leader, 13 Sept. 1905.
121. *ibid.*, 21 Jan. 1907.
122. *ibid.*, 22 Nov. 1907.
123. *ibid.*, 27 Nov. 1907.
124. *ibid.*, 6 Dec. 1907.
125. Naughton to Bertram, 5 May 1909 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/3/263).
126. Limerick Leader, 11 Nov. 1910.
127. Munster News, 31 Oct. 1908.
128. Bertram to Naughton, 25 Feb. 1910 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/3/263).
129. Limerick Leader, 22 Nov. 1912.
130. *ibid.*, 6 Dec. 1912.
131. *ibid.*, 20 Feb. 1911.
132. *ibid.*, 5 July 1912.

CHAPTER FOUR (pp 114 - 170)

1. See statistical table in W.G.S. Adams, Report on library provision and policy, pp 70-73.
2. Manual of the public benefactions of Andrew Carnegie, p. 317.
3. *ibid.*, p.321.
4. William Robertson, Welfare in trust, a history of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, 1913-1963 (Dunfermline, 1964), p.19.
5. CUKT, First annual report, 1914 (Edinburgh, 1915), pp 1-2.
6. Dictionary of National Biography, 1961-1970, p.4.
7. W.G.S. Adams, Report on library provision and policy presented to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust (Edinburgh, 1915).
8. *ibid.*, p.13.
9. *ibid.*, p.15.
10. *ibid.*, p.17.
11. For an account of the Trust's rural library policy in Britain, see F.A. Keyse, 'CUKT rural library experiments, 1915-1919' (unpublished F.L.A. thesis, Library Association, London, 1968).
12. CUKT, First annual report, p.11.
13. CUKT, Second annual report, 1915 (Edinburgh, 1916), p.8.
14. Bolger, Irish co-operative movement, pp395-6.
15. CUKT, First annual report, p.12.

16. CUKT, Second annual report, p.17.
17. For an account of the political background see, for example, F.S.L. Lyons, Ireland since the Famine, (London, 1971), pp285-357.
18. Munster News, 21 May 1913.
19. Ross to Byrnes, 22 Sept. 1914 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/31).
20. *ibid.*, Byrnes to Plunkett, 20 Feb. 1915.
21. CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee', 27 Feb. 1915 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/2).
22. *ibid.*.
23. *ibid.*.
24. R.M. Smyllie, later editor of the Irish Times, recalled O'Brien as 'a little man...a very brilliant journalist, and one of the few people who could be rude to W.B. [Yeats] with impunity'. Quoted in Patricia Boylan, All cultivated people: a history of the United Arts Club, Dublin (Gerrards Cross, 1988), p.34. Page Dickinson, a contemporary of O'Brien, described how he 'got right into the mentality of the people he was imitating, his absurd conversation being exactly what one would have expected had his originals been discussing the ridiculous topics he selected' quoted in Boylan, *op.cit.*, p.168.
25. Cruise O'Brien, 'Report on Newcastlewest and Rathkeale rural districts' in A.L. Hetherington (ed.), Glimpses at the rural library problem in Ireland, part one, (Dunfermline, 1915), pp2-14.
26. *ibid.*, p.13.
27. *ibid.*, p.10.

28. *ibid.*, p.8.
29. *idem.*
30. *idem.*
31. *ibid.*, p.9.
32. *ibid.*, p.7.
33. *ibid.*, p.13.
34. Byrne to Hetherington, 12 Mar. 1915 (SRO CUKT papers, GD 281/11/24).
35. O'Donnell to Hetherington, 14 Apr. 1915 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/12).
36. *ibid.*, O'Doherty to Hetherington, 2 Apr. 1915.
37. Monteagle to Plunkett, 12 Apr. 1915 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/31).
38. *ibid.*, O'Brien to Plunkett, 4 May 1915.
39. CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee', 6 May 1915 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/2).
40. Boylan, All cultivated people, p.8.
41. *ibid.*, p.65.
42. See his autobiography Irish reminiscences, (London, 1947), *passim*.
43. Lennox Robinson, Palette and plough (Dublin, 1948), p.164.

44. Lennox Robinson, Three homes (London, 1938), pp178-81.
45. Christopher Murray (ed.) Selected plays of Lennox Robinson (Gerrards Cross, 1982), p.7.
46. quoted in Brian de Breffney (ed.) Ireland: a cultural encyclopaedia (London, 1982), p.138.
47. Murray, op.cit., p.8.
48. Robinson, Curtain up, p.4.
49. Micheal MacLiammoir, All for Hecuba (London, 1946), p.90.
50. Frank O'Connor, My father's son (New York, 1969), p.5. In later life O'Donovan adopted the pseudonym 'Frank O'Connor'. As he was known by his original name, Michael O'Donovan, during the period covered by this study, this is the form that has been used.
51. Personal communication from Hubert Butler, Bennetsbridge, Co. Kilkenny, 26 Feb. 1989.
52. Murray, op. cit., p.11.
53. Robinson, Curtain up, pp 84-5. On the evidence of Cruise O'Brien's description and the geographical location of the village, this was most probably the branch library at Ballyhahill.
54. Robinson to Plunkett, 10 July 1915 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/31).
55. ibid., Hetherington to Plunkett, 19 July 1915.
56. Limerick Leader, 20 Aug. 1915.
57. Robinson to Plunkett, 4 Nov. 1915 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/31).

58. CUKT, Second annual report, p.17.
59. Robinson to Plunkett, 24 July 1915 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/31).
60. Limerick Leader, 13 Aug. 1915.
61. *ibid.*, 29 Oct. 1915.
62. CUKT, Second annual report, p.18.
63. Plunkett to Hetherington, 14 May 1915 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/12).
64. *ibid.*, Robinson to Plunkett, 1 Aug. 1915.
65. See Bertram to O'Riordan, 4 July 1912, 'Mr Carnegie does not object to a lecture room in connection with these buildings, it is only on condition that the lecture room is a subsidiary feature, and not adding greatly to the cost' (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/24).
66. Robinson to Plunkett, 15 July 1915.(SRO , CUKT papers, GD 281/11/12).
67. J.A. Gaughan, Listowel and its vicinity (Cork, 1973), p.484.
68. Hetherington to Plunkett, 14 June 1915 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/24).
69. CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee', 13 July 1915 (SRO, CUKT papers GD 281/1/2).
70. Hetherington to Robinson, 9 Nov. 1915 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/7).
71. Hetherington, (ed.), Glimpses at the rural library problem, part one, p.20.
72. Robinson to Plunkett, 4 Nov. 1915 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD

281/11/7).

73. *ibid.*, Plunkett to Robinson, 5 Nov. 1915.
74. Hetherington to Plunkett, 18 Nov. 1915 (SRO. CUKT papers, GD 281/5/171).
75. *ibid.*, Hetherington to Robinson, 29 Nov. 1915.
76. *ibid.*, Robinson to Hetherington, 4 Dec. 1915.
77. CUKT, Second annual report, p.18.
78. See Michael J. O'Neill, Lennox Robinson (New York, 1964), pp 79-81 for a discussion of this novel.
79. Proinsias O Conluain, Sean T.: sceal a bheatha (Baile Atha Cliath, 1963), p.167.
80. Limerick Leader, 28 April 1916.
81. Munster News, 27 May 1916.
82. Robinson to Hetherington, 15 July 1916 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/150).
83. Limerick Leader, 27 Oct. 1916.
84. *ibid.*, 26 June 1916.
85. Munster News, 26 June 1916.
86. O'Brien to Orpen, 15 Feb. 1916 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/31).
87. Limerick Leader, 1 June 1916.
88. *ibid.*, 30 June 1916.

89. Smith Gordon to Hetherington, 7 July 1916 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/31).
90. *ibid.*, Robinson to Hetherington, 18 July 1916.
91. *ibid.*, Robinson to Smith Gordon, 29 Aug. 1916.
92. *ibid.*, Robinson to Plunkett, 15 Nov. 1916.
93. Limerick Leader, 14 Nov. 1916.
94. *ibid.*, 27 Nov. 1916.
95. Daniel Doyle, 'Limerick county library' in An Leabharlann, New Series, xi, no.1 (1953-54), p.19.
96. Robinson to Plunkett, 18 Mar. 1916 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/12).
97. *ibid.*, Robinson to Plunkett, 15 Nov. 1916.
98. *ibid.*, Robinson to Hetherington, 28 Sept. 1916.
99. Murray, Selected plays of Lennox Robinson, p.14.
100. Robinson, Palette and plough, p.181.
101. Robinson to Hetherington, 28 Feb. 1917 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/150).
102. Robinson, Curtain up, p.89.
103. Limerick Leader, 1 June 1916.
104. CUKT, Third annual report, 1917 (Edinburgh, 1918), p.66.
105. Robinson to Hetherington, 30 Mar. 1917 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/12).



106. CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee', 7 July 1917 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/4).
107. CUKT, Fourth annual report, 1918 (Edinburgh, 1919), p.67.
108. idem.
109. Listowel Carnegie Library, 'Annual Report', 14 Aug. 1917 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/24).
110. CUKT, Fourth annual report, p.67.
111. A.L. Hetherington (ed.), 'Glimpses at the rural library problem in Ireland, part two' (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/4).
112. ibid., p.6
113. ibid., p.11
114. ibid., p.14.
115. CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee', 7 June 1917 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/4).
116. ibid., CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee', 15 Dec. 1917.
117. CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee', 26 Feb. 1918 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/5).

#### CHAPTER FIVE (pp171 - 189)

1. CUKT, Fourth annual report, p.21

2. Robinson, A young man from the south (Dublin, 1917).
3. Robinson, Curtain up, p.102.
4. R.F. Foster, Modern Ireland, 1600-1972, (London, 1988), p.486.
5. Robinson, Dark days (Dublin, 1918).
6. Hajo Holborn, History of modern Germany, 1870-1945 (London, 1969), p.496.
7. The report of the Irish Convention which was presented by Plunkett to the British government in April 1918, ironically on the day that Lloyd George introduced the military service bill in the house of commons. See Digby, Horace Plunkett, p.238.
8. Robinson, Curtain up, p.109.
9. J. C. Beckett The making of modern Ireland, 1603-1923 (London, 1981 ed.), p.444.
10. idem.
11. CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee', 30 Apr. 1918 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/5).
12. Robinson, Curtain up, p.109.
13. CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee', 8 Jan. 1919 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/6).
14. Robinson to Douie, 10 Aug. 1918 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/7).
15. CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee', 19 Dec. 1918 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/5).
16. Hetherington to Struthers, 20 Mar. 1919 (SRO, CUKT

papers, GD 281/5/211).

17. Lady Gregory's Journals ed. Daniel Murphy (London, 1978), i, p.52.
18. Robinson, Curtain up, p.110.
19. Munster News, 15 Feb. 1919.
20. Robinson to Hetherington, 15 Feb. 1919 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/31).
21. Munster News 15 Feb. 1919.
22. Limerick Leader, 19 Feb. 1919.
23. Robinson to Hetherington, 4 Apr. 1919 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/31).
24. Limerick Leader, 15 Aug. 1919.
25. CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee', 8 July 1919 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/211).
26. *ibid.*, CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee', 14 Oct.1919.
27. Robinson, Curtain up, p.111.
28. Beckett, The making of modern Ireland, p.445.
29. Keyse, 'CUKT rural library experiments', p.224.
30. Adams, Report on library provision and policy, p.79.
31. Keyse, *op. cit.*, p.225.
32. CUKT, Seventh annual report, 1920, (Edinburgh, 1921), p.9.

33. Keyse, op. cit., p.224.
34. C. L. Mowat, Britain between the wars, 1918-1940 (London, 1968 ed.), p.208.
35. Keyse, op. cit., p.225.
36. Public Libraries Act, 1919 (9 and 10 Geo. V. c 93).
37. Public Libraries (Scotland) Act, 1920 (10 and 11 Geo. V. c 45).
38. CUKT, 'Minutes of the annual general meeting', 25 Feb. 1920 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD281/1/7).
39. Dublin book repository file (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/211).
40. CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee' 30 July 1920 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/7).
41. ibid., CUKT 'Minutes of the library sub-committee', 12 Oct. 1920.
42. For the political and military events of the period, see Charles Townshend, The British campaign in Ireland, 1919-1921 (Oxford, 1975).
43. Quoted in James Gleeson, Bloody Sunday (London, 1963), p.9.
44. William Ewart, A Journey in Ireland, 1921 (London, 1922), p.6.
45. J.M. MacCarthy(ed.) Limerick's fighting story (Tralee, 1948), p.61.
46. IAOS premises, including creameries, were seen by the British authorities as centres of resistance and were singled out for reprisals. See Bolger, Irish co-

operative movement, p.210.

47. Limerick Leader, 26 July 1920.
48. Canon Lee to Mitchell, 31 July 1920 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/31).
49. Adams to CUKT, Sept. 1920 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD281/1/7).
50. *ibid.*, CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee,' 12 Oct. 1920.

#### CHAPTER SIX (pp190-239)

1. CUKT, 'Minutes of the annual general meeting', 4 Mar. 1921 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/8).
2. *ibid.*, CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee', 5 May 1921.
3. *ibid.*, CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee', 15 July 1921.
4. Lady Gregory's journals, ed. Murphy, i, p.275.
5. Public Libraries (Ireland) Act, 1920 (10 and 11 Geo V. c 25).
6. CUKT, Proceedings of the Irish library conference, 26-29 June 1923 (Dublin, 1923), p.75.
7. *idem.*
8. Plunkett to Robinson, 6 Apr. 1916 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/11/12).

9. Robinson to O'Doherty, 22 Nov. 1920 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/133).
10. *ibid*, O'Doherty to Robinson, 25 Nov. 1920.
11. Robinson, Curtain up, p.125. In November 1920 Robinson and McGreevy were reluctant hosts to Sean MacBride (Maud Gonne's son), and Ernie O'Malley, both of whom were 'on the run'. For three different accounts of what transpired see Robinson *op.cit.*, p.125, O'Malley On another man's wound (London, 1961 ed.), p.196 and an interview with Sean MacBride in Uinseann MacEoin (ed.), Survivors (Dublin, 1980), p.113.
12. J.A. Gaughan, Listowel and its vicinity, p. 478. Although known in later life as Thomas MacGreevy, during the period covered by this study he used the form McGreevy, and this form has been adopted throughout.
13. MacFadden to Robinson, 22 Dec. 1920 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/133).
14. Townshend, The British campaign in Ireland, 1919-1921, p.138.
15. Gaughan, *op. cit.*, p.389. Lennox Robinson, who visited the town on 9 March concurred. See Robinson to Mitchell 9 April 1921 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD281/5/211).
16. Government of Ireland Act, 1920 (10 and 11 Geo. V, c 87).
17. Robinson to MacFadden, 18 June 1921 (SRO, CUKT papers. GD 281/5/133).
18. *ibid*, MacFadden to Robinson, 24 June 1921.
19. *ibid.*, Robinson to Mitchell, 6 Oct. 1921.
20. J. D. Williams, Donegal county council: seventy five years (Lifford, 1924), p.114.
21. William Moore to Robinson, 28 Nov. 1921 (SRO, CUKT

papers, GD 281/5/133).

22. Anon., 'Obituary of Samuel J. Maguire' in An Leabharlann, New Series, xiii, no.2 (1955-56), p.65.
23. O'Connor, My father's son, p.15.
24. MacIntyre to McGreevy, 14 Dec. 1921 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/133).
25. *ibid.*, McDwyer to McGreevy, 12 Jan. 1922.
26. see Henry Boylan, Dictionary of Irish biography, (Dublin, 1978), p.215.
27. McGreevy to Rodgers, 30 Jan. 1922 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/133).
28. *ibid.*, Rodgers to McGreevy, 20 Feb. 1922.
29. Derry People, 3 Dec. 1921.
30. S.J. Maguire, 'Ireland's first county library' in CUKT, Proceedings of the Irish library conference, p.34.
31. Maguire to Robinson, 18 Mar. 1922 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/133).
32. Maguire, 'Ireland's first county library', p.34.
33. For the political and military events of the period, see Michael Hopkinson, Green against green: the Irish civil war (Dublin, 1988).
34. CUKT, 'Minutes of the Irish advisory committee', 13 Apr. 1922 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/222).
35. Maguire to McGreevy, 28 Apr. 1922 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/133).
36. *ibid.*, CUKT, 'Minutes of the Tirconnail Carnegie rural

- library committee', 23 May 1922.
37. Derry People, 3 June 1922.
  38. Maguire to Robinson, 30 May 1922 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/133).
  39. Derry People, 15 July 1922.
  40. A copy of this circular was enclosed with a letter from MacIntyre to Robinson dated 19 November 1923. (SRO, CUKT papers GD 281/5/133).
  41. *ibid.*, Robinson to MacIntyre, 15 July 1922.
  42. *ibid.*, Maguire to Robinson, undated.
  43. Peadar O'Donnell, The gates flew open (London, 1932), p.95.
  44. MacIntyre to Robinson, 25 July 1922 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/133).
  45. *ibid.*, CUKT, 'Minutes of the Tirconnail Carnegie rural library committee', 24 Oct. 1922.
  46. Lady Gregory's journals, ed. Murphy, i, p.338.
  47. Derry People, 23 Dec. 1922.
  48. Maguire, 'Ireland's first county library', p.34.
  49. Maguire to Robinson, 9 June 1923 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/133).
  50. The 1911 Census records the population of County Donegal as 168,537.
  51. This list was forwarded to McGreevy by MacIntyre on 7 Aug. 1923. The centre at Bundoran was evidently



established during the autumn of 1923, as it does not appear on the list. (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/133).

52. *ibid.*, 'I have got hold of a promising young man, Wilson by name. He has no library training, but would be alright after six months' - Robinson to Maguire, 11 June 1923.
53. *ibid.*, MacIntyre to Robinson, 31 Oct. 1923.
54. *ibid.*, MacIntyre to McGreevy, 16 Sept. 1923.
55. *ibid.*, Robinson to Clarke, 20 Nov. 1923.
56. *ibid.*, MacIntyre to Robinson, 20 Dec. 1923.
57. Derry People, 23 Feb. 1924.
58. Sean Bohan, 'The Donegal county library service' in An Leabharlann, New Series, xiii, no.2 (1955-56), p.84.
59. Robinson to MacIntyre, 3 Mar. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/133).
60. CUKT, 'Minutes of the Irish advisory committee', 16 Jan. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/222).
61. Frizelle to Robinson, 17 June 1921 (SRO, CUKT papers GD 281/5/140).
62. CUKT, 'Minutes of the Irish advisory committee', 10 Nov. 1921 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD281/5/222).
63. Patrick Buckland, A history of Northern Ireland (Dublin, 1981), p.46.
64. R. J. Lawrence The government of Northern Ireland (Oxford, 1965), pp34-5.
65. Buckland, *op. cit.*, pp32-3.

66. Hetherington (ed.), 'Glimpses at the rural library problem, part two', p.16.
67. Buckland, op. cit., p.3, quotes the following percentages based on the 1911 census returns for county Antrim: total population: 193,864: Catholics: 39,751 (20.5%); Non-Catholics: 154,113 (79.5%).
68. P. F. Gillies, 'Technical instruction in Ballymena' in Journal of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, viii, no.2 (1907-8), pp260-72.
69. for biographical details see Who was who, 1916-1928, p.435.
70. Ballymena Observer, 21 Oct. 1921.
71. Mrs Montgomery to Robinson, 3 Feb. 1922 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/132).
72. Ballymena Observer, 3 Mar. 1922.
73. Buckland, op. cit., p.32.
74. Mrs. Montgomery to McGreevy, 6 Mar. 1922 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/132).
75. Larne UDC, (the other urban district in the county), had adopted the public libraries act in 1906, and established a library with the assistance of £2,500 granted by Carnegie. This library did not participate in the experimental scheme.
76. Ballymena Observer, 10 Mar. 1922.
77. Robinson to Roy, 21 Apr. 1922 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/132).
78. *ibid.*, Roy to Robinson, 14 Aug. 1922.

79. *ibid.*, Plunkett to Londonderry, 7 Sept. 1922.
80. *ibid.*, CUKT, 'Minutes of the County Antrim Carnegie rural libraries committee', 12 Jan. 1923.
81. *ibid.*, Roy to Robinson, 31 Jan. 1923.
82. *ibid.*, Roy to McGreevy, 19 Mar. 1923.
83. *ibid.*, CUKT, 'Minutes of the County Antrim Carnegie rural libraries committee', 2 June 1923.
84. Northern Ireland Senate debates, 3 (1923), 180.
85. CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee', 23 July 1923 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/10).
86. Robinson to Bernard, 14 June 1923 (NLI, Documents of the CUKT Irish advisory committee, MS 10.542).
87. Mrs. Montgomery to Robinson, 21 Apr. 1923 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/132).
88. Ballymena Observer, 21 Sept. 1923.
89. Greer to Roy, 21 Nov. 1923 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/132).
90. *ibid.*, Roy to Robinson, 24 Nov. 1923.
91. Northern Ireland Senate debates, 4 (1924), 54.
92. CUKT, Tenth annual report, 1923 (Edinburgh, 1924), p.26.
93. Maguire to Robinson, 6 Feb. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers GD 281/5/134).
94. Northern Ireland Senate debates, 4 (1924), 33.

95. Ballymena Observer, 21 Mar. 1924.
96. CUKT, County libraries in Great Britain and Ireland, reports, 1925 (Edinburgh, 1926), p.52.
97. This list was forwarded to Robinson by Roy on 16 July 1923. (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/132).
98. Ballymena Observer, 28 Mar. 1924.
99. ibid., 11 Apr. 1924.
100. Who was who, 1941-1950, p.784.
101. Northern Ireland House of Commons debates, 4 (1924), 721.
102. ibid, 723.
103. Maguire to Robinson, 28 Apr. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers GD 281/5/136).
104. Northern Ireland House of Commons debates, 4 (1924), 726.
105. Public Libraries Act (Northern Ireland), 1924 (15 and 16 Geo. V, c 10).
106. Ballymena Observer, 23 May 1924.
107. Antrim county library: fifty years of service, 1922-1972, (Ballymena, 1972), p.4.
108. Robinson to Roy, 30 July 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers GD 281/5/50).
109. ibid., Maguire to Robinson, 8 Sept. 1924.
110. ibid., Robinson to Patrick, 22 Sept. 1924.

CHAPTER SEVEN (pp 240 - 261)

1. Robinson to Frizelle, 20 Mar. 1922 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/140).
2. *ibid.*, Frizelle to Robinson, 4 Apr. 1922.
3. CUKT, 'Minutes of the Irish advisory committee', 13 Apr. 1922 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD281/5/222).
4. Frizelle to Robinson, 26 July 1922 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/140).
5. *ibid.*, Robinson to Bernard, 14 Nov. 1922.
6. J.M. Mitchell, Report on the public library system of Great Britain and Ireland, 1921-3 (Edinburgh, 1924) pp 58-9.
7. Adams, Report on library provision and policy, pp66-7.
8. Casteleyn, History of literacy and libraries in Ireland, p.119.
9. Hetherington (ed.), 'Glimpses at the rural library problem, part two', p.3.
10. CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee', 8 May 1923 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/10).
11. Library Association Record, vi, no. 2 (1906), p.104.
12. Hetherington (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.18.
13. for biographical details see Terence Brown, Ireland's literature, selected essays (Mullingar, 1988), pp141-51, and for Phibbs's United Arts Club involvement, Boylan, All cultivated people, pp.135-7.
14. O'Connor, My father's son, p.5.

15. Robinson, Curtain up, pp110-11.
16. Dermot Foley, 'Librarians as authors, an uncritical review' in An Leabharlann xviii, no. 3 (1960), p.112.
17. Robinson to Maguire, 11 June 1923 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/133).
18. John Hewett, 'R.N.D. Wilson, 1899-1953', in Dublin Magazine, xxix, no. 2 (1953), p.55.
19. Brown, Ireland's literature, p.143.
20. Personal communication from Helen Roe. Unfortunately Miss Roe died on 28 May 1988.
21. Robinson to Butler, 15 Aug. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/136).
22. Personal communication from Hubert Butler, 26 Feb. 1989.
23. O'Connor, My father's son, p.5
24. CUKT, 'Minutes of the Irish advisory committee', 13 Sept. 1923 (SRO, CUKT papers GD281/5/222).
25. *ibid.*, CUKT, 'Minutes of the Irish advisory committee', 19 Nov. 1921.
26. CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee', 15 Dec. 1922 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/9).
27. CUKT, Tenth annual report, p.21
28. Lady Gregory's Journals, ed. Murphy, i, p.338.
29. Robinson, Curtain up, pp 134-5. See also Digby, Horace Plunkett, p.255.

30. CUKT, Ninth annual report, 1922 (Edinburgh, 1923), p.xi.
31. Robinson to Bernard, 12 Apr. 1923 (NLI, Documents of the CUKT Irish advisory committee, MS 10.542).
32. CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee', 18 May 1923 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/10).
33. See Hopkinson, Green against green, pp 256-8.
34. CUKT, Tenth annual report, p.26.
35. CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee', 27 July 1923 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/10). A music and physical welfare sub-committee was established to initiate schemes in these areas.
36. Mitchell to Robinson, 31 July 1923 (NLI, Documents of the CUKT Irish advisory committee, MS 10.542).
37. Robinson to Butler, 22 Sept. 1923 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/132).
38. *ibid.*, Wilson to Robinson, 11 Aug. 1923.
39. *ibid.*, Wilson to Robinson, 15 Apr. 1924.
40. *ibid.*, Robinson to Bernard, 9 Apr. 1924. (NLI, Documents of the CUKT Irish advisory committee Ms 10.542).
41. O'Byrne to McGreevy, 21 Jan. 1924 (SRO CUKT papers, GD 281/5/139).
42. *ibid.*, Ryan to McGreevy, 28 May 1924.
43. Mitchell, Report on the public library system, p.lxxvi.
44. Robinson to Byrne, 7 June 1923 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/61).

281/5/61).

45. Edward P. McCarron was a career civil servant who had entered the civil service in 1896 at the age of fifteen. Called to the bar in 1914, he was senior auditor in the Department of Local Government in 1922 and was appointed secretary of the Department in 1924. He held this position until December 1936 when he was abruptly removed from office by the then Minister of local government, Sean T. O'Ceallaigh, as a result of controversy over the appointment of a senior medical officer in the public health service. ( Department of Local Government, Appointment of secretary. N.A. (SPO), 6744).
46. Robinson to Maguire, 21 Feb. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/134).
47. CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee', 17 Oct. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/11).
48. Christina Keogh, 'Annual report of the Dublin book repository', 31 Dec. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD281/5/211).
49. CUKT, Eleventh annual report, 1924 (Edinburgh, 1925), p.31.
50. Robinson to Bernard, 4 June 1923 (NLI, Documents of the CUKT Irish advisory committee, MS 10.542).
51. CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee', 17 Oct. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD281/1/11).
52. idem.
53. Robinson, 'Memorandum on the future policy in Ireland of the Carnegie Trust', 24 Sept. 1924 (NLI, Documents of the CUKT Irish advisory committee, MS 10.542).

#### CHAPTER EIGHT (pp 262 - 291)

1. Catholic Bulletin, 1, no. 1 (1911), p.1.



2. Terence Brown, Ireland: a social and cultural history, 1922-79 (London, 1981), p. 71.
3. *ibid.*, p.72.
4. L. P. Curtis jnr. 'The Anglo-Irish predicament', p.62.
5. See Boylan, All cultivated people, especially Chapters fourteen and fifteen for the events of the period.
6. W. B. Stanford, A recognised church: the Church of Ireland in Eire (Dublin, 1944), p.16.
7. Mitchell to Bernard, 1 Oct. 1923 (TCDL Bernard papers, Ms 2388-93).
8. *ibid.*, Bernard to Plunkett, 15 Oct. 1923.
9. *ibid.*, Michell to Bernard, 20 Oct. 1923.
10. Lady Gregory's journals, ed. Murphy, i,p.484.
11. Patrick J. Corish The Irish Catholic experience: a historical survey, p.244.
12. Cumann na nGaedheal was established in April 1923 by Sinn Fein T.D.s who had supported the treaty of 1921. Led by President (a title analogous to prime minister), William Cosgrave, it held power until 1932.
13. Hoppen, Ireland since 1800, p.233.
14. Censorship of Films Act, 1923 (no. 23 of 1923).
15. R. S. Devane, 'Indecent literature: some legal remedies' in Irish Ecclesiastical Record, Ser.5, xxv (Feb. 1925), p.183.
16. Robinson to Butler, 23 Sept. 1923 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/132).

17. Robinson to Mrs Lambert Roe, 2 July 1924. I am grateful to the late Helen Roe for showing me this letter.
18. Robinson, 'National taste: a talk delivered at the Abbey theatre', ca.1918, p.12 (Southern Illinois University, Morris Library special collections, Robinson papers, folder 115).
19. See Seamus O Saothrai, 'Brinsley MacNamara, 1890-1963' in Irish Booklore, ii, no.1 (1972), pp 75-80.
20. Robinson, Curtain up, p.135.
21. McGreevy travelled to Clonmel on 2 July to attend a meeting of the South Riding council where a motion requesting an experimental library scheme was on the agenda. However, as Robinson wrote to E. P. McCarron on 9 September, his journey was in vain - 'alas the first six or seven items on the agenda were concerned with roads, ROADS, and he was somewhere about twenty fifth, so you can easily imagine the result. When the meeting was adjourned at four o'clock only item five had been reached'. (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/139).
22. Robinson to Wilson, 1 Aug. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/137).
23. Maguire to Robinson, 26 Sept. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/134).
24. Irish Independent, 31 July 1924.
25. Dolly Travers-Smith was one of a number of women painters who joined the United Arts Club in the early 1920s. Another was Norah McGuinness, later to become one of the most outstanding of modern Irish painters. In the mid-1920s she married Geoffrey Phibbs. The marriage was short-lived, and its break up in 1929 led Phibbs to leave the library service and also, as a gesture of defiance to his disapproving family, to adopt his mother's surname, Taylor. See Boylan, All cultivated people, pp135-6. Although Robinson did not marry until 1931, his nephew, Sean Dorman, remembers Dolly Travers-Smith as a guest at garden parties in Kilteragh. See Sean Dorman, My uncle Lennox (Fowey,

- 1986), p.5.
26. Quoted in The Catholic Bulletin, xiv, no.11 (1924), p.930.
  27. Lady Gregory's journals, ed. Murphy, i, p.563.
  28. *ibid.*, p.584.
  29. Wilson to Robinson, 18 Sept. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/137).
  30. McCarron to Robinson 15 Sept. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/139).
  31. CUKT, 'Minutes of the Irish advisory committee' 24 Sept. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/222).
  32. *ibid.*, CUKT, 'Minutes of the Irish advisory committee' 22 Oct. 1924.
  33. Finlay to Bernard, 6 Oct. 1924 (TCDL, McGreevy papers, 8143).
  34. *ibid.*, McGreevy to O'Brien, 15 Oct. 1924.
  35. See Lady Gregory's journals, ed. Murphy, i, pp 591-3 for an account of this meeting.
  36. Robinson to Finlay, 16 Oct. 1924 (TCDL, McGreevy papers, 8103).
  37. CUKT, 'Minutes of the Irish advisory committee' 22 Oct. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/222).
  38. Irish Independent, 20 Oct. 1924.
  39. Catholic Bulletin, xiv, no.12 (1924), p.1021.

40. Irish Rosary, xxviii, no.11 (1924), p.373.
41. Finlay to Bernard, 30 Oct. 1924 (TCDL, McGreevy papers, 8103).
42. Lady Gregory's journals, ed. Murphy, i, p.605.
43. CUKT, 'Minutes of the Irish advisory committee' 19 Nov. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 291/5/222).
44. Dail Eireann debates 9 (1924), 1903.
45. O'Connor, My father's son, p.16.
46. Robinson to McGreevy, 18 Dec. 1924 (TCDL, McGreevy papers, 8103).
47. Irish Times, 23 Dec. 1924.
48. Fr. Coleman to Florence Harrison, 19 Dec. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/135).
49. Wilson to Robinson, 22 Dec. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/137).
50. Catholic Bulletin, xiv, no.12 (1924), p.1021.
51. x.y.z, 'The Carnegie Trust', in Irish Rosary, xxviii, no.12 (1924), p.954.
52. Plunkett to Robinson, 18 Dec. 1924 (TCDL, McGreevy papers, 8103).
53. CUKT, 'Minutes of the Irish sub-committee', 26 Feb. 1925 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/12).
54. Lady Gregory's journals, ed. Murphy, i, p.614.

55. Robinson, Curtain up, p.135
56. Personal communication from Hubert Butler.
57. O'Connor, My father's son, p.8. It was this affair that made O'Donovan adopt the pseudonym of 'Frank O'Connor' for his subsequent writing career.
58. Harrison to McGreevy, 6 Dec. 1924 (TCDL, McGreevy papers, 8143).
59. Maguire to Mitchell, 1 Jan. 1925 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/134).
60. *ibid.*, Maguire to Mitchell, 15 Jan. 1925.
61. *ibid.*, Maguire to Mitchell, 3 Feb. 1925.
62. Wilkinson to Mitchell, 29 Dec. 1924 (TCDL, McGreevy papers, 8143).
63. Personal communication from the late Helen Roe.
64. MacIntyre to Mitchell, 25 Sept. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/56).
65. Ambrose Coleman, 'Our reading public and the Carnegie libraries' in Irish Ecclesiastical Record, Ser.5, xxv (Apr. 1925), pp357-72.
66. Harrison to McGreevy, 16 Feb. 1925 (TCDL, McGreevy papers, 8143).
67. Robinson to Wilson, 23 Dec. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD281/5/137).
68. Keogh to Mitchell, 7 Jan. 1925 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/211).
69. *ibid.*, Keogh to Mitchell, 28 Sept. 1925.

70. CUKT, 'Minutes of a meeting at 32, Merrion Square, Dublin', 18 July 1925 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/211).
71. CUKT, 'Minutes of the Irish sub-committee', 26 Feb. 1925 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/12).
72. Williams, Donegal county council, seventy five years, p.39.
73. McGreevy to Mitchell, 5 Mar. 1925 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/56).
74. CUKT, 'Minutes of the Irish sub-committee,'. 26 Feb. 1925 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/12).
75. Mitchell to McGreevy, 5 Mar. 1925 (TCDL, McGreevy papers, 8143).
76. ibid., McGreevy to Mitchell, 11 Mar. 1925.
77. Robinson to McGreevy, 28 June 1925 (TCDL, McGreevy papers, 8103).
78. CUKT, 'Minutes of the Irish sub-committee', 1 July 1925 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD281/1/12).
79. Local Government Act, 1925, (no.5 of 1925).
80. Dick Roche, Local government in Ireland, (Dublin, 1982), p.51.
81. Local Government Act, 1925, section 65, paragraph one.
82. Mitchell to Maguire, 29 May 1925 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/134).
83. CUKT, 'Minutes of a meeting at 32, Merrion Square, Dublin', 18 July 1925 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/211).
84. Mitchell to secretary, Kerry county council, 8 July 1925 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/61).

85. Digby, Horace Plunkett, p.257.
86. Plunkett to Mitchell, 10 July 1925 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/211).
87. H. A. Izant 'The Co-operative Reference Library' in Yearbook of Agriculture Co-operation, (1941), p.290.

#### CHAPTER NINE (pp292-345)

1. CUKT, First annual report, p.4.
2. CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee', 30 June 1925 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/12).
3. A copy of this circular is included in the Kerry county library file (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/61).
4. CUKT, Twelfth annual report, 1926 (Edinburgh, 1927), p.28.
5. Thomas Armitage, 'The county library movement' in Library World, lxxv (Sept. 1963), p.104.
6. in a television interview broadcast on RTE1, 22 March 1990. See also his autobiography Just like yesterday (Dublin, 1986), especially chapter three.
7. Wilson to Mitchell, 7 Feb. 1927 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD281/10/96).
8. *ibid.*, Mitchell to McCarron, 19 Apr. 1927.
9. R. N. D. Wilson, The county library service in Ireland: a summary for the guidance of local authorities, and for the general reader. (Edinburgh, 1927).
10. Christina Keogh, Report on public library provision in the Irish Free State, (Dublin, 1936), p.6.

11. CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee', 11 Mar. 1927 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/222).
12. *ibid.*, Keogh to Mitchell, 28 Dec. 1926.
13. *ibid.*, Keogh to Mitchell, 28 Aug. 1928.
14. *ibid.*, Keogh to Mitchell, 27 Mar. 1928.
15. *ibid.*
16. *ibid.*, Keogh to Mitchell, 22 May 1928.
17. Hubert Butler, 'The county libraries and the censorship', in Irish Writing, viii (1949), p.69.
18. Mitchell to Hugh O'Neill, 20 Mar. 1930 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/50).
19. Wray to Mitchell, 8 June 1928 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/10/97).
20. Butler, 'The county libraries and the censorship', p.68.
21. The Irish Texts Society was established in 1898 for the purpose of publishing annotated translations of Irish texts, principally dating from the Middle Ages. Its publications were academic, aimed at historians and philologists.
22. Butler, *op. cit.*, p.68. Ironically, the individual so described was a relative of John Kells Ingram, the first vice-president of Cumann na Leabharlann. Personal communication by Hubert Butler, 26 Feb. 1989.
23. Lionel McColvin (ed.), A survey of libraries: reports on a survey made by the Library Association during 1936-7 (London, 1938), p.32.
24. Belfast Newsletter, 25 Mar. 1927.



25. CUKT, Fourteenth annual report, 1927 (Edinburgh, 1928), pp20-2.
26. Report of the departmental committee on libraries in Northern Ireland, [C 101], H. C. Northern Ireland, 1929.
27. *ibid.*, p.5.
28. *ibid.*, p.8.
29. *ibid.*, p.10.
30. CUKT, Sixteenth annual report, 1929 (Edinburgh, 1930), p.30.
31. See above, p.158.
32. CUKT. Fourth annual report, 1917, p.21.
33. Robertson, Welfare in trust, p.77.
34. *ibid.*, p.85.
35. CUKT, Fourteenth annual report, 1927, p.8.
36. CUKT, Seventeenth annual report, 1930 (Edinburgh, 1931), p.89.
37. Report on public libraries in England and Wales presented by the president of the Board of Education to parliament, May 1927, 99 [c2868], H. C., 1926-7, xii, 329.
38. CUKT, 'Minutes of the executive committee', 10 July 1926 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/13).
39. CUKT, Thirteenth annual report, 1926 (Edinburgh, 1927), p.105.

40. CUKT, Seventeenth annual report, p.89.
41. CUKT, 'Minutes of the policy committee', 11 Oct. 1929 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/16).
42. Christina Keogh, 'Cumann Leabharlann na hEireann: a survey', in An Leabharlann, New Series, iii, no.4 (1933), p.98.
43. Keogh, Report on public library provision, p.10.
44. Casteleyn, History of literacy and libraries in Ireland, p.212.
45. CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee', 16 May 1930 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/17).
46. Maguire to Mitchell. 31 Oct. 1925 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/134).
47. Connacht Tribune, 7 Nov. 1925.
48. Maguire to Mitchell, 14 Nov. 1915 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/134).
49. CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee, 13 May 1927 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/14).
50. Mitchell to O'Donnell, 11 Apr. 1929 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/66).
51. Limerick Leader, 27 Apr. 1929.
52. for an account of this meeting see the Kerryman, 13 July 1929.
53. McCarron to McCormack, 18 Sept. 1929 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/66).
54. *ibid.*, Mitchell to O'Donnell, 27 Oct. 1930.

55. Doyle, 'Limerick county library', p.20.
56. CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee', 15 Dec. 1933 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/20).
57. Max Broome, 'Forty years of development: the growth of county library services', in Library Association Record, xci, no.8 (1989), p. 456.
58. CUKT, Eighteenth annual report, 1931 (Edinburgh, 1932), p.4.
59. Robertson, Welfare in trust, p.119.
60. Kelly, History of public libraries in Great Britain, p. 264.
61. Munford, Penny rate, pp120-1.
62. Robert MacLeod, County rural libraries (London, 1923)., p.120.
63. McColvin, (ed.), Survey of libraries, p.30.
64. Casteleyn, History of literacy and libraries in Ireland, pp202-5.
65. Keogh, Report on public library provision, p.11.
66. Maguire 'County library headquarters in the Saorstat', in An Leabharlann, New Series, i, no.1 (1930-31), p.50.
67. Dermot Foley, 'A minstrel boy with a satchel of books', in Irish University Review, iv, no.2 (1974), p.207. To add to his dismay, he received a tin box containing two .45 bullets and a cryptic note: 'Get out of the county, you have a Clareman's job'.
68. Roisin Walsh, 'County Dublin library service', in An Leabharlann, New Series, i, no.1 (1930-31), p. 20.
69. Doyle, 'Limerick county library', p.20.

70. Ownership of the building reverted to the landowner, who used it as a cowshed. In April, 1990 this researcher visited the building together with Mr Maurice O'Connor of Grouse Lodge, Ardagh. The Kilcolman parish council hope to repair the building for use as a community centre.
71. CUKT, Sixteenth annual report, p.18.
72. Janet Tomlin, 'Side lights on book selection', in Library Association Record, Ser 4, ii, no.10 (1935), p.450.
73. Alec Craig, The banned books of England (London, 1937), p.90.
74. Censorship of Publications Act, 1929 (No.21 of 1929).
75. Craig, op. cit., p.97.
76. Brown, Ireland: a social and cultural history, p.77.
77. Adams, Censorship in Ireland, p.71.
78. Foley, op. cit., p.211.
79. Limerick county library service, First annual report for the year ending 31 March 1936 (Limerick, 1936), p.7.
80. MacIntyre to Mitchell, 31 June 1929 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/56).
81. Munford, Penny rate, p.92. Munford was public librarian of Dover in the 1930s.
82. Report on public libraries in England and Wales, p. 253.
83. CUKT, County libraries in Great Britain and Ireland reports, 1925 (Edinburgh, 1926), p.42.
84. See, for example: W. C. Berwick Sayers, 'This fiction

- question', in Library World, xxxiv (1931-32), pp 131-3, and, in response, P. J. Lamb, 'This fiction question, another point of view', in ibid., pp147-8. The same issue was debated in Library Assistant, xxix (1936).
85. quoted in An Leabharlann, New Series, v, no.1 (1935), p.23.
86. Ballymena Observer, 1 June 1934.
87. Limerick county library service, First annual report, p.8.
88. I am grateful to Oliver Snoddy of 127, Strand Road, Dublin 4, for drawing my attention to this report.
89. Library Association Record, Ser.3, i, no.12 (1931), p.377.
90. Foley, op. cit., p.210.
91. J. H. Whyte, Church and state in modern Ireland, 1923 - 1970 (Dublin, 1971), p.47.
92. See, for example: Whyte, op. cit., pp44-7; J. J. Lee, Ireland, 1912-1985: politics and society (Cambridge, 1989), pp161-8; Paul Blanshard, The Irish and Catholic power: an American interpretation (Boston, 1953), pp110-2, and Kurt Bowen, Protestants in a Catholic state: Ireland's privileged minority (Dublin, 1988), p.36.
93. Lee, op. cit., p.161.
94. Egan to McGreevy, 1 Aug. 1924 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/69).
95. Connaught Telegraph, 28 Nov. 1925.
96. Mitchell to Egan, 22 Dec. 1925 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/69).
97. ibid., Wilson to Mitchell, 1 Dec. 1925.

98. Brigid Redmond, 'In the middle of county Mayo: organising the library', in Capuchin Annual, iii (1932), pp166-180.
99. McCarron to Mitchell, 8 Aug. 1927 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/69).
100. CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee', 13 May 1927 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/14).
101. Wilson to Mitchell, 1 Sept. 1927 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/69).
102. CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee', 9 Dec. 1927 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/14).
103. The Local Appointments Commission had been established by Cumann na nGaedheal in 1926. A branch of the Department of Local Government, it took over recruitment of senior staff for the local government service, which hitherto had been the responsibility of councillors.
104. Memorandum from Local Appointments Commission to President Cosgrave, 11 Feb. 1931 (NA (SPO) 2547).
105. Irish Independent, 31 Dec. 1930.
106. Connaught Telegraph, 6 December. 1930.
107. Dail Eireann debates, 36 (1930) 1341.
108. J. H. Whyte, op. cit., p.44.
109. Western People, 10 Jan. 1931.
110. Irish Independent, 7 Jan. 1931.
111. Western People, 23 Jan. 1931.
112. ibid., 5 Dec. 1931.

113. Catholic Standard 13 Dec. 1930.
114. Anon., 'The Mayo library crux', in The Catholic Mind, ii, no.1 (1931), pp3-5.
115. Catholic Bulletin, xxi, no. 2 (1931), p.98.
116. In 1926 the party was founded from the rump of the republicans, who had tired of abstention from Dail Eireann. Led by Eamon de Valera, they contested the 1927 general election and, having found a formula to accommodate the oath of allegiance to the crown, they took their seats and formed the main opposition to Cumann na nGaedheal. See J. A. Murphy, Ireland in the twentieth century, (Dublin, 1965), pp66-75.
117. Connacht Tribune, 29 Oct. 1928.
118. Gilmartin to Glynn, 4 Mar. 1931 (NA (SPO) 2547).
119. *ibid.*, Memorandum by William Cosgrave, 15 Apr. 1931.
120. Dail Eireann debates, 39 (1931) 431.
121. Irish Independent, 26 May 1931.
122. It is clear from the relevant file in the National Archives, as well as from various public pronouncements by clerical spokesmen, that concern about the employment of Protestant doctors in the general medical service was behind much of the Church's opposition to Miss Dunbar-Harrison.
123. Dail Eireann debates, 39 (1931), 518.
124. Memorandum by William Cosgrave, 24 Dec. 1931. (NA (SPO) 2547).
125. Western People, 23 Jan. 1932.
126. Irish Independent, 1 Jan. 1932.

127. Western People, 29 Jan. 1932.
128. *ibid.*, 7 May 1932.
129. *ibid.*, 4 Nov. 1933.
130. Times, 22 June 1932.
131. Sectarian influences were also at work in the Northern Ireland library service. The McColvin Report notes (p.32), that Belfast city library had to assign staff of an appropriate religious persuasion to branches in the various sectarian ghettos.
132. CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee', 8 May 1931 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/18).
133. Western People, 23 Jan. 1932.
134. Egan to Mitchell, 8 Feb. 1932 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/69).
135. CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee', 8 May 1931 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/18).
136. *idem.*
137. CUKT, 'Minutes of the policy committee', 6 June 1932 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/19).
138. CUKT, Nineteenth annual report, 1932 (Edinburgh, 1933), p.9.
139. quoted in Blanshard, The Irish and Catholic power, p.96.
140. CUKT, Twenty second annual report, 1935, (Edinburgh, 1936), p.22.
141. CUKT, 'Minutes of the policy committee', 8 Mar. 1935. (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/22).



142. Robertson Welfare in trust, p.113.
143. CUKT, Twenty third annual report, 1936 (Edinburgh, 1937), p.9.
144. Public Libraries Act, 1947 (No. 40 of 1947).
145. The CUKT did continue its assistance for specific projects. For example, in 1955 it funded a survey of the county library service conducted for the Chomhairle Leabharlanna by Dermot Foley and J. T. Dowling. An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, The improvement of public library services. Recommendations first series (Dublin, 1955).
146. R. V. Wright, 'County libraries during the reign: a brief survey of the past twenty five years' in Library Association Record, ser.4, ii, no.6 (1935), pp218-9.
147. CUKT, 'Minutes of the library sub-committee's 8 June 1934 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/1/21).
148. As late as 1955 only five counties had purpose built county library headquarters. See An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, op. cit., p.10.
149. R. W. 'County libraries' in Library Association Record, Ser 3, i, no.5 (1931), p.211.
150. Harold Speakman, Here's Ireland (New York, 1927), p.329.
151. Foley, 'A minstrel boy with a satchel of books', p.212.
152. MacIntyre to CUKT, August 1936 (SRO, CUKT papers, GD 281/5/56).
153. Redmond, 'In the middle of county Mayo; organising the library', p.179.
154. Kelly, History of public libraries in Great Britain, p. 209.

155. Robinson, 'How the county libraries began', in The Bell i (1970), pp31-2.
156. Foras Eireann/Carnegie United Kingdom Trust  
Interpretation: understanding our surroundings  
Proceedings of a seminar held at Malahide, county Dublin,  
April 1981 (Dublin, 1981).
157. Kaufman, 'Community lending libraries in eighteenth century Ireland and Wales', p.305.

#### ADDENDUM

Geoffrey Elborn's biography Francis Stuart: a life (Dublin, 1990), published too late for reference in the text, throws some light on the genesis of the literary review, Tomorrow, and further exonerates Lennox Robinson from any involvement with its editorial content. The review was the brainchild of Francis Stuart, Cecil Salkeld and the writer Liam O'Flaherty, all of whom, (but particularly Stuart), were disappointed with Cumann na nGaedheal's lack of commitment to the national culture. They were encouraged by W. B. Yeats, who planned to use Tomorrow as a vehicle to attack the political establishment without revealing his identity. Elborn notes that the editorial quoted on p.272 of this study, although signed by Stuart and Salkeld, was in fact written by Yeats. See Elborn, op. cit., pp64-70.

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This bibliography is organised in accordance with the plan followed in A New history of Ireland. This has been modified to suit the scope of the present study.

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## I. MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

### A Ireland

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Department of Local Government. Appointment of secretary. (SP 6744).

National Library of Ireland.

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Trinity College, Manuscript Library.

Bernard papers (MS 2388-MS 2398)

Dillon papers (Index).

McGreevy papers

Correspondence between Thomas McGreevy and Lennox and Dolly Robinson. (MS 8103)

Carnegie Trust county library service (MS 8143)

B. Great Britain

Edinburgh

Scottish Record Office

Carnegie United Kingdom Trust papers (GD281/1-GD281/13).

C. The U.S.A.

Carbondale, Illinois

Southern Illinois University (Morris Library, special collections).

Lennox Robinson papers. (Folder 115).

II. PRINTED PRIMARY SOURCES

A Records

1. Official Publications

(a) Statutes

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H.C. 1849 [548] xvii.

Report from the select committee on the public libraries  
(Ireland) act amendments bill...1894. H. C. 1894 [223]  
xv.

Return showing the names of all places in England, in  
Scotland, and in Ireland that have adopted the public  
libraries act. H. C. 1884-1885 [106], lxi, 267.

Return showing the names of all places in England, in  
Scotland, and in Ireland in which the public libraries  
acts have been adopted. H. C. 1890-1891 [5], lxi, 561.

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