

THE 4TH EARL OF DUNRAVEN, 1841–1926

A STUDY OF HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE EMERGING IRELAND
AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIL	All for Ireland League
CDB	Congested Districts Board
CCM	County Council Minutes (Limerick)
<i>CE</i>	<i>Cork Examiner</i>
CFP	Cork Free Press
DATI	Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction
DL	Direct Labour
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
FC	Finance Committee
<i>FJ</i>	<i>Freeman's Journal</i>
IAOS	Irish Agricultural Organisation Society
<i>IDI</i>	<i>Irish Daily Independent</i>
IFS	Irish Free State
<i>IHS</i>	<i>Irish Historical Studies</i>
ILC	Irish Landowners' Convention
ILLA	Irish Land and Labour Association
IPTS	Irish Protestant Tenantry Society
IRA	Irish Reform Association
<i>IT</i>	<i>Irish Times</i>
<i>ITTJ</i>	<i>Irish Tobacco Trade Journal</i>
<i>KEP</i>	<i>Kerry Evening Post</i>
<i>LC</i>	<i>Limerick Chronicle</i>

LCC	Land Conference Committee
LDA	Limerick Diocesan Archives
<i>LL</i>	<i>Limerick Leader</i>
LGB	Local Government Board
MLC	Minutes of Limerick Corporation
NAI	National Archives of Ireland
NLI	National Library of Ireland
PDA	Property Defence Association
PLG	Poor Law Guardian
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
RDC	Rural District Council
QCC	Queen's College, Cork
TCD	Trinity College, Dublin
UCC	University College, Cork
UCG	University College, Galway (now NUI Galway)
UIL	United Irish League
UL	University of Limerick

ABSTRACT

The 4th earl of Dunraven was born in Adare in 1841 into one of the wealthiest landed families in Ireland. Succeeding to the title in 1871 he was the quintessential Irish peer, engrossing himself in travel and adventure, interspersed with occasional, but highly significant, contributions in the house of lords.

His decision to contest the Croom division of Limerick County Council in 1899 marked the beginning of his public life, into which he packed, in twenty five short years, a lifetime of endeavour for Ireland, much of which ended in frustrating lack of success. The contest threw up many surprises, notably his tangle with Bishop O'Dwyer of Limerick over the want of higher education facilities for catholics, and an unavailing, but enterprising attempt, on behalf of his nationalist opponent, to snatch victory at the end of an unusual campaign. Though he never became chairman, which was one of his aims, he left his mark on council business, none more so than as an example to his fellow unionists that they, too, could and should aspire to serve their fellow countrymen on local bodies.

The second period of his active life showed remarkable acuity and resilience as he helped to steer the land conference of 1902 and the university imbroglio to successful conclusions. During that period, also, the trauma and difficulties attached, at that time, to the sale of his estate and the disposal of his village property in Croom, are manifested. Unusual for a landlord he, in conjunction with his new found soul mate and collaborator, William O'Brien, doggedly pressed for a resolution of the festering problem of the evicted tenants, the so-called walking wounded of the land war. One of his most endearing enterprises was his involvement in the resuscitated Irish tobacco industry but that venture, too, failed due to no fault on the part of the two pioneering entrepreneurs, Dunraven and Col Nugent Everard from County Meath.

The third part, taken chronologically, deals with matters political and was the least fruitful of his life's work and yet had the most potential. His unrelenting unionism, a credo he adhered to until the early 1920s, coupled with his shifting of the political goalposts (he gave the land settlement precedence over home rule) earned him the undying antipathy of the Irish Party and the nationalist press. His proposals, in 1904, for wide administrative reform, under the banner of the Irish Reform Association, floundered on the narrow rock of devolution. Despised by the nationalists he failed to win over any appreciable number of

unionists to the new policy of conciliation. He failed, also, to divert the Ulster unionists from their path of separation. Abhorring partition, he, more than anyone else, before and after the Great War, continually suggested workable and practical remedies for Ireland's ills, but they fell on deaf ears as, by then, Dunraven had become a nonentity, accentuated by his strong support, during the war years, firstly for recruiting and, later, his advocacy of conscription. A realist at heart, in the early 1920s, he accepted the establishment of the Irish Free State as the best solution available at that time.

This is the first attempt to chronicle the life-work of Dunraven, a worthy representative of a gallant band of Irishmen whose attempts to meaningfully contribute to the emerging Ireland of the first two decades of the last century were despised at the time, and neglected and unrecorded since.

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INTRODUCTION

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Windham Thomas Wyndham-Quin, the fourth earl of Dunraven and Mountearl was born, appropriately though perhaps fortuitously, in Adare Manor on 12 February 1841, the only son of six children of the then Viscount Adare and his wife, Augusta Goold. The Quins, who in ancient times were the hereditary chiefs of Inchiquin in County Clare (the surname Wyndham was added in 1815) were among the few families who successfully made the transition from Gaelic chieftain to anglo-Irish titled ascendancy. It was Donogh Quin who, by means of some shrewd business transactions, partly funded by a judicious marriage, began the revival of the family fortunes by leasing, in 1683, extensive property, owned by the earl of Kildare, along the banks of the River Maigue at Adare and Croom. After 1721 his grandson, Valentine, began the process of outright purchase of these and adjacent lands. When the family was advanced in the peerage in 1822 the title chosen represented a combination of the Irish and recently-acquired Welsh connection. The name Mountearl is local to Adare while Dunraven (meaning in Welsh a triangular fortress) was adopted in recognition of the considerable fortune and property that Caroline Wyndham, Dunraven Castle, near Bridgend, Glamorganshire, brought to the family on her marriage to Windham Henry [later the second earl] in 1810.

The young Windham Thomas generally lived in Dunraven Castle until 1850 when his father, Edwin succeeded as third earl and he became Viscount Adare. For the next decade or so Adare Manor was the family home. The even tenor of the life of the young Adare was shattered in 1855 when his father, following the example of his brother-in-law, William Monsell (afterwards the first Baron Emly), and under the influence of John Henry Newman and the Oxford Movement, converted to Catholicism. This event had serious implications for the young boy as his father also wished his heir to convert and, to that end, sent him to a private school in Ireland and later entrusted him to the care of different Catholic tutors, before enrolling him for a period in a school in Rome. All however was to no avail for the boy, encouraged by his low-church Protestant mother, resisted all efforts at conversion. That period of his life fostered in him a stubborn streak of independence and obduracy, qualities that he demonstrated many times in his later life. The hitherto warm relationship between himself and his father was fractured while the whole episode engendered in him a dislike for

any class of formal religious observance [though in his twenties he dabbled in and always afterwards took an interest in Spiritualism] and a certain distain for bishop, priest or clergyman whenever they strayed from matters of faith and morals into secular affairs.

Dunraven's early education was thus badly fragmented. This was something he regretted in later life as he felt the loss of 'the education, the discipline, and the wholesome training of Eton, or any other great public school, and the intimate friendships that spring from public school life.'¹ Notwithstanding the lack of formal second-level education and in deference to the wishes of his father, himself a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, the young Adare matriculated at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1858, at what he himself described as 'a ridiculously early age - not yet seventeen'. Three years of university life left its mark, not in the conventional sense of academic achievement but in developing and nurturing his life-long interest in sport.² He hunted in winter; played cricket and real tennis in summer, and mostly spent the rest of his time punting and boating on the River Isis – which, in a special sense, became for him the university of yachting. It was at Christ Church, too, that he was first attracted to army life, becoming a member of the officer training corps there. Realising the futility of remaining at Oxford, Adare turned his attention to the army and received a commission as a cornet or sub-lieutenant in the 1st Life Guards. Now he had ample time to continue his interest in hunting, horse racing and yachting. Military service was largely uneventful, a tour of duty in Dublin as aide-de-camp to the earl of Kimberley, lord lieutenant from 1864 to 1866; while in Adare during the Fenian rising of March 1867 he was ordered to inspect police barracks in County Limerick and report upon their defensive capacity and, in his only engagement of a military nature, he was present with his troop at the so-called Battle of Hyde Park on 23 July 1866.

Adare's attention was drawn, in 1867, to possible British intervention in the internal affairs of the then Abyssinia. He immediately volunteered for service but as no soldiers from England were being sent there, he contrived to get an invitation to go and act as war correspondent for the London *Daily Telegraph*. The army authorities refused to grant him leave of absence, so he promptly resigned his commission and set off. He made a success of

1 Dunraven, *Past times and pastimes* (London, n.d. [1922]), i, p. 9. Material for this section is also taken from Milo Spillane (ed.), *Adare Manor Golf Club, 1900-2000, a centurial record* (Adare, 2000); Matthew Potter, *A Catholic unionist, the life and times of William Monsell, 1812-1894* (Limerick, 1994); *Sneem, the knot in the ring*, n.d.[1976]; *Dictionary of national biography*; Dunraven papers, UL, D 3196/G/2/1.

2 Dunraven also developed an enduring interest in outdoor pursuits such as fishing and fowling, while, in his mid fifties, he first encountered the game of golf and, before long, he had converted part of the demesne lands, adjacent to the Manor, into a private golf links.

that role though he had no journalistic experience or training. A few years later, in 1870-71, he reported for that same newspaper on the Franco-Prussian war and was present when peace was signed at Versailles in May 1871.

The uneasy truce between father and son was put under strain after 1862, the year that the heir came of age. In order to fund his many activities Adare found that his allowance from his father was not commensurate with his status as heir to a vast and valuable inheritance. The father, somewhat disingenuously, pleaded inability to increase the allowance at that time. Yet he had expended a considerable sum on the building of the Catholic church at Sneem, County Kerry [1865]; had included in his will, the sum of £2,000 in trust to Bishop Butler and William Monsell for such purposes as they might choose [the money was expended in 1884 on building the boys' chapel in Mungret College], while smaller sums of money, though on a regular basis, were spent on the improvement of the Catholic church and parish of Adare, on the upkeep of the parish clergy and to succour parishioners and tenants, either land or house tenants, whenever hardship came their way. The matter came to a head on the marriage of Adare in 1869 to Florence Elizabeth Kerr. In an effort to broker a settlement, Monsell was one of a number of arbiters suggested but was not acceptable to the younger man who retained a firm of solicitors in London to process his claim before a court of law. This was the position when Edwin, the 3rd earl, died unexpectedly at a health resort in Great Malvern in the Cotswolds on 6 October 1871.

Despite their differences, Dunraven and his father, Edwin, had much in common. Both were of a scholarly disposition, Edwin in the fields of archaeology and ancient Irish history and mythology; the son in the areas of journalism and literature; both expressed their love of the Irish people, at a local and more parochial level in the case of the father [though this might be equated with the patrician instincts of the family], while the son strove for an Ireland, contented and prosperous. Edwin and Monsell, under the influence of the Second Reformation and having seen the efficacious work of the Irish Society in Ventry, County Kerry, in the 1830s, were instrumental in founding St. Columba's Irish Collegiate School in Dublin in the early 1840s where Irish speaking clergymen were to be trained to continue the work of converting Irish papists into loyal and contented protestants. The younger man worked unceasingly for an Ireland where the land was farmed by its owners, where standards of living were raised by the provision of employment and where greater educational opportunities were available for all, and where the people themselves managed the affairs of the country through the medium of a legislature in Dublin.

In the early years of the last century a group of southern unionists, mostly ex-landlords, attempted to shape the course of the emerging Ireland. Standing head and shoulders above that intrepid group was Windham Thomas Wyndham-Quin, the 4th earl of Dunraven, ex-landlord, philosopher, political theorist, writer, indefatigable worker for Ireland and, above all, realist. In concert with his upbringing and background he strove to improve the lot and life, not of the inhabitants of Adare and its hinterland, as his forefathers had done many times in the past, but of the Irish people as a whole. Yet, for all his endeavours, he remains as forgotten today as surely as his ameliorative exertions were spurned during his lifetime. In the burgeoning canon of modern historiography he has been consigned to the realm of footnotes and, more often, not even that [a case in point is that he did not warrant inclusion in Brian Lalor (general ed.), *The encyclopaedia of Ireland* (Dublin, 2003)]. This dissertation, the first full-length study of the subject is, in essence, a journey into a ‘Hidden Ireland,’ the antithesis of the world of Daniel Corkery, as it attempts to claim for Dunraven his place among the nation-builders of modern Ireland.

One of the reasons for this neglect is the paucity of material in the Dunraven papers. The bulk of these are in the University of Limerick (those formerly held by PRONI), while the rest are in the private possession of two of Dunraven’s closest living relatives, Thady, the (7th) earl of Dunraven at Kilgobbin, Adare and the earl of Meath, at Kilruddery, Bray. In his autobiography, Dunraven, informs his readers that, in writing it, he mostly had to depend upon his memory, as he explained that in July 1894, his yacht, *Valkyrie II*, sank following a collision off Hunter’s Quay in the Firth of Clyde with the loss of valuable records, diaries and documents. While this may account for the deficiency prior to that year it does not explain the loss for the years 1900 to the 1920s, years in which Dunraven played an important, if not a seminal, role in Irish affairs. It is curious that much of the in-correspondence dealing with the brief Dunraven-O’Dwyer-Flanagan imbroglio of 1899 has survived, yet nothing remains of more intriguing and historically sensitive events such as the aftermath of the land conference, Dunraven’s involvement in the university settlement, in the devolution crisis of 1904 and in the Irish Convention of 1917-18. Some material survives in the John Redmond papers, covering the crucial pre-conference period at the end of 1902 and in the William O’Brien papers in both NLI and UCC. Dunraven and O’Brien corresponded regularly from 1903 to 1914. After that, communication stuttered as the first hiatus between them occurred.

Because Dunraven spent much time actively engaged in the war effort and advocated conscription (a step too far for O'Brien) so their correspondence virtually ceased. The final rupture occurred on Dunraven's decision to participate in the ill-fated Irish Convention of 1917-18. Historians owe a debt of gratitude to Sophie O'Brien, who copied, in a legible hand, many of her husband's letters (written in his usual indecipherable scribbling) to Dunraven. So close were Dunraven and O'Brien in their thinking and actions that the difference between them was often difficult to decipher. Using the available material, principally in the Redmond and O'Brien papers, it is possible to build up a plausible schema of Dunraven's hopes, thinking and plans. In the *lacuna* caused by the inadequate response from the Dunraven papers, newspapers, particularly the unionist *Limerick Chronicle*, which often highlighted the non-nationalist side of Dunraven's activities and the nationalist *Limerick Leader*, were useful and necessary primary sources. Dunraven's own writings, particularly his autobiography *Past Times and Pastimes* provided much needed clues to his multifarious activities, volume two containing a comprehensive account of the important decade beginning in 1912.

Dunraven's active life is considered in three parts. Firstly, his election to and subsequent membership of Limerick County Council from 1899 to 1908. Following the introduction of democratically elected local councils in the rest of the United Kingdom, Dunraven realised that their introduction into Ireland could not long be delayed and then the hitherto unchallenged supremacy of the landlord class in the administration of local affairs would be put to the test of universal acceptability. In allowing (or putting) himself forward on a non-nationalist ticket for election to the first county council in 1899, this study takes the view that Dunraven was making a statement that unionists, especially those with experience under the grand jury system, should put themselves before the predominantly nationalist voters and do so with a certain degree of confidence. The election campaign, apart from the very singular Dunraven-O'Dwyer-Flanagan imbroglio, highlighted the resurgence of nationalist sentiment as, egged on by leaders of the United Irish League, notably O'Brien and Michael Davitt, voters were urged to remain true to faith and fatherland. It was a tribute to Dunraven's benignity as a landlord that he overcame a significant campaign of hurtful vindictiveness, the victory being all the more remarkable as he went to great pains to point out to the electorate that he abhorred the very concept of home rule. Significant after the first year or two of the life of the council was a concerted plan of action, on the part of the nationalist majority, to prevent unionists from gaining (or ousting them from, in the case of Dunraven) positions of influence or authority. In such a climate of mild intolerance Dunraven

had to operate, yet, on more than one occasion his was the voice of sanity in the chamber, listened to and heeded. His contribution to council affairs, significant in the first year of membership, is weighed against his inability to devote himself more fully to the business of the county council as the years went by.

Part Two portrays what, to a casual eye, might seem to be a series of unconnected activities of a philanthropic or ameliorative nature, from his championing of the land conference in 1902 to the failure of the tobacco growing industry (and the closure of his cigarette factory) in the early 1920s. Two threads running through them bind them securely together – a genuine attempt, on his part, to improve the material conditions of the Irish people, and a desire to bring to its inevitable conclusion the Tory policy of progressive unionism whose ultimate end was a prosperous and contented Ireland still in union with Great Britain. That is not to say that he was completely disinterested. Dunraven was well aware of the need, by the landlord constituency, of a successful outcome to the land conference, while the terms he agreed with his farming tenants were higher than those negotiated by a number of selling landlords, most notably Lindsey Talbot-Crosbie of Ardfert, County Kerry. On the other hand Dunraven, like the other major experimenter, Sir Nugent Everard, undoubtedly lost heavily on the tobacco enterprise, the more the pity, as the employment potential of that industry was enormous. At times he could be exceedingly generous. In 1908 he gave £500 to the Limerick Technical Committee to fund scholarships for further study in the sciences, while dwelling houses in the town or village of Croom were sold to occupiers, who could afford to purchase them, at prices considered to be reasonable and, at the same time, he facilitated the purchase, by the rural district council, of the rest of the dwellings for the benefit of those who could not afford to buy. Dunraven's name is always associated with the land conference but his seminal role in its formation and existence has never been fully explored. The part he played in the long university saga is also interesting. By a combination of his own input and the corroboration of Sir Antony MacDonnell (the under-secretary in Dublin), representing officialdom, he rowed out the boat towards a solution in January 1904, becoming as T. W. Russell put it, the 'handy man' of the government. When that attempt was frustrated, he performed the same function in 1906 before the Fry Commission, but once a solution was in sight he tactfully withdrew. The sustained interest he displayed throughout meant that his view of anti-sectarianism was not hidden and that he was willing to play whatever role he was called upon in order to bring an end to the long suffering of the Roman Catholic people. Dunraven's desire to secure an end to the plight of evicted tenants, (some

might say that he was dancing here to the tune of William O'Brien), was genuine. The conference of 1906 (the only course of action open to Dunraven and O'Brien since all other avenues had failed or had been frustrated) brought no immediate relief, but it had the effect of galvanising the Irish Party into action and hurrying on the Evicted Tenants (Ireland) Act of 1907 that was generally accepted as bringing closure to a chapter that did little credit to the leaders of nationalist Ireland. The tobacco saga was an effort to resuscitate an industry that was quite successful a century before and one that could have proved a boon to the new breed of farmers as well as to rural dwellers. It is not always understood that a landlord anxious to dispose of his estate to tenant-farmers and town or village dwellers suffered both frustration and unjust criticism as he, understandably, endeavoured to maximise his future income by seeking terms higher than those that, perhaps, pleased the *Freeman's Journal*.

The third part, dealing with matters political from 1904 to 1924, a period during which Dunraven occupied a prominent position on the national scene, had the most potential for good, but paradoxically had the least influence on the future of Ireland. Once the land issue was on the way to being settled it was inevitable that Dunraven (with the encouragement of MacDonnell and the tacit approval of George Wyndham, the Irish secretary) would turn his attention to how the better government of Ireland could be used to eradicate subversion and discontent and promote prosperity and harmony among her people. To Dunraven this could only be found within the bounds of the union with Great Britain, though he was aware that such was anathema to nationalists. In an attempt to marry the two political strands of Irish life, pro or anti the Act of Union, Dunraven, in his set of proposals in 1904 embraced revolutionary reform in the way Ireland should be governed. Public perception only centred on one small but significant item – the setting up of some form of assembly in Dublin. The reaction to this not novel suggestion and the hostile and militant reaction among Ulster unionists to the input of Dunraven and particularly MacDonnell is closely considered. One of the lessons of the land conference, as seen by Dunraven and O'Brien, was the belief that a conference between differing parties could solve most, if not all, of Ireland's ills. The home rule bill of 1912 brought further perplexity for the disciples of conciliation and conference. Dunraven and his ally O'Brien, while broadly welcoming the measure since the union remained intact, were startled by the reaction of Ulster Orangeism and feared that, sooner or later, an opt-out clause would be provided for them. Dunraven, the realist, took more seriously than John Redmond (who felt that the Ulster volunteers were merely playing at soldiering) the growing crisis in the North and pleaded that special attention, even

concessions, should be granted having first been worked out at a friendly conference. The onset of the Great War marked the beginning of the end of whatever influence Dunraven could bring to bear on Irish affairs. His avowal of conscription for Ireland (at some personal cost to himself) as a remedy for the shortage of manpower at the front, marked him out as a pariah, the voice of somebody no nationalist should listen to. His participation in the Irish Convention of 1917-18 as the lone voice of Federalism, was ineffective. As Ireland proceeded headlong along the road of violent confrontation with the United Kingdom the time for conference, the only solution Dunraven could offer, was well and truly over. Oblivious almost to what was going on around him, Dunraven persisted in calling for a solution based on a reasoned and reasonable response from both sides, but by now he was so far sidelined that his voice was not heard where it mattered.

Despite the fact that the establishment of the Irish Free State was not his ideal solution to Ireland's difficulties, Dunraven supported the provisional government in Dublin and even consented to join the senate, something that involved a sacrifice on his part, as it could be interpreted as his final acceptance of the inevitability of partition.

PART ONE

MEMBERSHIP OF LIMERICK COUNTY COUNCIL, 1899-1908

PROLOGUE

Dunraven was obviously aware of the shortcomings of the grand jury system when he put a question in the house of lords, in February 1890, whether it was the intention of the government to extend to Ireland the principles of local self-government.¹ The answer was in the negative. When the Local Government (England and Wales) Bill was going through the house in 1894 he was interested enough in the measure to propose a number of amendments.² Surprisingly, his input was little when a similar measure for Ireland was proposed in 1898. During discussion on the second reading, he disagreed with the clause that debarred ministers of religion (unlike the English Local Government Act) from sitting on local councils but was pleased, in general terms, with the measure:

Personally I have little doubt that it will work well and smoothly, even from the beginning, and I am perfectly certain that it will be prejudicial to no interest and to no class and that ultimately it will be beneficial to the whole country at large.³

During the committee stage a few days later, he returned to the clause excluding ministers of religion asserting that it was aimed directly against the RC clergy.⁴ Later, he interested himself in the preservation of ancient monuments, proposing an amendment:

That an ancient monument of historical or archaeological value will be preserved and safe-guarded and, at the same time, no frivolous interference on the part of those interested in remains of no historical value can take place.⁵

1 *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 341, cols. 411-4, 17 February 1890.

2 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 21, cols. 232-55, 12 February 1894.

3 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 62, col. 575, 21 July 1898.

4 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 62, cols. 1053-5, 25 July 1898.

5 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 63, col. 130, 28 July 1898.

A further amendment of his was also accepted that each county council be entitled to prosecute for any penalty under section six of the Ancient Monuments Protection Act, 1882.⁶

THE BISHOP, THE DEAN AND THE EARL

While the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898, heralded a complete transformation in the way in which local administration was to be handled in the future, the main interest in rural areas was, not the benefits to be derived from the legislation, but rather the ensuing elections and the candidates likely to offer themselves before the new electorate. This was reflected in the attitude of the two principal local newspapers as they attempted to assess the political background and special qualities needed by potential candidates. The pro-union *Limerick Chronicle* offered encouragement to unionists to put themselves forward without fear of rejection as ‘their ability, common-sense, and experience have always been freely recognised by people holding opposite views.’⁷ On the other hand, the fiercely nationalist *Limerick Leader*, while it was of the opinion that the utmost caution should be exercised in the selection of aspirants to office, felt ‘that candidates should be selected on the grounds of honesty and probity rather than by reason of their declarations in favour of peasant proprietorship or a catholic university.’⁸ While the leader writer was virtually certain that nationalist majorities would be returned on all bodies in three provinces in Ireland, yet that paper seemed to be giving a guarded signal that non-nationalists of a neutral or mildly-unionist hue could, with some degree of confidence, offer themselves to the electorate.

By the end of 1898, the serious business of selecting candidates had commenced as the Local Government Board (LGB) had already announced that the act would come into force on 1 April 1899, and elections for Limerick County Council would be held on the 6th of the same month.⁹ In the Croom division, which comprised Adare, Banogue, Croom, Croagh and Kildimo, the first candidate selected was James Moriarty, a Croom shopkeeper, who was chairman of the local branch of the Irish Land & Labour Association (ILLA). Rumours, however, were rife that a local magnate, seen as a decided threat to nationalism, was to be approached to stand for the division. This caused Moriarty to officially withdraw on 15 January 1899 as he felt that somebody stronger than he was needed to fight the impending

⁶ *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 63, col. 130, 28 July 1898. Dunraven’s father, the third earl (1812-71), was a prominent archaeologist and historian. See Alfred Webb, *Compendium of Irish biography* (Dublin, 1878), pp 447-8.

⁷ *LC*, 19 July 1898.

⁸ *LL*, 2 January 1899.

⁹ *LC*, 12 November 1898.

battle.¹⁰ That meeting then decided to approach John Coleman, PLG, who had been sounded out already as to his availability. He resided within the division and had already been selected to contest the election in Bruff but readily agreed to accept the new challenge, acceding, as he himself said, to the invitation of the priests and people of Croom.¹¹ By accepting in the manner in which he did, Coleman firmly established himself as the one entitled exclusively to the support of the nationalist electorate in the division. By any standards, Coleman was a formidable candidate with an impressive record of service in the nationalist cause, having been a member of Croom Board of Guardians for twenty five years.¹² During his time on that body, Coleman strongly advocated the provision of a cottage and acre of land for agricultural labourers under the terms of the labourers' acts, so it was therefore assumed that he would gain a large measure of support from amongst that new class of voter, in addition to the votes of the tenant farmers, including those on the Dunraven estate.

The identity of the local magnate was soon revealed. At a public meeting in Adare, at which Dean Flanagan, PP, Adare, presided, and which was held on the day after Moriarty withdrew, Dunraven was quickly proposed and then accepted as a candidate. The ecumenical and varied nature of the nomination can be seen from the fact that he was nominated by Frank Fosberry, a civil engineer and Church of Ireland member of the ascendancy, and seconded by Michael Giltenane, a catholic farmer and poor law guardian. As Dunraven was not present, it was necessary to ascertain whether he would accept and so a large crowd, led by Flanagan, proceeded to walk the mile or so to Adare Manor. The earl was at home, as if there was any doubt on that score, and he formally accepted the nomination. To reinforce the stage management of the whole episode, Dunraven immediately proceeded to deliver his opening campaign speech. He spoke of his roots in County Limerick; the importance of the new council regarding sanitary and labourers' acts, the management of roads, and the collection of rates; his experience as a former member of Glamorganshire County Council and his current membership of London County Council¹³ and concluded by asserting that

¹⁰ *LL*, 18 January 1899.

¹¹ *LL*, 16 January 1899.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Dunraven states that he was a member of London County Council (Wandsworth division) from 1891 to 1897 and served on Glamorganshire County Council from 1899 to 1902 (Dunraven, *Past times*, i, p. 30). As happened on a number of occasions in his autobiography he mixed up his facts. Dunraven was elected to London County Council on a Moderate (representing the Conservative and Liberal-Conservative interests) ticket in 1895. He was re-elected in 1898 but resigned in the Autumn of 1899 (*Times*, 4 March 1895, 5

Irishmen had a chance to prove that they could manage their own affairs economically and honestly. It is significant that Dunraven did not succumb to any populist viewpoint; did not renounce his unionist or anti-home rule position like his marriage connection¹⁴ and fellow county man, [the 2nd] Baron Emly, and did not find fault with or distance himself in any way from the outgoing grand jurors, who, he concluded, 'had managed county business generally exceedingly well.'¹⁵ No reference was made, either, to the claims of catholics for equality in the field of university or higher education, an omission that would have been well noted by the RC bishop of Limerick, Dr Edward Thomas O'Dwyer. The *Limerick Chronicle*,¹⁶ in reporting the proceedings at Adare, noted that Dunraven would be of immense service to the community at large, as many of the newly elected members would have little knowledge of the duties entrusted to them or had little experience in public affairs.

Coleman's short election address, a model of brevity if not complacency, appeared in the *Limerick Leader* on 20 January:

Ladies and Gentlemen

At the request of priests and people, I have come forward to offer myself for election as your representative for this division of the Limerick County Council and respectfully solicit your vote and influence.¹⁷

A copy of a much longer election address by Coleman is in the Dunraven papers.¹⁸ This address was specifically aimed at those who made up the majority of electors - farmers, labourers and townspeople. It made all the correct nationalist noises – support for home rule; demand for a catholic university; a redistribution of the excessive taxation which the UK had

March 1898, 4 March 1901). See election address, dated 11 January 1895, in Dunraven papers, Adare, D 3196/G/12. Dunraven served one term on Glamorganshire County Council, 1889 to 1892. See letter to electors of the Bridgend division, 3 December 1888, when he offered himself as a candidate and a further letter, dated 2 March 1892, when he informed the electors that he did not propose to contest the forthcoming election (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/11, vol. 11, pp 18, 77). Dunraven owned Dunraven Castle and estate near the town of Bridgend, Glamorganishire.

14 Emly's father, William Monsell, later the first Baron Emly (1874), married, in 1836, Lady Anna Maria Charlotte Wyndham-Quin, Dunraven's aunt. Some time after she died childless in 1855, Monsell married again. The second baron was a child of this marriage. Prior to announcing his candidature for the Patrickswell division, Emly renounced his unionist principles.

15 LC, 17 January 1899.

16 Ibid.

17 LL, 20 January 1899.

18 Dunraven papers, Adare, D 3196/G/25.

exacted on Ireland over the years, and a compulsory land purchase act. A novel suggestion was also directed towards Dunraven, landlord of the towns of Adare and Croom, when Coleman professed himself a supporter of any agitation to reduce house rents in towns and villages within the division.

By this time, Coleman's candidature was being promoted vigorously. A general support committee, the National Election Committee, with working branches in all the outlying electoral districts, except understandably, Adare,¹⁹ was set up. Canvassing had commenced and a meeting, to monitor progress, was held in Croom on each Friday night. In addition, public demonstrations of support and outdoor rallies were arranged.²⁰ The first of these took place at Old Kildimo on 5 February. The two principal speakers were James Coffey, a Limerick solicitor and town councillor, and the mayor of the city, Alderman John Daly, the old Fenian. Coffey explained that he was speaking on behalf of Coleman, as the latter was somewhat averse to speaking in public. This was a little disingenuous, as Coleman had addressed the public at an after-mass meeting in Banogue on the previous Sunday. Obviously, as Coleman was a poor public speaker, his campaign managers decided that it would better serve their purpose to keep him in the background at the larger and more important meetings and rallies. In the course of his address, Coffey took Dunraven to task on a number of issues. He attacked his lack of sportsmanship over the America's Cup incident;²¹ the total absence of Irishmen in positions of importance on the estate and at Adare Manor, and highlighted his inconsistency in suggesting that Irishmen were capable of handling their own affairs under the aegis of the Local Government Act but not so under a home rule regime.²² Coffey thus set the scene for what was to be the thrust of the campaign against Dunraven, a mixture of personal and political attacks. Dunraven was, from a nationalist viewpoint, vulnerable to charges of anti-Irish bias both in his business affairs [as were all landlords and public bodies in Ireland], especially in the conduct of the Adare estate, and in his loyalty to the British Empire, which precluded him from entertaining any thoughts of a parliament being established in Ireland.

19 There was no nationalist organisation in Adare at that time though a branch of the Land League had operated there in 1881 (*LC*, 1 February 1881).

20 *LL*, 27 January 1899.

21 In December 1895, the New York Yacht Club instituted an inquiry into protests Dunraven made concerning the racing of the American yacht, *Defender*, against his yacht, *Valkyrie III*, as they competed for the America's Cup the previous September. Dunraven's protests were not upheld. See Dunraven, *Past times*, i, pp 48-9, 179; D 3196/G/18/1, 19/1, 20/1, Dunraven papers, Adare.

22 *LL*, 8 February 1899. Colman Moloney says that John Coleman suffered from an (unnamed) illness that prevented him from speaking at large gatherings. See Colman Moloney, *Limerick County Council, 1899–1932* (unpublished MA thesis, UCC, 1977), p. 25, n. 85.

While the pro-Coleman campaign was proceeding apace, events were unfolding which would soon have the effect of raising the Croom contest to a new and higher plane, when charges of ‘priest ridden peasantry’ would be levelled against Irishmen. Towards the end of January, Dunraven, then back at his London residence, received an extraordinary letter from Dean Flanagan. Flanagan first explained that the bishop of Limerick, who was riding past the parochial house in Adare that afternoon, on his return from visitation in the west of the diocese, stopped at the gate and summoned the parish priest. Both Flanagan and the curate, Fr McCarthy, went outside. The bishop said to Flanagan:

I intend to make it impossible for any catholic to vote for a liberal unionist (or no doubt, conservative) if the government they are supporting does not pledge itself at once to deal with the university question – so that men like Dunraven and Monteagle may as well retire. He said with emphasis ‘you may tell Dunraven this,’ or rather, I think, he said ‘I *wish* you to tell Dunraven this.’ I answered that certainly I would do so at once.²³

Two statements by Flanagan concerning the demeanour of the bishop before and during his remarkable diatribe against unionists, ‘I saw wrath in his countenance’ and ‘he spoke throughout hotly and almost passionately’²⁴ were intended to convince Dunraven of the seriousness of the contents. On the other hand the use of the phrase ‘or rather, I think he said’ should perhaps have alerted Dunraven to the fact that the account, though colourfully told by Flanagan, a man in his late seventies, may not have contained the actual words used by the bishop. Dunraven acknowledged, by return, the receipt of the letter, quoting the relevant section and concluding:

I regret this determination on the part of the bishop for many reasons but I am greatly indebted to him for publicly announcing it to me.²⁵

23 Flanagan to Dunraven, 28 January 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24). Flanagan got the day wrong. The bishop passed by on Friday, 27 January. Later O’Dwyer tried to make capital out of the discrepancy in the dates by implying that if Flanagan could not get the day of the Adare meeting right then what chance was there that he got the ‘message’ right (O’Dwyer to the press, *LL*, 27 February 1899).

24 *Ibid.*

25 Dunraven to Flanagan, 31 January 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24).

This letter is of huge significance. Firstly, Dunraven accepted, without the need for further investigation, the authenticity of what occurred during the brief encounter between O'Dwyer and Flanagan. Secondly, Dunraven felt pleased that this vital 'message' was passed on to him in good time and that, by the manner of its transmission, it had been placed in the public arena. Accordingly, Dunraven now felt entitled to make whatever use he could out of the information in order to counter the bishop's antipathy to him. Dunraven obviously intended that this letter be seen by O'Dwyer, but before Flanagan transmitted it he wrote to Dunraven:

I see your letter is meant to fall under the episcopal eye. It is very good but before I send it I must sleep on it for it might make him paw the ground still further.²⁶

Flanagan now began to realise the implications of his letter of 28 January and its possible repercussions and so was unsure how to proceed. In a postscript to the above letter he begged Dunraven to wire him and show his preference – 'send it to the bishop or not.' Two days later, not having received any answer to his query, Flanagan wrote to Dunraven to say that he would write to O'Dwyer merely stating that he had passed on the 'message', as it had now become known, but would make no reference to any communication from Dunraven meant to be seen by O'Dwyer.²⁷

As promised, Flanagan wrote²⁸ to O'Dwyer to say that he had written to Dunraven and had given the 'message', as best he could, in the *ipsisissima verba* of the bishop. In order to ameliorate any feelings of hostility the bishop might entertain towards him on account of his close friendship with Dunraven and to avoid the slings and arrows of episcopal displeasure over his support for Dunraven up to this, Flanagan, a wily old man, trotted out a number of platitudes. He said that he was going to disassociate himself from Dunraven's campaign and would not even vote for him and suggested that Dunraven would be defeated by a large majority even if the bishop did not interfere in the contest. In order to excuse himself from any fall-out that might accrue from Dunraven's forthcoming election address Flanagan fell back on a favoured ploy of his, 'I am going down hill very rapidly and my strength is failing.'²⁹ O'Dwyer replied the following day easing Flanagan's mind on two points. Firstly, O'Dwyer said that there was no reason for Flanagan to disassociate himself from Dunraven's candidature, as all knew the special relationship between them. Secondly, he outlined his

26 Flanagan to Dunraven, 1 February 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24). Dunraven may have written two letters to Flanagan on 31 January, one of which was intended for O'Dwyer. If that were the case the letter to O'Dwyer has not survived.

27 Flanagan to Dunraven, 3 February 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24).

28 Flanagan to O'Dwyer, 3 February 1899 (LDA, O'Dwyer Papers).

29 Ibid.

attitude to Dunraven's candidature:

My position is quite different. I should apprehend if his influence were increased in the county. . . . Apart from politics, that is quite sufficient for me to desire his defeat. I think it most probable that I shall take no formal part in the contest whatever.³⁰

As that letter makes no mention of O'Dwyer's aversion to Dunraven on the question of a catholic university in Ireland, the veracity of Flanagan's account of his meeting with the bishop in Adare must be open to doubt. Flanagan may not have recounted the exact words O'Dwyer used when passing on the 'message' to Dunraven. In any event, it obviously did not cross O'Dwyer's mind that there was any danger that he was misquoted in the transmission of the 'message'.

The absence of any further communication from Dunraven was now beginning to alarm Flanagan. He knew that before long Dunraven would issue his election address and feared that both he and bishop would be implicated. He sent an urgent telegram to Dunraven on Monday, 6 February, 'omit bishop in address. I have a letter practically retracting what I reported. He will do nothing.'³¹ This was followed, the same day, by a letter, with which was enclosed O'Dwyer's of 4 February, as proof of the bishop's change of mind, as Flanagan saw it:

I hope you will feel no necessity of putting him in the address. It is safe not to do anything. It will be better then, in my opinion, not to arouse his wrath by alluding to the original threat – leave him alone.³²

Two letters, which boded ill for Flanagan, duly arrived from Dunraven. The first,³³ dated 6 February, the same day as Flanagan sent the telegram and follow-up letter, merely informed Flanagan that the address was finished on the previous day, Sunday, and was then with the printers. The following day an equally terse message arrived in Adare from London, 'I return the bishop's letter, many thanks for showing it to me. In any case it was too late.'³⁴ If

30 O'Dwyer to Flanagan, 4 February 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24).

31 Telegram, Flanagan to Dunraven, 6 February 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24).

32 Flanagan to Dunraven, 6 February 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24).

33 Dunraven to Flanagan, 6 February 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24).

34 Dunraven to Flanagan, 7 February 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24).

O'Dwyer's letter [of 4 February] arrived too late to necessitate changes in the address, then the telegram, which should have arrived on the previous day, Monday [the day the address was sent to the printers], should have alerted Dunraven to the new situation and allowed him time to take remedial action. All in all it was an unfeeling response to the obvious concerns of his friend of near forty years.

There was nothing for Flanagan to do now but to await whatever might transpire. He had not long to wait. In the meantime he wrote to his cousin Johnny Woulfe Flanagan, a reporter with the *Times*, giving a sanitised version of the cause of his impending trouble:

The bishop is as mad as a hatter with me for supporting Dunraven for county councillor . . . he hates him [Dunraven] . . . we cannot be sure of his return, but he has a good chance . . . his [O'Dwyer's] present view is that all nationalists be returned and the gentry left at home to shoot pheasant and snipe as an act of retaliation on the government for not taking up the university question.³⁵

Flanagan wrote to O'Dwyer on 8 February. As O'Dwyer had drawn down the subject of the university question when they spoke in Adare and seemed to imply that Dunraven and Monteagle were, in some way, responsible for the lack of any solution, Flanagan wanted to show the bishop that other more powerful forces were impeding any progress in that area. Flanagan informed O'Dwyer what Dunraven had recently told him:

As to the 'no-popery cry' in England at present acting as a barrier to the bringing forward of the university question, I [Dunraven] have not the smallest doubt, both from my own observations and from letters from English friends, that the protestant spirit is aroused most strongly.³⁶

Flanagan informed O'Dwyer, in a postscript and without alluding to his own concerns, that Dunraven's address was at the printers and that he had no idea what was in it.

Dunraven's address to the electorate of the Croom division appeared in the *Limerick*

35 Flanagan to John Woulfe Flanagan, 7 February 1899 (NAI, Woulfe Flanagan Papers, 1189/12/3). For a brief note on Woulfe Flanagan see Hickey and Doherty, *A dictionary of Irish history since 1800* (Dublin 1980), p. 174.

36 Flanagan to O'Dwyer, 8 February 1899 (LDA, O'Dwyer Papers).

Leader on Wednesday, 8 February, though Flanagan's first view of it was on opening the *Munster News* of the following day. The main paragraph stated that, since Dunraven was selected as a candidate, he had received a message from the bishop of Limerick, who had requested Dean Flanagan to convey it to him and then restated, word for word, the information supplied by Flanagan on 28 January concerning O'Dwyer's views of the coming contest. Dunraven wished the electorate to know that he had no intention of retiring from the contest; that he was not her majesty's government, and that he was favourable to the principle he understood to be involved in the university question. He then went on to matters more pertinent to the coming election. Stressing the importance of the new council and how its decisions would affect the lives of all in matters of poor-law rates, health, roads etc., he concluded by stating that while politics had nothing whatever to do with the county councils he had no desire to conceal his opinions on any subject of interest to those whom he hoped to represent. In general the address appealed to prudent ratepayers and all those who wished to extract the maximum benefit from the new system. Dunraven also laid down a marker that politics, i.e. nationalist sentiment, should not be an issue but that the election should be all about the most suitable person to represent the division and the one best able to contribute to the new system.

Flanagan's worst fears were realised as he saw his own words quoted verbatim. He immediately wrote to O'Dwyer putting the blame on Dunraven, 'to my amazement and horror, I find that he has inserted the 'message' you sent to him through me.' Flanagan went on to stress, not the effect the publication of the address would have on O'Dwyer, but on Dunraven:

I think this is an insane act and that by it he destroys whatever chance he had of being elected, for of course the Coleman party will make capital out of it, but in any event, his chances were very slight.³⁷

If this letter was a ploy to appease O'Dwyer it failed miserably. If O'Dwyer's alleged 'message' was extraordinary then this letter was equally so. No word of apology was tendered to the bishop, who now found himself exposed to public odium, nor was the blame laid where it was most merited – on Dunraven, who should have checked out the actual words spoken before he used them in such a public manner. O'Dwyer replied to Flanagan the following day in a letter that has not survived, but which must have contained a severe rebuke

³⁷ Flanagan to O'Dwyer, 9 February 1899 (LDA, O'Dwyer papers).

for Flanagan:

Your letter has given me [Flanagan] the deadliest blow I have ever received in my life and caused me the most intense grief I have ever suffered.³⁸

Following his opening expression of shock and his willingness to resign the parish and the deanship, Flanagan went on to make a spirited defence of his part in the action:

The day after you spoke to me I wrote to Dunraven in the words he quotes in his address and I was absolutely certain you wished me to do so. This is what you call a 'lying version' because of the omission that you would render it impossible for catholics to vote for liberal unionists by an appeal to their honour and good feeling. If I omitted this, it was without the remotest intention of misrepresenting you.³⁹

O'Dwyer, in his lost letter to Flanagan, obviously gave his version of the words he used that day. To O'Dwyer the manner in which the threat was to be put into effect was more important than the threat itself. This was to be done by appealing to catholics rather than instructing them to follow a certain course of action. What O'Dwyer failed to comprehend was the imperiousness and unreasonableness of his threat. Against such a salvo of episcopal disapproval there was little Flanagan could say in his defence other than to explain that he begged Dunraven not to mention the bishop but that his plea was ignored. By this time Flanagan was not sure what O'Dwyer had said on that earlier occasion. Writing to his soul mate, Fr Ignatius, at the Oratory in Birmingham, he gave a different version of the words used by O'Dwyer:

I intend to make it impossible for catholics to vote for him [Dunraven] or any unionist unless they insist on getting the government they are supporting to give a catholic university *at once*. I shall appeal to the catholics in the county to abstain from voting for such men as a point of honour.⁴⁰

38 Flanagan to O'Dwyer, 10 February 1899. This letter highlights the apparent contradiction regarding the day of the meeting in Adare. The original letter to Dunraven, peculiarly dated Jan. 28/29 opens with the words 'the bishop rode past here today.' The letter of 10 February states 'the day after you [O'Dwyer] spoke to me I wrote to Dunraven.'

39 Flanagan to O'Dwyer, 10 February 1899 (LDA, O'Dwyer papers).

40 Flanagan to Fr Ignatius [Ryder], 10 February 1899 (Birmingham, Oratory Archives). Flanagan was a member of the Congregation of the Oratory from 1848 to 1862.

Flanagan also included extracts from O'Dwyer's letter of rebuke:

The bishop now calls Dunraven a blackguard . . . he says my version is a 'lying version' and reproaches me for not having shown him a copy of my letter to Dunraven . . . he hates Dunraven.⁴¹

The matter of the bishop's intervention soon came to the notice of the public press. The initial reaction of the two Limerick newspapers was one of amazement and incredulity. As might be expected interest was centred not on the benefits and possibilities of the new councils as outlined by Dunraven in his address but rather on the so-called 'message'. The first reaction of the nationalist *Limerick Leader* was that the case for a catholic university would be retarded and not advanced:

If he [O'Dwyer] attempts to dictate to the people in this fashion many of the present supporters of our claim will, for obvious reasons, abandon their position.⁴²

The unionist *Limerick Chronicle*⁴³ was more forthright in its denunciation of O'Dwyer, referring to a pertinent point of what it called startling importance that, while the Imperial parliament had recently bestowed the fullest measure of freedom upon the newly enfranchised element in Ireland, a section of it, at least, seemed about to be disenfranchised by one man making it impossible for them to vote for the candidate of their choice. The Dublin *Independent* took up that same point when it commented on Dunraven's address:

[it] raised a question of the very gravest moment for Irishmen of all classes . . . there is a principle at stake of such importance at the present time that a mere local election fades into insignificance . . . the autocratic position he [O'Dwyer] assumes is simply intolerable in a country which is supposed to be comparatively free.⁴⁴

Lest a similar charge of disenfranchisement be laid against Dunraven in respect of his tenants and employees, the following hand-written memo, undated, appears among the Dunraven papers:

41 Ibid.

42 LL, 8 February 1899.

43 LC, 9 February 1899.

44 *Irish Daily Independent (IDI)*, 10 February 1899.

To such of the electors as happen to be in my employment I wish to say that the one thing I desire is that they will think, speak and vote freely as they think best.⁴⁵

It shows that Dunraven took heed of the lesson to be learned from the bishop's intervention.

As soon as Flanagan saw the election address, he also wrote to the countess of Dunraven, who was then at Adare Manor. On this occasion he laid the blame on the shoulders of the bishop:

I do not know what the bishop will say but it is his own doing. He cannot deny that I reported it correctly and that he distinctly added that he wished me to send it to Dunraven.⁴⁶

If Flanagan was nothing else, he certainly was a duplicitous character as he became more confused about what actually transpired on the roadside at Adare.

O'Dwyer now felt obliged to comment publicly. In a communication to the press it was stated, on his behalf, that:

the 'message' is a garbled and misleading version of a private conversation which the bishop had about a fortnight ago, quite casually, with the dean, and the bishop thinks the publication of it without notice to him a discreditable proceeding.⁴⁷

The bishop now joined the blame game. Despite the 'roasting' he had meted out to Flanagan, O'Dwyer now placed culpability on Dunraven, the third entity of the tangled triangle. Coincidentally, a letter of explanation from Flanagan appeared in the same newspaper on the same day. In it he made five points but only succeeded in getting himself deeper in trouble. Firstly, Dunraven had published what purported to be a 'message' from the bishop without Flanagan's consent or sanction. Secondly, Flanagan himself was in error in not checking out

45 Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24.

46 Flanagan to the countess of Dunraven, 9 February 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24).

47 *LC*, 11 February 1899. Strangely enough, the ultra protestant *Daily Express* was more sympathetic to O'Dwyer than to Dunraven, 'the issuing of such a 'message' as it appeared in Dunraven's election address, seemed to us, as we said, an inexplicable proceeding to come from a prelate of the character of O'Dwyer and we are glad to find it so promptly and emphatically disavowed' (*Daily Express*, 11 February 1899).

with the bishop the veracity of what he was sending to Dunraven. Thirdly, and what was most painful to him, the address did a most grievous injustice to the bishop. Fourthly, Flanagan now stated that he had neglected to include, at the end of the 'message', the manner by which O'Dwyer would make it impossible to unseat Dunraven. These words he could now remember:

That he [O'Dwyer] would make a public appeal to the honour and self-respect of Catholics as to whether they could support the followers of a government that avowedly, at the dictation of a few bigots, denied them justice on the university question.⁴⁸

It is inconceivable that any human could remember the precise form of words as now given by Flanagan and, in any event, his recall of what the bishop said seemed to change with each passing day. Fifthly, Flanagan stated that he must have told Dunraven the manner by which the interdict was to be carried out but, in any event, Dunraven ought to have let him see the draft of the election address before it went to the printers.⁴⁹ All in all it was a pretty hefty indictment of Dunraven coupled with an admission of the hurt the whole episode had caused his diocesan superior.

The explanation provided by O'Dwyer, brief and all as it was, had the immediate effect of softening⁵⁰ opinion against him. Flanagan was also seen as the hapless hod-carrier, the mere conduit through whom some sort of message was transmitted, parts of which were lost or forgotten in transit. This had the effect of leaving Dunraven as the villain. The *Munster News*, in an editorial entitled 'A Fallen Idol', severely castigated Dunraven, for the handling of his side of the affair, in an unseemly personal attack:

We had imagined Dunraven to be an ideal member of his class, manly, frank, courageous, leaving behind him his lordly halls and broad acres and bravely entering the civic arena to do battle for a losing cause, ready to receive, with what grace and fortitude he might, the rude pummelling of the democratic champion. Instead, however, of preparing to take up the gage of battle in a spirited manly fashion as becomes a 'belted earl' we have his lordship crying out before he is struck. This is not the way to

48 Flanagan to LC, 11 February 1899.

49 Ibid.

50 News cuttings, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24.

gain the favour of the electors in any division in the county of Limerick, and no doubt, by this time, Dunraven sees and regrets the mistake he has made.⁵¹

Since Lord Monteagle's name had been mentioned⁵² in the election address of Dunraven, he too became embroiled in the controversy. O'Dwyer wrote, marked private, on 9 February, to Monteagle, setting out the actual words used by him, on that occasion. O'Dwyer said that he and Flanagan were discussing the catholic university question when the dean said that he was of the opinion that the government would do nothing during this parliamentary session on account of the Kensit agitation,⁵³ and stated that Monteagle's name only came up afterwards in general conversation. Then O'Dwyer claimed that he had said:

If protestant bigotry is allowed to wrong us, I shall put it to the catholics of this county, whether in honour and self-respect, they can support the followers of the unionist government and you may tell Dunraven I said that, in face of such an appeal, it would be impossible for Catholics to support him.⁵⁴

In view of what had gone before, Monteagle wisely sought O'Dwyer's permission to publish this letter and, having received it, added a covering note of his own in order to clear the air, as he thought, once and for all. The opposite effect resulted however as, in his note or letter, Monteagle alleged that the whole matter 'must have originated in some misunderstanding on Lord Dunraven's part.'⁵⁵ This suggestion, according to the *Limerick Chronicle*,⁵⁶ should not have been expressed publicly without having heard Dunraven's side of the story. So much for Monteagle's efforts to clear the muddy water.

While this new controversy was unfolding, Flanagan felt it was in his best interest to

51 *Munster News*, 13 February 1899.

52 The address stated that as O'Dwyer 'intended to make it impossible for any catholic to vote for men like Lord Dunraven and Lord Monteagle, they might as well retire from the contest.'

53 John Kensit (1853-1902), founder of the Protestant Truth Society and the Wickliffe Preachers, was a fundamentalist protestant gospeller and agitator who, as well as highlighting abuses in the Church of England, saw the use of public money or government support for Catholic institutions, anywhere in the United Kingdom, as threatening the Protestant Constitution and giving Rome a foothold in the establishment. Balfour's letter of 23 January 1899 (see n. 59) brought on a fresh wave of anti-Catholic agitation.

54 O'Dwyer to Monteagle, 9 February 1899, cited in *LC*, 14 February 1899; *Munster News*, 13 February 1899.

55 Press release by Monteagle, 11 February 1899, cited in *LC*, 14 February 1899.

56 *LC*, 14 February 1899.

write to Dunraven, who was still abroad at a health spa, in view of his recent letter to the press, in case Dunraven had read it without the benefit of an explanation from the dean. Flanagan began apologetically by explaining that he had been obliged to throw upon the earl the *whole* responsibility for publishing the ‘message’ because it had created tremendous commotion in the three kingdoms and had brought down upon his head the wrath of the bishop. Having got over that hurdle, Flanagan went on to say that the great grievance of the bishop was that the address made no reference to the manner by which O’Dwyer would put his sanction into effect. While Flanagan had stated in his letter to the *Limerick Chronicle* of 11 February [a copy of which he enclosed] that he had informed Dunraven on that point, he now admitted that it was not so. He also admitted that the letter of 11 February was written merely to satisfy the bishop, ‘under the circumstances, I have thought it only fair to the bishop to write a letter to the *Limerick Chronicle*.’ In order for Flanagan to keep his head above water it was necessary that Dunraven, the one person who knew the facts, did not contradict his story:

I hope you will see your way to keep silent and make no comment. I see no occasion for you saying a word and by being silent you will keep me out of further trouble.⁵⁷

To humour Dunraven, Flanagan concluded with the news that a most successful pro-Dunraven rally was taking place, as he was writing, in the old market place adjacent to the parochial house. On the following day, Flanagan felt it necessary to again write to Dunraven. He explained that:

I was battered and bleeding from the bishop’s assaults, but now have just come from the Manor. I feel stabbed to the heart and bleeding to death by the view Lady Dunraven and the girls [the earl’s daughters] take of my letter to the *Limerick Chronicle*.⁵⁸

The family was exceedingly perturbed because, by the use of the word ‘purports’, Flanagan had implied that the information contained in the address had not been supplied by him. Then follows a long rambling incoherent account of how he came to use the term ‘purports’

57 Flanagan to Dunraven, 12 February 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24).

58 Flanagan to Dunraven, 13 February 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24).

and he then proceeded to give an account, contrary to that of O'Dwyer, of how the conversation that day got around to Dunraven and the university question:

The bishop, when he spoke to me, knew of Balfour's letter.⁵⁹ The first words I spoke to him were 'well I hope Balfour's letter satisfies you.' He then drew himself up and began about you.⁶⁰

By this time the entire controversy had taken its toll on Flanagan and no credence could be placed on any of his doings or sayings. This was epitomised by his closing remark, that of a sad pathetic old man:

Between you both [the bishop and the earl] I am in a state of collapse. I wish you would write me a consolatory letter and put a little life in me.⁶¹

Dunraven, a major player in the whole affair, appeared to remain strangely silent. In the event his explanation or apologia was not long in coming. Writing from Pau, a health resort in the South of France where he had been for some time, Dunraven stated, in a long letter⁶² to the press, in Ireland and in Great Britain, that he had seen the recent communications to the press from O'Dwyer, Flanagan and Monteagle. He said that the most serious charge laid against him was that he had made public a communication of a private nature and did so in a garbled and grossly misleading fashion. Before he could adequately reply to those charges, it was necessary for him to send to London for copies of correspondence to and from Flanagan, hence the delay in replying. Dealing, firstly, with O'Dwyer's allegation of a garbled and misleading version of the message, Dunraven considered that this was adequately rebuffed by Flanagan's original letter of 28 January. Secondly, regarding the more serious charge of a private communication being published without notice to the parties, he

59 In January 1899, A. J. Balfour, leader of the house of commons and former Irish chief secretary, anxious to settle the Irish university problem to the satisfaction of the RC bishops, ventured to sound public opinion by an open declaration in favour of his chosen scheme. This took the form of a letter to a constituent in East Manchester, dated 23 January 1899, and which was later widely published (Patrick J. Walsh, *William J. Walsh, archbishop of Dublin* (Dublin, 1928), pp 551-2. See also editorial comment on Balfour's letter in the *IDI*, 26 January 1896.

60 Flanagan to Dunraven, 13 February 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24).

61 *Ibid.*

62 Dunraven to various newspapers, 17 February 1899, cited in *LC*, 21 February 1899.

contended that the gist of the matter was not the form of words used, be they Flanagan's or O'Dwyer's, but rather the sinister nature of the threat itself, and that if a person in such an influential position as that of a bishop sent such a message or threat to a candidate for any election, then that candidate was bound to bring such to the notice of the electors. In order to justify his own stance and to show the words that prompted him to include them in his election address, Dunraven included, as part of his long missive, an abridged version of the opening letter from Flanagan.⁶³ At the same time he sent to each editor, for private perusal, a copy of the actual letter sent to him by Flanagan. The leaking of the latter in Limerick, some time later, by an unknown source, caused immense embarrassment to 'old Feyther', the pet name by which Flanagan was familiarly known in his own family circle. Dunraven then made a direct challenge to O'Dwyer:

I submit that the bishop's own version of his own words is by no means clear and I invite him to state in unmistakable language whether he does, or does not, desire voters, clerical or lay, to act as they choose in a purely secular manner.⁶⁴

Dunraven, with his long letter of explanation to the press behind him, then wrote⁶⁵ privately to Flanagan absolving him of any blame in the matter, something that greatly cheered the old priest. Flanagan was so overjoyed that he was moved to write to Lady Dunraven, 'he shows he is in no way displeased with me, but speaks of me too (sic) high and affectionate terms.'⁶⁶ Flanagan felt that a heavy load had been lifted off his shoulders and that he had become a new man. Making his peace with Dunraven was more important to him than settling matters with the bishop. The call of friendship of well over thirty years could not be laid aside easily.

Some few days later O'Dwyer wrote⁶⁷ to the press but failed to address Dunraven's request for clarification of his position. Commenting on that letter and taking O'Dwyer's version of the words used on that occasion, *The Independent* vindicated the position taken by

63 The unabridged version of this letter is contained in Dunraven Papers, Adare, D 3196/G/24.

64 Dunraven to the press, 17 February 1899, LC, 21 February 1899.

65 This letter, received by Flanagan on 21 February, has not survived.

66 Flanagan to the countess of Dunraven, 21 February 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24).

67 See LL, 27 February 1899. Since it is accepted that O'Dwyer ruled the diocese with an iron fist [an over-patrician stance originating, perhaps, in his aristocratic background], his failure to reply to Dunraven's request for clarification and the very fact that somebody had the temerity to publicly cross him and even challenge him, must have caused silent amusement among the laity and especially among the clergy of the diocese.

Dunraven:

Surely Dr O'Dwyer did not expect Lord Dunraven, whatever the 'message' was, to put it in his pocket and run away because the Catholic bishop of the diocese did not approve of his candidature. Lord Dunraven did what every independent-minded man would have done under the circumstances. He threw off his coat and fought his corner. And he was right.⁶⁸

Flanagan had been advised by Dunraven to make no further public comment or communicate with O'Dwyer and had agreed to it:

I shall not write any remarks to the press. The bishop may call on me to do so. I do not know what he may ask me to do or say, but I have absolutely nothing to retract.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, mainly due to the influence of his nephew, James Woulfe Flanagan, RM, Listowel, Flanagan did tender a public apology to O'Dwyer.⁷⁰ This *volte face*, written by Woulfe Flanagan on behalf of his uncle, who was said to be too ill and too upset to do so himself, could well be regarded as bringing an end to the first phase of this hitherto three cornered controversy. Henceforth, apart from odd references on public platforms and in election literature, the bitter battle raged on in private between O'Dwyer and Flanagan but with the absence of Dunraven whose final shot was his long letter of 17 February. So deep was the fissure between the two eminent churchmen that in fact rapprochement was not brought about until December 1900 and only then through the good offices of Monsignor Denis Hallinan, PP, Newcastle West and a future bishop of Limerick.⁷¹

In endeavouring to analyse the affair one cannot but be amazed by the manner in which O'Dwyer initiated the business and then allowed it to escalate. On the afternoon of the day in question, the bishop was returning to Limerick on horseback following a parish visitation in the west of the diocese. In Adare he summoned Flanagan and engaged the dean in conversation. The impromptu passing on of such an important message, as the bishop sat on

68 *IDI*, 27 February 1899.

69 Flanagan to Dunraven, 21 February 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24).

70 *LC*, 2 March 1899.

71 Rev J. Fitzgerald, CC, Adare, to Monsignor Hallinan, 6 December 1900 (telling that Flanagan received a letter from O'Dwyer); Flanagan to Hallinan, 7 December 1900 (telling that O'Dwyer came to visit Flanagan) (LDA, O'Dwyer papers).

his horse on the public roadway, shows that it was neither pre-meditated⁷² nor properly worked out, something which O'Dwyer himself admitted later. As the bishop never subsequently denied that the message was intended for transmission to Dunraven, one must take it that Flanagan was not in error on that point. The exact words or phrases, used by the bishop and intended to be passed to Dunraven, were never clarified, though it is definitely known that three attempts were made to do so, one by the bishop and two by Flanagan. When writing to Dunraven, reporting the incident, the dean said that the bishop spoke in an agitated and angry tone, something that, no doubt, helped to convince the earl of the serious intent of its contents. As the message was intended to be delivered verbally it was most unfortunate for both clergymen that Dunraven was then in London, necessitating a written communication from Flanagan. O'Dwyer should have been concerned on receiving a note from Flanagan to say that the message had been transmitted in writing as, after all, he had served as a curate under Flanagan in Adare for a short period⁷³ and knew the special bond of affection that existed between the parish priest and the Dunraven family. On the other hand, if it was his intention to pass on such a serious warning, O'Dwyer should have contacted Dunraven himself and not by means of a verbal instruction to a man in his late seventies.

Flanagan was the innocent sufferer in the whole affair. In good faith and, as it appeared later, with a number of errors and inconsistencies, the 'message' was passed on, unfortunately for him, in writing. The only charge that can be laid against Flanagan is that he omitted, perhaps because his memory played him false, to pass on the method by which O'Dwyer, as the bishop alleged later, said that he would carry out his threat, i.e. by appealing to the good sense of catholics not to vote for somebody who did not actively support the setting up of a catholic university. That lapse of memory by Flanagan was most serious because, if the method to be used by the bishop to carry out his threat had been communicated to Dunraven in the beginning, it would have become clear to the earl that the message was not as sinister as it appeared. The consequence of that omission by Flanagan was the catalyst of a grave

72 While the transmission of the 'message' that day may not have been premeditated, the rationale behind it was long in O'Dwyer's mind. On 2 December 1898 he took the editor of the *Irish Times* to task for not making a direct pronouncement in favour of catholic claims for fair treatment in the matter of higher education. He also castigated Irish protestants for their silence, 'let them speak out, not a few isolated individuals, whose motives on the eve of council elections may be misunderstood, but the whole body of the protestant gentry.' (*IT*, 3 December 1898). Catherine Shannon takes a more sinister and purposeful view of the transmission of the 'message'. She saw it as typical of O'Dwyer's usual evasive tactics regarding politics, his threat was conveyed to the Adare landlord through a third person, Dean Flanagan' (C. B. Shannon, 'Local government in Ireland: the politics and administration' (MA thesis, UCD, 1963), p. 195.

73 O'Dwyer was curate in Adare from 1870 to 1872 (John Begley, *The diocese of Limerick from 1691 to the present day* (Dublin 1938), pp 566-7).

injustice inflicted on the unsuspecting prelate, whose subsequent pique can be readily understood, though one could question whether his arrows of frustration and anger, directed towards Flanagan, were aimed in the right direction. Flanagan did, however, have an opportunity to end the controversy before it began. When Dunraven replied to Flanagan on 31 January he obviously intended that it be passed on to O'Dwyer. Flanagan referred to that letter as the controversy spluttered to an end and explained why he did not forward it at the time it was received:

You know the letter you quote of 31 January to me was to be delayed and afterwards go to the bishop as an emollient. But your letter saying this was marked 'private'.⁷⁴

Since the letter of 31 January is actually marked 'not for publication' and not 'private', as alleged by Flanagan, it is possible that the request to pass it on may have been in a separate note. Since, in any event, Flanagan was unsure as to what to do, he asked Dunraven for instructions but having got none, decided not to forward it, but wrote instead to O'Dwyer to state that he had conveyed the 'message'. Flanagan considered that if the 'message' was not being included in the election address then there was no point in stirring up needless controversy.

Dunraven's part in the affair is more interesting. The dichotomy created by the inclusion of a public message in a private letter may possibly have crossed his mind but once the letter was received from Flanagan, Dunraven regarded it as having entered the public arena. 'I much regret this determination on the part of the bishop for many reasons but I am greatly indebted to him for publicly announcing it to me,'⁷⁵ Dunraven wrote to Flanagan. Dunraven may have been hell bent on furthering his campaign at all costs and determined to use the 'message' to his own best advantage, a strategy which carried risks as he had no way of gauging the possible reaction of the voters to his 'defiance' of the bishop. His initial reaction, from the tone of voice said by Flanagan to have been used by O'Dwyer when giving the 'message', indicated that Dunraven felt that the bishop was threatening him; so naturally he was going to respond. Dunraven's treatment of Flanagan seems to be less than fair. The lack of certainty of Flanagan in his original letter when he used the phrase, 'he said . . . or

74 Flanagan to Dunraven, 21 February 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24).

75 Dunraven to Flanagan, 31 January 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24).

rather I think he said⁷⁶ should have alerted one with the acuity of Dunraven that all was not as was being reported to him. No attempt was made to contact Flanagan to verify, before publication, the contents of the message; no reply was sent to ameliorate his worries when he feared that the matter was about to escalate, nor was any notice taken of Flanagan's letter or telegram to say that the message had been incorrectly reported. The excuse given for inaction on this latter point was that the address had gone to the printers. It would have been only a matter of small expense and the delay of a day or so to have the address suited to the latest twist. Even if the bishop had become aware of the contents of Flanagan's message and communicated his reservations to Dunraven prior to publication of the address it is doubtful that much notice, either, would have been taken of his protestations. But then both O'Dwyer and Dunraven were heavyweights, well used to public controversy and each well capable of looking after himself in any ensuing verbal battle. Flanagan, as has been seen, employed a very different defensive mechanism. Finally, one could not but notice the coldness or even indifference displayed by Dunraven towards Flanagan who had, after all, got himself into trouble through over exuberant loyalty to the Dunraven cause.

The most interesting point to emerge from the imbroglio was the lack of effect on the outcome of the election. No great notice was taken by the voters of O'Dwyer's exhortation or advice⁷⁷ and, although the bishop withdrew his earlier reservation on Dunraven's candidature, the hint of the threat remained and, despite the subsequent use of the incident in pro-Coleman circulars and the alleged mistreatment of Flanagan by Dunraven, the voters were mature enough to vote as they considered best suited their own purposes or designs. Thereby was continued the demythologisation of the old shibboleth 'home rule would be Rome rule' and despite the powerful coalition of the Church, covertly, and the call of nationalism, overtly, the voters in the Croom division showed a stubborn streak of independence and loyalty, something which the unionist and protestant tradition in Ireland could and should have taken to heart, then and later.

76 Flanagan to Dunraven, 28/29 January 1899 (Adare, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/24).

77 The furore caused during the Limerick election of 1899 must have slipped the mind of Archbishop Walsh of Dublin when, in 1904, he contemplated giving much the same advice to voters in Dublin as he showed his growing frustration at the efficacy of parliamentary methods to secure justice for Catholics. Writing on 29 February 1904 to Sir C. Nixon, who was contemplating entering parliament, Walsh wrote, 'action other than parliamentary in any violent or unconstitutional form I am debarred from recommending . . . but there is an alternative form of procedure which I am at present seriously considering . . . my views are of such a character that makes it impossible for me to commit myself to approval of the candidature of anyone who is desirous of keeping up the present mode of putting forward the Catholic and national claims of the people of Ireland.' (P. F. Walsh, *William J. Walsh, archbishop of Dublin* (Dublin, 1928), p. 557.

When the dust of battle settled Dunraven was elected by a majority of 123 votes over his nationalist opponent, something that showed that the fallout from the Dunraven-Flanagan-O'Dwyer imbroglio was negligible.

THE PEER VERSUS THE POOR LAW GUARDIAN

The election campaign was being carried on apace, even if the O'Dwyer-Flanagan-Dunraven affair attracted the attention of the newspaper editors abroad and distracted attention, at home, from the actual business of garnering votes. A most successful pro-Coleman meeting was held in Croom on Sunday, 12 February where messages of support were read from Michael Davitt, 'I shall do my best to give a helping hand to Coleman before the polling'; John Finucane, MP, 'I would appeal to the electors of Croom not to give up a friend for a man who, up to the present, has given no proof of his love of Ireland,'¹ and William O'Brien, MP. In light of the close personal friendship and good working relationship later established, it is interesting to note the attitude of O'Brien to Dunraven in 1899:

I cannot unfortunately return to Ireland in time for the Croom meeting but any time after the first Sunday in March I will be at your disposal. In your fight against Lord Dunraven you will have noticed the attempt of Gerald Balfour [chief secretary] to misrepresent the effect of the recent urban elections [held earlier in the year] by leading the ignorant English public to believe that the victory of the Labour candidates meant the defeat of the nationalists ... can we doubt how triumphantly he [Balfour] would make himself heard in England if he could boast that his late landlord host at Adare was returned by the votes of the people of Limerick as an avowed and uncompromising Home Rule-killer.²

If Dunraven was 'an avowed and uncompromising home-rule killer' then he remained so at least until the devolution proposals of 1904. Starting from such a base of hostility on the part of O'Brien towards Dunraven the level of trust that was built up between the two during the land conference was remarkable, even though they were still poles apart politically. In that context it is easy to understand their belief, held for years afterwards, that the most intractable problems confronting Ireland could be solved by a conference between small groups of

1 There was a good deal of truth in Finucane's claim. Apart from the horse breeding commission in 1896-7, which did not concern the bulk of the Irish people, Dunraven's only other intervention in national affairs was during the Financial Relations controversy of 1896. As lord lieutenant of the county, he was asked to call a public protest meeting in Limerick on 29 December 1896 and later presided at the proceedings. While he at no time expressed any personal opinion on the matter, he stated at the start of the meeting that he was pleased that 'Ireland was speaking as one man and acting with one voice' (report of meeting in *LC*, 29 December 1896). Subsequently Dunraven had occasion to write to the *Times* because, in the issue of 30 December 1896, that paper reported that John Daly (the old Fenian dynamiter) spoke at the meeting to support Dunraven and Bishop O'Dwyer in demanding the enforcement of the report of the Financial Relations Commission. Dunraven emphatically wished to state that at the meeting he expressed no opinion whatever on the subject (*Times*, 2 January 1907). See also Dunraven, *Past times*, i, pp 31-3. The meeting took place in 1896 and not 1898, as stated therein.

2 *LL*, 13 February 1899.

interested persons, however contrary their views, provided that all sides were dedicated to a settlement. James O'Shea, PP, Croom, whose support for Coleman, up to this, was more shadow than substance, also wrote a letter³ explaining his inability to attend. This letter purported to give an insight into the conduct of the campaign on the Dunraven side. It was, O'Shea wrote, being masterminded by the estate office and no expense was spared on either transport costs or wages for the many canvassers then busy. O'Shea made two further interesting points. Firstly, he asked why did Dunraven, with all his power, wealth and influence, covet the little insignificant post of county councillor, and secondly, by imposing himself on the electors of Adare, Croom and Kildimo, most of whom were either his tenants or employees, he was giving those voters no real choice, while, at the same time, disenfranchising those outside his sphere of influence. Admitting that Dunraven was a gentleman of undoubted ability and high attainments, O'Shea, however, made no attempt to answer his own questions as to why Dunraven had entered this contest but put it to each elector to ponder on the conundrum he had posed and then to vote using the protection of the Ballot Act. In its account of that meeting, the *Limerick Leader* headed its report 'the peer and the poor law guardian', a device it often used afterwards to emphasise the disparity between the social standing of the two contenders and to gain a measure of sympathy for the alleged underdog.

As the election campaign had then started in earnest, the *Limerick Leader* drew comparisons between the two candidates. Concerning Dunraven, the leader writer asserted that his Irish public services in the past were so insignificant as to have remained unnoticed, while Coleman was 'a man who always interested himself in local affairs, and who would attend the meetings of the council regularly.' That latter observation concerning Coleman was phrased in a manner calculated to draw attention to the likely performance of whichever of the two would be successful in the election. In the event of the earl being successful a broad hint was given that he, who had done so little in the past for the country of his birth, was hardly likely now to interest himself in the mundane and banal concerns of his new constituents. Regular attendance at meetings was always going to be the achilles' heel of Dunraven's future performance as a member of a purely local body. It was alleged⁴ and never subsequently contradicted, that Dunraven, during his long membership of the Croom Board of Guardians, and Limerick Asylum Board, never attended a single meeting. This

³ Ibid.

⁴ *LL*, 27 March 1899. Dunraven was an ex-officio member of both boards.

should have been one of the main planks of the nationalist campaign, hammered out, loudly and clearly, at each and every opportunity. Such an appeal to the self-interest of the electorate might have produced better results. Personal criticism and ridicule of Dunraven by nationalist speakers, on the other hand, only served to strengthen and reinforce the natural affection in which the Wyndham-Quin name was held in Adare and amongst the tenantry of the vast far-flung estate, all of which was included in the sprawling Croom division [it was put about by nationalists, before the election, that the Croom division was specifically drawn up to facilitate the election of Dunraven].

As Dunraven was still abroad, the Croom and Adare Organisation Committee, which had been formed to forward his campaign, marked time by holding low-key public rallies at Adare, on the day of the Croom meeting and at Old Kildimo two weeks later. A feature of the Adare meeting⁵ was the huge crowd said by the *Limerick Chronicle* to have travelled from Croom. If Dunraven and his supporters were losing the battle in the patriot stakes, then that newspaper was making sure that they would emerge victorious in the propaganda stakes. In between the two meetings, the committee issued a statement to the *Limerick Leader*,⁶ since it considered it necessary, firstly, to rebuff the recent opinion of that paper that Dunraven's past service to Ireland was insignificant, and secondly, to point out that the Adare meeting of 12 February was not adequately reported therein, and to ask that their statement be given the same publicity as Coffey's earlier denunciation of Dunraven at Old Kildimo. In keeping with its stated policy of fair play for all, a policy that it generally adhered to, that paper obliged. It is obvious, due to the accumulation of facts contained therein and to the general presentation of the case that some hidden hand, other than the five signatories, contributed to the production of the document. The statement contained a lengthy and spirited defence of Dunraven's past record on behalf of the labouring class, from his statement⁷ in the house of lords on 13 April 1883, when he said, 'the land act of 1881, which had been passed for the farmers, had done nothing for the labourers,' to his championing of the labourers' bill, later that year, when he was entrusted⁸ with its safe passage through the upper house. The Old Kildimo meeting, the number in attendance being the subject of disagreement between the two main local newspapers, first saw the appearance of Dunraven's supporters sporting

5 *LC*, 14 February 1899.

6 *LL*, 20 February 1899. It was signed by Joseph Benson, Michael O'Farrell, Michael Giltenane, PLG, Denis Collins and James Hickey.

7 *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 278, cols. 167-76, 13 April 1883.

8 *Hansard*, 3rd Series, vol. 283, cols. 925-7, 17 Aug.; 1320-01, 20 Aug.; 1486, 21 Aug. 1883.

rosettes of orange and green and also marked the emergence of James Naughton, Croagh, variously described as secretary of the Croagh Wolfe Tone '98 Association and president of the Croagh Land and Labour Association, as a leading orator and contentious demagogue on the Dunraven side. That meeting also produced a new pro-Dunraven slogan 'support the man who is spending his money'. From the conduct of the campaign and from the evidence of onlookers such as Fr O'Shea of Croom, there is no doubt that Dunraven had considerable funds at his disposal to fight the election.

The Coleman bandwagon moved to Croagh to Sunday, 5 March, where the principal speakers were again Coffey and Daly. Coleman, as before, remained silent, and was completely anonymous, being merely listed as J. Coleman, one of those who had travelled from Banogue to the meeting. Coffey, this time, assailed Dunraven as a landlord, disputing the widely held assertion that the tenantry on his estate were comfortable; rather, said the speaker, 'was it not well known that they were the most rack-rented tenantry in Munster?'⁹ Daly, in keeping with his background, referred to his past sufferings for the cause of Ireland and said that it was now time to fight British oppression [as personified by Dunraven] in the polling booth, rather than with guns.

As if to answer Coffey's charges, the people of Adare and district went in huge numbers to the railway station, on Wednesday, 8 March, to welcome Dunraven on his return from abroad.¹⁰ Such was the enthusiasm of the throng that, after an address of welcome was read on behalf of his election committee, the horses were unyoked and the carriage was dragged to the Manor, making a stop at the parochial house on the way. There the earl and his daughters entered the house for the first face-to-face meeting between Dunraven and Flanagan since the 'message' controversy.

Dunraven's first action on his return was to respond to a kind of address that had been sent around, by his opponent, to the tenants on his estate. This circular or document, signed by Coleman and addressed 'Dear Friends' was made up of two parts. The first was an attack on Dunraven as an extortionist landlord who exacted exorbitant rents for 'poor and worn out lands' with an incitement to tenants to take the first step in redressing their misery:

Is not this estate the highest-rented and the poorest tenantry in the country? It is quite

⁹ *LL*, 8 March 1899.

¹⁰ *LC*, 9 March 1899. Dunraven was returning after a sojourn at a health resort in Europe.

time you should show this unionist peer that you see through his little game, and show the flower of English and Scottish aristocracy whom he's so fond of entertaining at his house, that he has ground you to all but chaff.¹¹

The second part of the document purported to show how Dean Flanagan was used by the estate office in the collection of rents:

Is it not well known that the dean at Adare was the fulcrum by which exorbitant rents were exacted on the labour of the unfortunate tenants of the worn-out tillage lands of the Dunraven estate? He [the dean] was used, caressed, respected, beloved and successfully cajoled as long as required; but now, when occasion serves, is exposed and thrown overboard with ruthless contempt.¹²

Commenting on the document Dunraven said that he could not allow to pass unchallenged the statements concerning the dean, which he paraphrased as follows:

Fr Flanagan has been nothing more than a kind of instrument in my hands to enable me to screw the last farthing out of my tenants . . . that man has lent himself to try and grind the poor.¹³

Dunraven went on to say that as far as he was concerned Coleman and those who opposed his candidature had a perfect right to say anything they liked about himself but not to implicate an innocent party. It is interesting that Dunraven made no attempt to disprove the allegations regarding collection of rents, dismissing them as if they were not based on fact and so not worthy of refutation. This document indicated a change in the thrust of the nationalist attacks on the earl. Henceforth, he was to be portrayed as a heartless landlord, whose tenants were on the point of destitution through rack-renting, while much was to be made of the alleged perfidy of the earl in his recent dealings with Flanagan.

Meanwhile both candidates had officially entered the lists by the time nominations

11 Dunraven papers, Adare, D 3196/G/24, the first 'Tenantry Document'.

12 Ibid.

13 *LC*, 9 March 1899.

closed on Monday, 6 March. As if to overwhelm Coleman by sheer weight of numbers, Dunraven was nominated on nine different papers, signed by voters from all parts of the division. One solitary nomination paper, which was sufficient, was deposited on behalf of his opponent.

Now that he was back in Adare, the earl immersed himself totally in the campaign. His first major outing was an open-air rally in Croagh on Sunday, 12 March. By this time a second ‘tenantry document’, undated and signed by Coleman, as before, had been circulated. It contained the same criticism of Dunraven as an avaricious and uncaring landlord but, in treating of Flanagan, portrayed him as one who had been useful to Dunraven in the past but who was cruelly discarded at the time of the ‘message’ controversy:

Look at his treatment of the dean. Whilst Fr Flanagan was for years trying to serve his own poor people and all other harassed tenants on the estate that ever approached him, he was at the same time a good friend to the earl. In settlements he effected, many a pound found its way into the rent-office that, but for him, the earl would never see. . . . And now see how recklessly the noble earl casts him aside, as one would throw away a squeezed lemon and exposes him to annoyance, pain and ridicule. Will the many friends of the revered dean back up this and vote for the man who is guilty of such conduct?¹⁴

In his address to the Croagh meeting Dunraven referred to this second circular from Coleman, which his tenants had received the previous day. He expressed satisfaction that it ‘practically apologised to Father Flanagan and had taken back all allegations made,’¹⁵ a rather strange interpretation from a perusal of the relevant section. He also took time to reply to the parish priest of Croom, who had asked on 12 February, why he, who had a seat in the house of lords, was seeking such a minor office as that of a county councillor. His reply was simple and direct:

¹⁴ Dunraven papers, Adare, D 3196/G/24, the second ‘Tenantry document’. There was an element of truth in the statement that Flanagan acted as an intermediary between the tenants and the estate office. See Aubrey de Vere to Baron Emly, 22 December 1885, ‘he [de Vere] had a letter from Flanagan who mentioned that he had arranged matters between Dunraven and his tenants’ (NLI, Emly papers, 83 17 (8)). On another occasion that we know of, Flanagan accompanied the countess of Dunraven when she visited a distressed tenant at Ballinvoher, Ballysteen (LL, 17 March 1899, letter of James Moran). While the first of the two interventions recorded above would seem to deal with matters of rent, the second was decidedly humanitarian.

¹⁵ LC, 14 March 1899.

This is the first time in my life that an opportunity had offered itself to me of offering my services and any little experience, any little knowledge, and any little amount of brains I may have, to my fellow countrymen in my own birthplace, and in my own division and where I live.¹⁶

During his time both in government and in the house of lords Dunraven had gained a large measure of expertise in dealing with public affairs. Up to this his interest was mainly in matters dealing with the empire but now, with the possibilities opening up before the country from the passing of the local government act, he obviously felt that this experience could be put to some use on behalf of Ireland. Taking the declaration at face value it seemed a valid reason to enter public life, not so much to represent the wishes of ordinary people, a duty which, from his social standing, was likely to be beyond him, but to see that the structures of administration in local government were prudently and carefully set down. In offering himself for election Dunraven made no attempt to hoodwink the electorate into thinking that he was at one with them on the great national issue of home rule. In Croagh he made it clear to his listeners and to a much wider audience that, while his stance was painful for him, he could not see his way to support a parliament in Dublin:

Do you think that it has been no sorrow to me that on matters of Imperial and national politics, which have nothing to do with the county council business, my conscientious convictions compel me to differ with what I know to be the conscientious views of the great majority of the people among whom I live.¹⁷

The honesty of the above gave a clear choice to the electorate, either they could support a candidate who was at one with them on local concerns but who differed from them on national affairs, or they could vote for one whose policies were virtually indecipherable, and too often wrapped in irrelevancies and abuse of his opponent. In that same speech in Croagh, Dunraven spoke of serving the people of the division if they gave him the chance by electing him so that he would be able to carry out their views conscientiously and act according to their wishes. It is difficult to see by what manner Dunraven, if successful, could ascertain the wishes of his new constituents. His availability and accessibility would, due to his social

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

position, be severely restricted and unlikely to be sought by any of his tenants. If elected his main asset would be his *entrée* into official and government circles as well as his familiarity with officialdom in Dublin Castle. On the other hand, he did not need to be a member of any county council to use his personal standing for the benefit of the county. On the face of it his answer to O'Shea's query looks plausible enough but he failed to explain what great service he could render the people of County Limerick that, say, Coleman, a man of the people, could not. On the other hand, his reason may have been deeper. It was always the hope and desire of the framers of the local government legislation that the new councils would be composed of nationalists as well as unionists [who, from their background and experience, were seen in the past as the natural party of power and whose participation in the new order of affairs was deemed to be essential], working in harmony for the common good. Perhaps then Dunraven saw his participation in the hustings as a signal to landlords of a unionist hue to claim a share of what many saw as their rightful place in public affairs. As an anti-home ruler, Dunraven may also have been attempting to establish Limerick County Council as a prototype for the future in which interest in and participation in local affairs would supersede and extinguish, in nationalist circles, any desire for legislative independence.

Following the Croagh meeting, the *Limerick Leader*¹⁸ deprecated the playing of national airs; the use of green banners and the sporting of orange and green garments by the Dunraven faction at Croagh, as if such was the exclusive preserve of one side or the other. The *Limerick Chronicle*,¹⁹ sensing that it could trump the contribution of its rival, and bring some semblance of reality to the contest, editorialised on other comments of Dunraven at that meeting. It mentioned his speaking of the ability of the new council to raise money for both annual and capital expenditure through the efficacy of sound credit ratings, which, in turn, would result from prudent management of council affairs. As the owner of the highest rated²⁰ estate in County Limerick, though not the largest, it was in Dunraven's interest to ensure that prudent management of the financial affairs of the county council would keep the annual rate demand at a tolerable level. Ratepayers in the division, and that included estate owners, farmers who had purchased under previous land acts and business persons in towns and villages, could be sure that, if elected, Dunraven would champion their concern for fair

18 *LL*, 13 March 1899. For a discussion on the manner in which tunes, colours and symbols began to be used in the 'nationalisation' of Ireland see Peter Alter, 'Symbols of Irish nationalism' in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 14 (1974), pp 104-23; Brian O Cuiv, 'The wearing of the green' in *Studia Hibernica*, nos. 17-18 (1976-78), pp 107-19.

19 *LC*, 14 March 1899.

20 U. H. H. de Burgh, *The landowners of Ireland* (Dublin, 1878).

treatment. In raising such matters, Dunraven was engaging in real local politics in contrast to the relative silence in this regard from the nationalist side.

At this stage in the campaign, one could clearly contrast the two methods of approach to the electors. On the one hand, criticism of landlords, excessive rents, and unionists spewed from the mouths of pro-Coleman speakers, always to the tune of nationalist drums. On the other hand, Dunraven, while quite capable of getting in jibes²¹ at his opponent's expense, generally endeavoured to lift the debate to a higher level and attempted to address the requirements and necessities of the forthcoming council. Coleman suffered from his inability to present his own views at his public rallies. He was fortunate though that speakers from outside the division made themselves available, an indication of the importance with which nationalist Limerick viewed the Croom contest, yet this had a downside as the speakers invariably concentrated on abusing Dunraven to the detriment of dealing with local concerns.

Like the earlier Flanagan-O'Dwyer episode, another controversy, minor in character, flared up which, once again, had the effect of keeping the contest in the public eye and insured, by means of comment and letters, that newspaper readers were kept fully informed. It began when James Naughton of Croagh, while presiding at the late meeting there, was handed a piece of paper, apparently by two prominent Coleman supporters, containing two questions to be answered, in an impromptu manner, by Dunraven. The questions were obviously meant to catch Dunraven unawares, in the hope that the answers might elicit either unsatisfactory or vague replies. One concerned Dunraven's views on possible land purchase by tenants, the other dealt with whether rents should be exacted on labourers' cottages by the district council during the six slack winter months. Despite receiving the questions, Dunraven did not answer them at the meeting as, apparently, he expected the chairman to put them to him in a formal manner. All this the earl explained in a letter that was published in the *Limerick Leader*²² subsequently, thereby ensuring that the answers reached a much wider audience than the relatively small number of partisan supporters present at Croagh. Dunraven also enclosed, for publication, a note to Naughton in which he answered the points more fully than he would have been in a position to do at the public meeting. The first

²¹ In his final manifesto to the electors, Coleman asked them to assemble at his rally in Croom in their thousands. Amid laughter and cheers Dunraven pointed out, at his meeting in Croom, that the total electorate in the division was only 750 and observed that as the most important part of council business would be financial, how could one who thought that 750 contained a great number of thousands be capable of conducting council business? (LC, 28 March 1899).

²² LL, 22 March 1899.

question posed no difficulty for Dunraven. With regard to land purchase, he was able to say that as far back as 1883, he was strongly in favour of tenant ownership and indicated the economic motivation for this:

There would be no doubt that a man who was the owner of land was more likely to develop his property by the employment of money or labour than the man who held it under any other form of tenure.²³

The second question, which Dunraven described as complicated, was in essence a trick question and, despite his protestation to the contrary, may have inhibited him from giving an answer that day, thereby allowing him time to consider his response. If Dunraven came down on the side of the district council, the landlord in this case, then he could be said to be anti-labourer. If, on the other hand, he backed the labourers' demands in this hypothetical case, then he was at variance with his oft-stated opinion that the financial affairs of the county council and, by implication, the district councils, should be managed as prudently and as economically as possible. Dunraven could also have sidestepped the subject by proclaiming that it was a matter for prospective district councillors and not county councillors, but that would leave him open to the charge of avoiding the issue. He did, however, tackle the issue in a Solomonesque manner:

The case of a private owner dealing with his own money, and that of a district council, which is the trustee of other people's money is different. The main thing appears to me to be that the rent should be a fair rent and I should have thought that small weekly payments would generally have come easier on the occupier than large quarterly or half-year payments. It appears to me to be impossible to lay down a fixed rule applicable to every individual case, and it is a matter to be dealt with by the district council in whose hands it will be. I can only say that, personally, I think full consideration should in all cases be given to the necessities and convenience of tenants.²⁴

Like the earlier controversy, this mini-fray lingered²⁵ for a while with charge and counter-charge between the *Limerick Leader* and Naughton, wherein the former, who had spoken

²³ LC, 18 March 1899.

²⁴ LL, 22 March 1899.

²⁵ LL, 22, 24 March 1899.

highly of Naughton in 1890 when he suffered imprisonment²⁶ for the national cause, now failed to comprehend his adherence to the Dunraven camp.

Dunraven was not in the country for the week or so of the *Limerick Leader*/Naughton encounter. On Monday, 20 March he crossed to Britain to preside at the annual dinner of the Bridgend Chamber of Trade. Knowing that his speech there would be widely reported in Ireland, he reiterated his belief that the council contest should not be fought on purely political, social or religious grounds, and that it was on account of the excellence of his election committee that he was able to fulfil his speaking engagement in Wales.²⁷

By the time that the Bridgend report appeared in the newspapers, Dunraven was already back in Adare, busily preparing for the public meeting to be held in Croom on the following Saturday, the day before a huge nationalist rally there. This was the most significant meeting of Dunraven's campaign to date. It was his first public meeting in Croom, the epi-centre of Coleman's support and important therefore that there would be a good turn out and that the meeting be conducted in a dignified and proper manner. Moreover, it was inevitable that comparisons would be made between that meeting and the nationalist rally²⁸ the following day where, in the absence of William O'Brien, Michael Davitt was listed as the principal speaker. As was usual, supporters on both sides came from outlying areas of the division (or were transported to the Dunraven rallies at the earl's expense as the *Limerick Leader* always alleged). Large contingents came with the local brass band from Adare and were joined on the way by the Croom fife and drum band. It was indeed a formidable procession, in the centre of which was Dunraven's carriage drawn by what were described as people from the locality, that made its way from the edge of the village to the area in front of the hotel, the site for the meeting. Two or three days before this meeting, Coleman's latest manifesto, the fourth, this time addressed to the entire electorate of the division, was circulated. This fortuitous happening provided Dunraven with an excellent opportunity to refute the allegations contained therein; to poke fun publicly at Coleman and, better still, to do so in the place of his election headquarters. At the outset Dunraven declared, once again, the contents to be a load of unmitigated nonsense and an insult not only

²⁶ On 13 January 1890, Naughton, secretary of the Croagh branch of the National League, was sentenced to one month's imprisonment with hard labour for intimidating William Evans, a caretaker of an evicted farm. See *LL*, 22 November 1889, 13 January 1890; *LC*, 14 January 1890; *Munster News*, 15 January 1890.

²⁷ *LC*, 25 March 1899.

²⁸ *LL*, 22 March 1899.

to himself, something that did not really perturb him, but also to the intelligence of every elector. At the end of this manifesto Coleman had written:

Landlords are the curse of Ireland therefore vote for Compulsory Purchase on just terms, a happy and prosperous country, and the right to live as men should in your native land. Vote for this, and VOTE FOR COLEMAN.²⁹

Dunraven answered this quite neatly. He suggested that somebody ought to ask Coleman to explain how he meant to give compulsory purchase on just terms and prosperity to the country if he was returned to the county council. Did Coleman not yet realise, he added, that land purchase schemes had nothing to do with the county council but were matters for the Imperial parliament?³⁰

In all Coleman and his advisers circulated four documents, the first two to Dunraven's tenantry, and the other two to the electorate in general. The third appeared after 17 March and the last was timed to inflict utter discredit on Dunraven prior to the Croom meeting of 25 March. All were similar in tone and content, fulminating against the landlord class and Dunraven in particular. They compared the misery of the tenants to the lavish life-style of the landlord; said that rents collected in Adare were spent in Great Britain to finance the earl's yachting and horse-racing interests; highlighted the paucity of money spent on the estate in Ireland, and bemoaned the scant recognition given to Irishmen in the running of Dunraven's affairs. All these 'facts' were interspersed with degrading and insulting references to Dunraven himself, his family name and his antecedents. Coleman was badly served by such documents. We have seen how Dunraven was able to use extracts to ridicule Coleman and, if even a fraction of the allegations were true, it is difficult to see how the Adare tenantry and villagers could vote for Dunraven let alone publicly support him.

At the Coleman rally the following day, Michael Davitt was the principal speaker and star turn of the meeting. He began by saying that he had only interfered in a few council campaigns so far but that he was obliged to assist the Croom effort as Dunraven was a supporter of Dublin Castle and of Balfour, the prime minister, 'who had declared that the

²⁹ Dunraven papers, Adare, D 3196/G/24. It is only from internal evidence that the four documents or manifestos, all undated, can be placed in chronological order.

³⁰ LC, 28 March 1899.

object and purpose of his party, in passing the local government act, was to knock the bottom out of home rule.³¹ Davitt was a complex character who, despite his ultra nationalist utterings, was pragmatic enough to realise the desirability and necessity of integrating unionist opinion into a body where nationalists were in the majority. Davitt made two uncharacteristic, yet kindly references to Dunraven. In the course of his speech, he gave as his opinion that if Dunraven were to declare himself a nationalist, as another landlord in the county has done, then he, Davitt would not be surprised if Coleman retired in favour of his opponent. Towards the end of the meeting, Davitt, in seconding a motion of thanks to the chairman, suggested to the audience that:

To show that they had no ill-feeling against Lord Dunraven, while he would be in favour of giving him a good thrashing on the day of the poll as a landlord and an Anglo-Irishman, yet, when the council was elected and manned by nationalists, he would also be in favour of the council co-opting him as a resident of the county and a man of some distinction.³²

This was not, surely, vintage Davitt. While it still showed opposition to Dunraven as a landlord, though strangely mild tempered, it showed certain deference to the earl, going so far as to use his British title. Either a sea change had come over Davitt or else he was revealing a more private and heretofore secret part of himself. The *Limerick Leader* expressed its shock at Davitt's remarks. The editorial said that Davitt was a republican who neither believed in queens, princes or lords, yet here he was virtually offering, as far as it was within his power, a seat on the council to Dunraven, whether the electorate rejected him or not. The writer then professed not to know which Davitt had come to Croom, the red-hot revolutionist or the man who would not be surprised at Coleman for doing reverence to a coronet. In conclusion the newspaper was of the opinion that Coleman's cause would have been better served if Davitt, the 'peculiarly constituted democrat',³³ had never come to Croom.

As the election campaign was drawing to a close, the *Limerick Leader* devoted an editorial to this topic just three days before the poll. It began by stating that one of the beneficial results of the local government act was to revive the national aspiration for home

31 *LL*, 27 March 1899. Davitt was in error regarding Balfour. He did not become prime minister until 1902.

32 *Ibid*.

33 *LL*, 29 March 1899.

rule. Referring specifically to the Croom contest, which it said was one of national significance and on which the eyes of England were centred, the editorial, not surprisingly, came out strongly in favour of Coleman as a man of intelligence and service and with an impeccable nationalist background. On the other hand, the newspaper was generous enough to his opponent. It stated that Dunraven's suitability for the post of county councillor could not be doubted, but that, nonetheless, he was a unionist landlord 'who believes the people of Ireland are not able to manage their own affairs, but at the same time possess sufficient intelligence to appreciate the ability of his lordship.'³⁴

The penultimate pro-Dunraven rally took place in Old Kildimo³⁵ on Sunday, 2 April, just four days before polling day. He was, as usual, the principal speaker and was shrewd enough to quote Davitt's words that he would be a useful man on the council. Most of Dunraven's ire was directed towards his marriage-connection and recent convert to Irish nationalism, Baron Emly, who had sent two brake loads of supporters to the recent pro-Coleman rally at Croom. Before the meeting ended, a communication was read from the labourers and workingmen of Kilfinny, 'who deprecated the manner in which the opponents of Dunraven were conducting the campaign.'³⁶ This petition, which was well put together, was a standard enough sort of procedure, but in this case, it surprisingly came from an area, which, while part of the estate, was not included in the Croom electoral division.

Dunraven held his final rally, on 3 April, appropriately enough in Adare,³⁷ right outside the main entrance to the manor house. He confined himself to a few topics - answering again the more sensible questions raised in the many documents or manifestos circulated by Coleman; stating emphatically that it was not the policy of the government to substitute the local government act for home rule, and finally, he went on to allay fears that any of his more prominent supporters were in any way beholden to him either as tenants, labourers or dependants, thereby implying that they, and indeed every other voter, were free to vote as they chose.

However confident Dunraven may have been of success on polling day, 6 April, he, as in his alacrity in countering any harmful allegations made against himself, left nothing to

³⁴ *LL*, 31 March 1899.

³⁵ *LC*, 4 April 1899.

³⁶ *Ibid.* The Kilfinny document was signed by John Hannan, T. Heffernan, Michael Noonan, Michael Walsh, Michael Kelly and T. Lynch.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

chance. In this case, a sample ballot paper³⁸ was produced and circulated to each voter, giving his or her number on the register, as well as the place, day, and hours of polling. The electors were shown where to put the x if they were willing to vote for him.

After a truly extraordinary election campaign, polling day was quite unremarkable. When the votes were counted, Dunraven had 395, a comfortable margin of 123 over his nationalist opponent.

38 Dunraven papers, Adare, D 3196/G/25.

AN ELEVENTH HOUR TRICK

Just two days before polling, another surprising development took place in this most unusual campaign, which, once again, had the effect of raising the Croom contest to the level of wider public attention, and which, in the opinion of both Limerick newspapers,¹ damaged Coleman's prospects considerably.

A printed leaflet, which purported to come from the Irish Protestant Tenantry Society (IPTS), was already prepared for posting so that a copy would reach each house in the division prior to polling, but too late to prevent contradiction. This organisation regretted that:

large districts in Ireland, which not very long since were peopled by those gallant and faithful men [protestant tenantry] who formed the vanguard of Protestantism and the British Monarchy, have been weeded out of them to such an extent that not a single Protestant is now to be found in them.²

In order then to redress this imbalance the society:

will strenuously labour to meet and counteract this destructive course of things, it will exert itself by every means within its reach to retain the present Protestant population in Ireland, and to introduce a Protestant tenantry into the districts before alluded to, by hunting the Papists from our estates and giving them no quarter whatever.³

In the normal course of events this document seemed so preposterous that it would not be taken seriously but, in this case, Dunraven was listed as one of three patrons of the society, and accordingly, if such a clandestine organisation really existed, it placed all the tenants on the Dunraven estate in an invidious position. It was a clever last minute ploy to discredit the earl in the eyes of the voters. It so happened that, some days prior to the posting of the document, Dunraven was made aware of its existence and not only was he shown a copy, but his benefactor offered to deliver the entire stock of leaflets to him.⁴ Dunraven would not agree to the latter suggestion, ostensibly because to do so would encourage either house

1 *LC*, 6 April; *LL*, 7 April 1899.

2 Dunraven Papers, Adare, D 3196/G/25.

3 *Ibid.*

4 Dunraven, *Past times*, i, pp 29-30.

breaking or theft. His informant did, however, agree to keep the earl informed of the day and method of distribution. The unionist candidate then conceived a clever plan. He would prepare a counter document or disclaimer, to be distributed at or about the same time and, in order to win widespread sympathy, he would arrange to have a report on the whole matter ready for publication in important newspapers. But first it would be necessary to check out the authenticity of the leaflet. He contacted the earl of Enniskillen, who was also named as a patron. Both were in agreement that no such organisation was in existence or if it did exist, they knew nothing about it. Armed with that knowledge, Dunraven prepared, in the form of a circular, an emphatic denial, in which he pointed out that neither he nor the earl of Enniskillen knew anything of the alleged organisation, and that the names of others, said to be associated with this phantom group, were either fictitious or those of deceased persons. Secondly, he forwarded the contents of the leaflet and his denial, together with a brief accompanying letter, to the (Dublin) *Daily Express* with instructions to publish them on polling day, Thursday, 6 April, if specifically requested to do so. The letter expressed his indignation at his treatment, at the eleventh hour, by unscrupulous opponents, ‘this appears to me to be a disgraceful way of conducting an election and I have felt bound to issue a strongly worded reply.’⁵ The rebuttal or denial was then sent to a printer in Limerick and, once they were returned, the trap was ready to be sprung, that is if the quarry hove into sight.

According to Dunraven’s own account,⁶ the unknown one informed him that the nationalist circulars were to be mailed to outlying places on Wednesday, the day before the poll, with the bulk of them to be sent by messengers on jaunting cars on the morning of the voting. Armed with that knowledge, Dunraven sent out his disclaimer in the same manner, to arrive at about the same time.⁷ The task was performed, at such short notice and with such efficiency by Dunraven’s willing election-staff that, in some cases, the two hand-distributed documents arrived simultaneously. Whatever day the documents reached the houses the nationalist camp knew what was afoot in regard to the denial and the material sent to the

⁵ *Daily Express*, 6 April 1899. The choice of that strongly unionist and pro-landlord newspaper, instead of the more widely read moderate unionist *Irish Times*, was interesting. Dunraven obviously intended his rebuttal to be read by a specific readership. Neither the two Limerick newspapers nor the *Irish Times* carried the rebuttal though all three made reference to the occurrence.

⁶ Dunraven, *Past times*, p. 30. Both the *LC*, 6 April 1899 and the *Daily Express*, 7 April, state that they were mailed two nights before the poll (Tuesday 4 April). Dunraven’s covering letter to the *Daily Express* was dated 5 April and stated that the leaflets were circulated that morning. Dunraven’s autobiography, however, contains a number of minor inaccuracies. In vol. i, p. 31 he mixes up the results of the county council elections in 1902 and 1905, while in vol. ii, p. 118, the major fire in the tobacco curing barn took place in 1917 and not 1916, as stated.

⁷ Dunraven, *Past times*, i, pp 29-30.

press because, early on the morning of Thursday, the polling day, handbills were distributed and posters were issued insisting on the authenticity of the IPTS document. More surprisingly, however, both the handbills and posters were said to have contained a threat, in Coleman's name, to take legal action against Dunraven for libel. The existence of the second nationalist circular was reported in the *Limerick Leader*⁸ on the Thursday but try as he could, the reporter could not get his hand on any of the handbills or posters.

There was a small but significant difference in Dunraven's disclaimer or rebuttal, between that which appeared in the *Daily Express* compared to that which was circulated locally. In the latter, Coleman is twice mentioned by name. It began:

AN INFAMOUS LIE. Mr Coleman is circulating a leaflet headed the Irish Protestant Tenantry Society, in which I am stated to be the Patron of a Society the objects of which are to drive out Catholic tenants and substitute Protestants. The whole thing is a LIE and Mr Coleman knows it is a lie. No such society existed; it is nothing but an invention of Mr Coleman.⁹

The document¹⁰ concluded with a scathing and vituperative attack on Coleman:

The statements in this leaflet are a gross and cowardly libel upon me and I intend to bring the authors and distributors to justice. The man who circulates a lying statement like this is a LIAR. Will you have a LIAR like this represent you on the County Council?

Coleman was not named in the denial subsequently published in the newspaper. The threat of libel, said to have been contained in the second IPTS document is proof that the contents of the earl's disclaimer had passed to the nationalist side. It is impossible, at this

⁸ *LL*, 6 April 1899. It states that 'the *Leader* man could not get hold of a specimen of the last piece of electioneering literature, but he was assured that they were thrown out as handbills off a [side]car which passed through the village [early that morning].'

⁹ Dunraven Papers, Adare, D 3196/G/25.

¹⁰ The genesis of this document goes back at least to the founding of the Protestant Colonisation Society. This was an organisation formed in Ulster in 1830 to ensure that lands, vacated through emigration or other causes, would continue to be occupied by protestants. The principle survived and other similar groupings were founded afterwards, most notably the Protestant Tenantry Society, 1841. See Hickey and Doherty, *A new dictionary of Irish History from 1800* (Dublin, 2003), p. 407.

distance in time, to know whether Coleman played any part in the composition of the original document but surely he must have been aware of its existence. Dunraven certainly believed so. However Coleman never followed through with his threatened action for libel against Dunraven nor did Dunraven proceed with his. Dunraven was disappointed if he expected the *Daily Express* to create a furore over the happening. Apart from a brief reference to the original circular on Friday 7 April, ‘the leaflet created the greatest indignation’, the matter was dropped.

THE HISTORIC FIRST MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

Following the declaration of the election results both sides took stock. The *Limerick Chronicle*,¹ while deprecating the passing of the influence of the grand jury from local administration, took comfort from the fact that the new council could call on the services and experience of unionists such as Dunraven, Monteagle and T. D. Atkinson. The *Limerick Leader*, on the other hand, felt pleased that voters held true to home rule principles in the provinces of Munster, Leinster and Connaught, where only a sprinkling of unionists were returned. The victory of Dunraven was, it felt, a marked tribute to his personal popularity and, because he secured election without sacrificing any of his unionist principles, it dubbed him an honest man capable of greater things in the future:

As an honest man he is open to conviction on the home rule question, and who knows what three years working with the people, from whom he and his party have been so long estranged, may accomplish.²

The editorial writer was more far seeing than he, perhaps, realised. It is doubtful that Dunraven's intense interest in the welfare of Ireland after 1900 resulted from his years on Limerick County Council but rather that his membership of that body was the first step in a deliberate policy, as enunciated by himself during the election campaign, of doing what he could to help the country of his birth. Dunraven, speaking at victory celebrations in Croom and Adare, stated that he regarded his new position as a trust placed in him and proof of the confidence that had been reposed in him.³

When the euphoria of victory and the disappointment of defeat subsided, interest centred, not on who would control the county council, but rather on who would occupy the position of chairman. The *Limerick Leader* suggested that a meeting of nationalist members of the new council be held as it was strongly of the opinion that no unionist should be elected to that important position, thereby 'endowing him with a casting vote leaving it, perhaps, in his power to bring things to a deadlock whenever the fancy seized him.'⁴ When the suggested meeting was not held, the *Limerick Leader* expressed regret that some district

¹ LC, 8 April 1899. Monteagle and Atkinson were returned for the Askeaton and Ballingarry divisions, respectively,

² LL, 10 April 1899.

³ LL, 11 April 1899.

⁴ LL, 12 April 1899.

councils had seen fit to elect unionists to office, claiming that Orangemen, ‘the sea green incorruptibles of the north, had strained every point against the nationalists’⁵ where they were in the majority. An interesting exchange of letters between Thomas Butler, chairman of the Adare election committee, and Dunraven took place about this time. Butler, in a skilfully crafted letter, asked Dunraven indirectly whether he was interested in the chairmanship of the council:

Your name has been frequently mentioned in connection with the chairmanship of the county council, and your election committee believe that many of the councillors would be willing to support you, but it has been objected that your views as to the non-political nature of the council are so strong that you would, if chairman, prevent discussion on some of the political subjects in which we are keenly interested.⁶

In reply, dated 21 April 1899, Dunraven stated:

I am much obliged to you for saying that my name has been mentioned in connection with the chairmanship of the council, and enquiring my views as to the duty of the chairman with regard to political resolutions. My views are that the chairman of the council is in all things the servant of the council. That, as it is the first duty of the council to transact the business of the county, so it is the first duty of the chairman to do all in his power to facilitate the transaction of that business and that, if the council desire to discuss other matters, it is the chairman’s duty to allow such discussion, to put such resolutions as may be moved, and to carry out any directions the council may give as to forwarding such resolutions to the proper quarter. The chairmanship will, especially during the first year, entail close attention to the business of the council, and, if elected, I am prepared to devote myself to it.⁷

It was an object lesson for any prospective chairman on how to conduct council business and shows a definite desire to become chairman, if only for the first year. In an attempt to bring Dunraven’s name to the forefront, James Naughton, his ally from the recent election, now

⁵ LL, 19 April 1899.

⁶ Dunraven papers, Adare, D 3196/G/25.

⁷ Ibid.

describing himself as secretary of the Croagh Wolfe Tone '98 Association, wrote to the *Limerick Leader* suggesting that, in voting for the office of chairman, the councillors should elect whosoever received the highest number of votes at the recent election.⁸ While Naughton did not mention Dunraven by name, his intention was clear.

Despite the fact that the *Limerick Leader* had opined that Dunraven possessed ‘much capability and political experience’⁹ the opposition of the main nationalist newspaper in Limerick did not help his chance of becoming chairman when the thirty-one councillors came together, for the inaugural meeting, on Saturday, 22 April 1899.¹⁰ The first business was the election of a temporary chairman. Lord Monteagle and T. D. Atkinson proposed Dunraven but, in a two-way contest, he only received seven votes while twenty-three were obtained by his opponent, Patrick O’Shaughnessy, Newcastle West. This didn’t augur well for Dunraven’s ambition to capture the chair. Clearly the nationalist majority was not willing to offer him any preferment. Dunraven’s votes came from what could be described as the unionist rump, that is three who were elected, Monteagle, Atkinson and himself, and a further three nominated by the outgoing grand jury, Sir David Roche, William Waller, James O’Grady Delmege, together with the nationalist member for the Kilfinane division, Dr Maurice Connery.¹¹ As there was provision in the act for the co-option of two members it was left to Monteagle and Dunraven, due to the hesitancy of the general body, to propose¹² that the co-options be proceeded with. Eight candidates were proposed and seconded, amongst whom was the ubiquitous James Naughton, Croagh, who was said to be representing the labour interest. Dunraven took care not to be associated with Naughton’s candidature, leaving the nomination of Naughton to Atkinson and Sir David Roche. All eight were then voted on, each councillor having two votes. Naughton received the six unionist votes in round one but fell out after the next round. The next item was the election of chairman where Atkinson, in proposing Dunraven, said that he had a very large and practical experience of county council business in Great Britain. William Waller seconded. Two other candidates were also duly nominated. Dunraven again received seven votes, the same as the neo-nationalist, Baron Emly. Both, however, were well short of the sixteen secured by Thomas B.

8 *LL*, 21 April 1899. Dunraven did not receive the highest number of votes. His total of 395 was bettered by Thomas B. Mitchell, who secured 419 votes in the Bruff division.

9 *LL*, 17 April 1899.

10 *CCM*, 22 April 1899.

11 Connery was reprimanded by the UIL for so doing as he breached a resolution passed on 4 March 1899 (*LL*, 2 June 1899).

12 *Ibid.*

Mitchell, Bruff. Dunraven wisely refrained from contesting the vice-chairmanship. Gracious as ever, Dunraven then proposed a vote of thanks to the temporary chairman. A long resolution¹³ in the names of Anthony Mackey, the newly elected vice-chairman, and Coleman, who was an ex-officio member of the council due to his chairmanship of Croom RDC, was then taken. It began ‘that we the county councillors . . . hereby renew our fidelity to our country’ and ended ‘nothing short of legislative independence can or ever will satisfy the national aspiration of our people or enable them to become contented, happy or prosperous in their own land.’ While the resolution embodied a legitimate aspiration in nationalist eyes it was also designed to discomfit unionist members of the council. Dunraven, the leader of the small unionist membership, took up the cudgels on behalf of his class. He said that he could not agree with portions of this resolution but was unwilling to propose an amendment. Dunraven realised that resolutions of that type were inevitable in the euphoria of the nationalist victory but pointed out to councillors the ineffectiveness of such resolutions, which were a waste of the council time.

13 LL, 24 April 1899; Diarmaid Ferriter, *A history of Limerick county council 1898 – 1998* (Limerick, 1998), p. 207.

WORK FOR THE LABOURING CLASSES

The grand jury system of local government was long¹ established in Ireland. Part of the function of that body was the raising of funds through a county rate or cess, applicable to occupiers of land. An important duty placed upon the grand jury was the building and maintenance of public roads or highways. As it did not have a work force of its own, that responsibility was given to landowners living adjacent to the place of work, or through whose land the roads traversed. For that they were allowed to collect tolls and later, when that system was not practicable due to greater road usage, the grand jury rewarded road maintenance with grants from the county funds. The system evolved whereby land occupiers would contract to maintain a stretch of roadway for an agreed payment. As the land occupiers were the payers of the county rate, many of them, whether large or small, felt that the contract system was their sole prerogative, while the grand jury encouraged the system as it ensured the prompt payment of the county cess - only fully paid up rate payers were allowed to tender as contractors.

This then was the system inherited by the new county council in 1899. The popular usage of the bicycle, together with the development of gasoline driven automobiles and the invention of the pneumatic tyre, meant that new and improved roads were required. In County Limerick, some people, including Lord Emly, who were interested in the work of the Irish Land and Labour Association (ILLA), became acutely aware of the disadvantage that this system placed upon the land-less labourer.² This class of person, disproportionately disadvantaged after the Great Famine, had begun, in the 1880s, to receive state recognition by the provision of labourers' cottages on half-acre plots. But they had neither the ability nor the wherewithal, financial or otherwise, to tender for road contracts. Work on the roads, especially in the slacker labouring months of winter, when conversely, the roads required greatest attention, was seen as the best method of improving the lot of the labourer, and more pragmatically, under the terms of the local government act, he now had a vote, making him as important, at election time, as the highest land-owning rate payer in the county. Yet the act precluded him from even tendering for any such work or benefiting from any work in

1 D. J. Hickey and J.E. Doherty, *A Dictionary of Irish history since 1800* (Dublin, 1980), pp 310-2.

2 For the treatment of labourers in the nineteenth century see K. Theodore Hopppen, *Ireland since 1800* (London, 1989), pp 84-5; D. Fitzpatrick, 'The disappearance of the Irish agricultural labourer, 1841-1912' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, vii (1980), pp 66-92; J. S. Donnelly, Jr., *The land and the people of nineteenth century Cork* (London, 1975), pp 17—241.

connection with roads. So began a long and torturous campaign which, once the internal council wrangles had been sorted out, concentrated on wringing from a reluctant Local Government Board (LGB) such concessions as were needed to make the act, in another small instance, more amenable to the population at large than to the LGB.

Once the county council was up and running, the problems associated with road maintenance soon surfaced. At the fourth meeting, 13 May 1899, Emly, member for the Patrickswell division, moved a long motion, the essence of which was ‘that the county council in every case prefer direct employment of labour by council to the intervention of contractors.’³ Dunraven spoke next, even before the motion was seconded. He objected to it because, in his opinion, the council should not become a direct employer of labour, and went on to give two reasons. Firstly, the council did not have sufficient competent overseers of labour nor did it have an adequate corp of officials to back up the work or supervise the workforce. Both of these factors would result in work being carried out uneconomically, resulting in widespread misuse of council money, money which was not its own. Secondly, Emly’s motion would create what Dunraven called ‘an aristocracy of labour’, which meant that since only a certain number of labourers could be employed they would then ingratiate themselves with the officials, to the detriment of many others seeking to get on the schemes. This would result in the demoralisation of labourers and again lead to extravagance and waste. He continued by stating that he would like to see labourers getting as many small contracts as could comfortably, with existing staff, be supervised and managed.⁴ William Leahy, the council solicitor, clarified the position by quoting section 22 of procedure of council’s order, issued by the LGB on 30 January, 1899, to the effect that ‘all public works executed in pursuance of a proposal of the rural district councils, or a proposal of a committee appointed under this order by the county council, shall be executed by contract.’⁵ A later section of this order, however, allowed direct employment, in exceptional cases, on minor or district roads. Coleman seconded Emly’s motion, again opposing the views of Dunraven, a pattern already begun, and which continued, with few exceptions, as long as both were members of the same council. This action brought Dunraven again to his feet, pointing out to the meeting that the first paragraph of the motion was contrary to the law as Leahy had propounded it, and that the passing of the motion was therefore futile in the

3 CCM, 13 May 1899.

4 LL, 15 May 1899.

5 Ibid.

extreme. He then proposed an amendment whereby the motion, less the offending paragraph, be placed before the council. Delmege, a fellow unionist, seconded. Stalemate seemed the likely outcome of the subsequent debate until Anthony Mackey, vice-chairman, proposed a further amendment, ‘that, owing to the fact that direct employment or more commonly referred to as direct labour (DL) is now allowed on district roads, we recommend short contracts and DL where possible.’⁶ As this was in keeping with the spirit of his amendment, Dunraven withdrew his. When Mackey’s amendment was put to the house, it passed by twenty votes to nine.

As might be expected, the *Limerick Leader*, that self appointed keeper of the conscience of nationalist Limerick, was displeased on all fronts. An editorial⁷ railed against Emly for the lack of clarity and forethought in his motion; ridiculed Dunraven’s ideas on extravagance and waste, and questioned what it called Leahy’s law. Special indignation was reserved for the earl. His ‘aristocracy of labour’ remark provided an ideal opportunity to comment on his alleged abhorrence of class privilege while, at the same time, his membership of the house of lords was based, not on any special talents discernable in the earl, but simply because his ancestors sat there before him. He was further brought to task for never having reprimanded the middlemen whose profit taking was legendary under the road schemes of the old grand jury system, a body of which Dunraven was not a member but whose devotion to duty he had praised on first accepting the nomination to contest the county council election.

Whenever the opportunity arose, the landlord class was made to shoulder the burden of complaints made against their peers even if they themselves were innocent. In later months, Dunraven was accused of being anti direct labour. His objection at the time of Emly’s motion was firstly, that public works, including roads, bridges, footpaths etc., must be carried out by contractors, otherwise they were contrary to the law as it stood. Secondly, any such work properly assigned to the county surveyor could not commence until the county council provided adequate supervisory and back-up services, otherwise public money would be misspent. When he learned from Leahy that minor or by-roads, as distinct from heavy or main roads, could be tended or even constructed by direct labour, the first of his misgivings was eliminated, while the use by Mackey, in his amendment, of the term ‘where possible’

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

ensured that suitable preparations would precede commencement of work. In that event Dunraven was happy to go along with this concept of direct labour. One important point may be noted from that day's discussion. Dunraven, for the first time, established himself as the conscience of the council. Then and later, he had to point out to councillors that the law, as it stood, could not be contravened, even by unanimous decisions of nationalist bodies, nor by the biased opinions of editorial leader writers. The *Limerick Leader*, for example, stated that the councillors, with the exception of Dunraven and a few others, were in favour of Emly's motion and would have unquestionably passed it had not the legal adviser interfered.⁸ Clearly the euphoria of the nationalist victory at the recent council elections had a curious effect on certain people.

Dunraven, possibly smarting under the sharp criticism of his alleged stance on DL, decided to do something practical to show his good faith in the matter. At a meeting of the Croom branch of the Independent Trade and Labour League, on 6 June 1899, Peter Fitzgerald, JP, the estate agent at Adare, with the blessing of the earl and as the best means then available of assisting labourers to become road contractors, made the following quite revolutionary proposal:

*If some of the members of the society [the labour league], either jointly or severally, would offer themselves as contractors for portions of road that might be open to contract, Dunraven would be prepared to provide the necessary security.*⁹

The scheme would work as follows. On contracts for road maintenance or repair being procured, up to two thirds of the sum agreed would be advanced by the county surveyor, the balance to be paid on completion. If the contract was not completed to the satisfaction of the surveyor, the security promised by Dunraven would then be called in to enable the work to be completed. This move was a huge boost to the concept of DL, showing that an influential personage like Dunraven had both confidence in the labouring classes and in the general idea of DL, seemingly a reversal of his previous stance. This turn of events was warmly welcomed by the *Limerick Leader*, 'Dunraven [by offering to provide security] has, by a single thoughtful action, done more to advance DL than all Emly's wild and irrelevant rhetoric,'¹⁰ a reference to a serious verbal confrontation, on motion and amendment regarding DL, between

⁸ LL, 2 June 1899.

⁹ LL, 9 June 1899.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Emly and Mackey, at the council meeting of 3 June. The *Limerick Leader*, now firmly, but perhaps unwisely, advocating the merits of DL, saw the Croom model as a way of side tracking the law as it stood, ‘Dunraven has shown his confidence in the Croom labourers and set an example which wealthy members of the council should follow.’¹¹ This was followed by a reference to Emly for his *volte-face* prior to the election (a course of action not forgotten by that newspaper), ‘should he who had thrown overboard his unionist principles for a green mantle, allow himself to be outpaced by a mere Tory?’¹²

Emly was still miffed at the failure of the county council to support his motion on DL when he spoke at Herbertstown on 2 July. He too placed some of the blame on Dunraven’s presence on the council as he listed two reasons for the failure of his motion. Firstly:

If they [the nationalists] had been organised, the arch enemies of their race, Dublin Castle, earl Cadogan [lord lieutenant] and Dunraven, would have wept together over the loss of Croom.¹³

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the fact that the county council was composed of six unionists, twenty six big farmers and no labourers was clearly relevant to the issue.

DL again surfaced at the council meeting of 4 July. Emly, who was supported by a noisy group of labourers in the public area that necessitated the presence of a head constable and other members of the RIC, moved that Mackey’s amendment be rescinded in favour of his original motion. Dunraven, who took no part in the long subsequent discussion, intervened at a late stage. He described Emly’s motion as eminently silly, the passing of which would lead nowhere and said that he supported Mackey’s amendment then and now, as being the best vehicle the council had of getting whatever benefits it could out of direct employment and, at the same time, meeting the natural wishes of the labourers. He also complained that valuable council time, when many other important matters needed to be attended to, was being wasted in going over old ground. Once again, the voice of reason was listened to. A vote was then taken, the result being twelve (including Coleman) for Emly’s

11 *LL*, 14 June 1899.

12 *Ibid.*

13 *LL*, 3 July 1899.

motion, with seventeen against.¹⁴ The *Limerick Leader*, ever mindful of the labourers' interests, published an interview with John Horan, the county surveyor. Arising out of this, the editorial pointed out two courses open to labourers to further their cause, firstly, by seeking to amend the law - a change in the thinking of the leader writer, and secondly, by making themselves available to work with contractors on heavy roads, that is main thoroughfares, the wages to be paid by the council.¹⁵ Having failed at county council level, Emly also changed tack. The ILLA, of which he was the leading light, passed a resolution calling on the county council to demand from the government the power to employ DL.¹⁶ The process was taken one step further, opening up immense potential for good or evil when Charleville RDC rejected¹⁷ all tenders for contracts within its area - RDCs had the duty to manage minor roads in its own area, subject to the approval of the relevant county council. Robert Coll, a member of Limerick County Council, put forward, at the general meeting of county and borough councils in Dublin, on 22 August 1899, a proposal 'that the privy council be asked to amend the law so that each county council could deal with the question of DL as it saw fit.'¹⁸ As this seemed the sensible and legal way forward, in line with what Dunraven had advocated three months before, Coll's proposition was adopted.

As nothing seems to have come from Dunraven's offer of 6 June to the labourers of Croom he made another attempt to initiate some form of DL for their benefit, which might serve as a model for improving landlords and others. At a meeting of Croom RDC on 17 October an offer was made, on behalf of Dunraven, to provide one-third of the cost of cementing footpaths in the town, most of which was part of the Adare estate. If the district council made up the balance, the work, now quite legal, could commence immediately using local labour. John Coleman, the chairman, in a typical contemptuous throw-away remark, asked, 'why not the total cost?' He was answered by Denis Spencer Lyons, a catholic unionist and supporter of Dunraven, who sensibly observed that more than rent payers to the Adare estate office used the footpaths of the town. Immediately interruptions and noises blocked out any further meaningful discussion and the mayhem ended when the discussion of

14 LL, 5 July 1899.

15 LL, 2 August 1899.

16 LL, 4 August 1899.

17 LL, 18 August 1899. Charleville is in the neighbouring County Cork.

18 LL, 25 August 1899.

the offer was adjourned for three months on a vote of twenty to nine.¹⁹

The reply from the LGB to the Dublin meeting of county and borough councils was disappointing in the extreme and gave no hope for a reversal of the law. In a circular to all local authorities the requirements of the law, as it then existed, were clearly set out:

The principle is maintenance of roads by contract and not by means of labourers directly employed by the councils – the only exception is where roads are given in charge of the county surveyor and this can only be done in the case of damage or where no sufficient contractor can be found.²⁰

A number of things now occurred. At public meetings²¹ labourers began to put pressure on farmers and others not to tender, and, at a meeting of Rathkeale RDC, on 9 November,²² despite the presence of the county surveyor, who warned the councillors that DL could not be put in operation as long as there were contractors offering solvent securities and tendering at the usual prices, the members refused to open the tender envelopes - so that technically speaking no tenders were received. The situation became further confused when, at a special county council meeting on 11 November, the councillors rejected a suggestion of Monteagle to refer the non-opening of envelopes to the LGB.²³ Leahy, the law agent, then interposed to remark that, for example, in the case of the Rathkeale RDC crux, should the council decide itself to undertake the work by some scheme or other under DL, then, in his opinion, the members of the finance committee would be positively and indubitably surcharged once the pay sheets of the labourers came before them.²⁴

Dunraven attended the next council meeting, on 22 November, and endeavoured to put some semblance of sanity into the situation. He, with the support of Monteagle, proposed:

That, in the opinion of the council, the construction and maintenance of roads can be more efficiently and economically carried out by DL under the control of the county surveyor than by contract, and that such an alteration in the law is urgently needed as shall enable the

¹⁹ *LL*, 18 October 1899.

²⁰ *LL*, 25 October 1899.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *LL*, 10 November 1899.

²³ *CCM*, 11 November 1899.

²⁴ *LL*, 13 November 1899.

county council to carry out construction and maintenance on rural roads in such a manner and in such disposition as they find beneficial.²⁵

This was agreed unanimously and it was decided to send a copy of the resolution to the lord lieutenant and to the secretary of each county council. Whatever effect the resolution might have with other county councils, the names of the proposer and seconder would certainly carry much weight in Dublin Castle. The same pair then put a further motion to the house, as follows:

that before handing over to the county surveyor any work hitherto executed by contract, this county council do advertise for tenders in order to place itself in a legal position under section 24 of the procedure order, [1899].²⁶

In speaking to his motion, Dunraven, drawing on his London county council experience, said that a system of DL was best but that it depended on the county surveyor doing his business properly and employing an efficient staff, and the labourers doing an honest day's work for a fair day's pay. He then went on to explain that the council itself was required to advertise for tenders where rural district councils, by one means or other, didn't receive, or purported not to have received, road tenders. He estimated that a sum of £20,000 could be wrongly promised or spent by the council for DL schemes by March 1900. If that were the case, either he himself, as chairman of the finance committee, or each individual member of the council, that had not acted in accordance with due procedure, could be liable for the payment of that sum, or, put more simply, that either he would have to pay £20,000 or each councillor would pay something in the region of £800. Despite the implications of the scenario depicted, the council was not fully impressed by his reasoning and passed the motion only by sixteen votes to nine. One important outcome of the day's business was that the council was now committed to proceeding along the legal pathway, while at the same time seeking to amend the law in regard to DL. The *County Council Gazette*, commenting on the DL impasse in Limerick, complimented Dunraven on his stance regarding re-advertising and possible surcharge and further pointed out that when the local government bill was at the

²⁵ CCM, 22 November 1899.

²⁶ Ibid.

committee stage in the house of commons, an amendment, enabling county councils to act as desired in Limerick had been defeated.²⁷

As the end of 1899 approached the conundrum of DL was no nearer solution.²⁸ At the last council meeting of 1899, held on 30 December, the county surveyor found that he had forty roads for which no tenders had been received. Taking a slightly less than legal position, the councillors decided, in the absence of Dunraven, to advertise for twelve-month road contracts in each case.²⁹ Since the normal tender period heretofore had been four and half to five years this new arrangement was designed to make them worth as little as possible in order to discourage intending contractors. This proposed course of action, a misguided attempt to circumvent the law, earned a rebuke as the LGB pointed out that it had no power to sanction any departure from the provisions of Articles 24 and 25, Local Government (Procedures of Council) Order, 1899.³⁰ To counter this blast of reality the county councillors decided to mandate the new law officer, James Coffey, to get counsel's opinion. By then, despite the unfavourable terms, some tenders had been submitted to the county surveyor and the *Limerick Leader* again decided to take a hand in the proceedings. In editorial comment, it opined that the tenders were too high, more than labourers would cost, and that this was reason enough for rejection. It then challenged the council members to defy the LGB and seize the opportunity to put their professions regarding DL into practice.³¹ Without the steadying influence of Dunraven at meetings it seemed likely that the council might adopt a more truculent attitude to the LGB on the thorny issue of DL, encouraged by the exhortations of the *Limerick Leader* and by the fact that Croom RDC, of which Coleman was chairman, had rejected³² all tenders. The council, at its next meeting, wisely rejected the promptings of the *Limerick Leader* and, instead, sent a copy of the following resolution to the LGB, 'that the government be called upon to alter the law so as to enable councils to give the roads to labourers,'³³ Three months later,³⁴ the councillors were informed that no formal reply had been received, nor one to a follow up letter sent on 18 August.

²⁷ *County Council Gazette*, December 1899, cited in *LL*, 18 December 1899. The NLI does not possess a copy of the *Gazette*.

²⁸ *LL*, 27 December 1899.

²⁹ *LL*, 1 January 1900.

³⁰ *LL*, 9 April 1900.

³¹ *LL*, 18 May 1900.

³² *LL*, 1 June 1900.

³³ CCM, 18 June 1900. A similar type motion, agreed on 22 November 1899, was sent to the lord lieutenant but no reply was received.

³⁴ *LL*, 14 September 1900.

Dunraven attended the October 1900 meeting of the council. During the usual discussion of DL, Dunraven proposed, seconded by fellow unionist, Sir David Roche, a stronger and more precise motion than that of June. It asked the LGB whether the finance committee could make payments for the maintenance of roads, which the council had handed over to the county surveyor after tenders had been invited *in globo*, and for which none had been received.³⁵ That letter to the LGB, dated, 15 October, elicited a reply, dated, 30 October.³⁶ Clearly, the signatures appended to the resolution made an immediate impact in Dublin. The result of the inquiry or resolution was that seeking tenders *in globo* was illegal; the council could not, if no tenders were received, place the roads in charge of the county surveyor, and once again the LGB re-iterated that any action subsequent to the acceptance of such tenders would also be against the law and the finance committee would, if sums of money were paid out, be liable to surcharge. The essence of the reply, which should have come as no surprise to anybody, incensed the councillors who now directed their ire towards the LGB. Coleman was irked that the last letter, from the two titled members, had received such prompt attention, while Robert Coll said that it was time that the LGB became the servant and not the master of the people - a common complaint in nationalist circles, irritated by the constraints, based upon legislation as administered by the Custom House officials, placed on speedier implementation of the peoples' wishes.

The first glimmer of settlement, in what had been described as a 'game of battledore and shuttlecock', came when Balfour announced in the house of commons that the LGB now had the power to make a provisional order giving authority to work the roads by DL.³⁷ At a meeting of the county council, on 1 December, with Dunraven again an absentee, it took much discussion before deciding to send a deputation to the LGB to investigate the possibility of obtaining a provisional order for County Limerick. The composition of the deputation caused further trouble. Robert Gubbins proposed that the chairman, vice-chairman, Mackey, Dunraven, Monteagle and R. Coll wait on the chief secretary. Patrick Coll, objected saying that some on the deputation (an oblique reference to Dunraven and Monteagle) had opposed DL in the past but had come on board when they realised that it would become an established thing. William Waller, a unionist councillor, sounded a note of concern when he suggested that Dunraven, due to the objection to his presence on a

35 CCM, 13 October 1900.

36 LL, 5 November 1900.

37 Ibid.

deputation, might not now be willing to travel. Gubbins, however, mindful of the importance of Dunraven and to a lesser extent, Monteagle on any deputation to Wyndham, held his ground and the names of the deputation were eventually approved unanimously.³⁸ An impetus was added to the urgency of the situation by a resolution before the council, from the county organising committee of the ILLA, which stated that the agricultural labourers of the county were ‘on the verge of starvation through want of employment.’³⁹ The *Limerick Leader*, giving its opinion on the selection of Dunraven, its old enemy, said that his selection could not be condemned ‘as he now saw things in a different light.’⁴⁰

Some slight delay occurred in arranging the Dublin deputation. Dunraven wrote from the South of France, where he was recuperating from illness, intimating his willingness to attend but adding that it would not be convenient for him to do so before 3 January 1901, otherwise he would have to withdraw.⁴¹ The newly appointed chief secretary, George Wyndham, met the delegation on Saturday 26 January 1901. Wyndham had already obtained, officially, the views of some thirty county surveyors. Two-thirds of these expressed themselves in favour of DL, but all, without exception, advised great caution in the change over to DL and its implementation. Nonetheless, the chief secretary was willing to prepare a draft of a provisional order empowering the county councils to employ DL; to circulate same, and if it received general approval, to lay it before parliament for sanction. The *Limerick Leader* while not over enamoured of Wyndham, expressed approval of the manner in which the deputation placed the business before the chief secretary.⁴²

Matters regarding the implementation of DL could now be put in train. Limerick county council set up a special committee, including Dunraven, to examine the proposed local government order to see its effects and benefits, and report back.⁴³ At a meeting four days later, the councillors sensibly adopted a resolution that the council should defer consideration of road contracts pending the formation of a scheme under the expected provisional order.⁴⁴ In December the council instructed Horan, the county surveyor, to proceed with the

38 LC, 1 December 1900.

39 LL, 3 December 1900.

40 Ibid.

41 LL, 17 December 1900.

42 LL, 28 January 1901.

43 CCM, 23 February 1901.

44 LL, 1 March 1901.

preparation of DL schemes.⁴⁵ His preliminary report, presented to the council on 13 August, 1902⁴⁶ noted that 1,800 miles of roadway had been maintained, by contract, at an average yearly cost of around £30,000; the DL scheme would not commence until 1 April 1903, when existing contracts expired, and, it was both advisable and prudent that the DL scheme operate on 300 miles, for a start, at £10 a mile. This report was handed to the roads committee for examination and it was Dunraven who presented⁴⁷ its views to the council on 20 September. A change in procedure was recommended by the roads committee - that all roads in the county be worked by DL under the charge of the county surveyor. Dunraven also recommended that stones be quarried and broken by piece work, rather than by contract, and that wages be set out as follows, labourers 12 shillings per week, surface men 14 shillings, foremen £1. The report estimated that the yearly expenditure, allowing for the cost of extra administration and the employment of twelve foremen, would come to £30,460, compared to the average yearly expenditure on roads, for the last three years, of £30,736. While the saving in monetary terms was modest, the benefit lay in the large amount of wages payable to a big number of workers, who would otherwise not have benefited. The adoption of the report of the roads committee was proposed by Dunraven and seconded by Emly and passed unanimously. Dunraven moved an amendment on the lines of his suggestion for the quarrying and breaking of stones. This was also agreed. The roads committee then retired to consider the provisional declaration of the scheme, as prepared by the council solicitor, Leahy. This too, was later passed on the proposal of Dunraven and Emly. The DL scheme was then circulated to the district councils for observation and approval. It was indeed appropriate that Dunraven and Emly should have moved the motion for final county council approval. No two councillors had done more to initiate, in the case of Emly, and move forward, in the case of Dunraven, this necessary and worthwhile scheme. Although they had differed bitterly at the conception of the idea they joined together at its birth.

The Limerick scheme was then sent for approval to the LGB and received sanction on 10 January 1903 enabling it to come into effect on 1 April 1903⁴⁸ thereby initiating the first programme of direct labour, under the control of county councils, to be promoted in the

45 *LL*, 2 December 1901.

46 *LL*, 13 August 1902.

47 *LC*, 20 September 1902.

48 *LC*, 10 January 1903.

country.⁴⁹ The scheme, when implemented, was most successful as the county surveyor was able to report to the council, on 30 April 1904,⁵⁰ that it had resulted in a saving of £1,200 during the previous twelve months. The faith of the entire council in the efficacy of the scheme was fully justified. Thus ended a sometimes bitter and sustained campaign in which Dunraven played an important part.

49 Colman Moloney, 'Limerick County Council, 1899-1932' (MA thesis, UCC, 1977), p. 44.

50 *LL*, 2 May 1904.

BALANCING THE BOOKS

At the inaugural meeting of the county council Dunraven suggested that, among the other sub-committees, a finance committee (FC) should be formed.⁵¹ This committee would inquire into the financial condition of the county; examine liabilities, sources of income and payments, as well as deciding on and overseeing the collection of the county rate or cess. Dunraven suggested nine as the appropriate number with the addition of the chairman and vice-chairman as ex-officio members. After this was agreed, he and John Coleman were chosen as members of the committee. The quorum was fixed at five. The councillors, most of whom had little experience in matters of high finance and its management, were only too happy to go along with the suggestions of the earl. Amongst those subsequently appointed to this sub-committee were four unionist councillors. This was a measure of appreciation of the expertise they were likely to bring to the working of the committee as, after all, they were well practised in the management of their own estates. Dunraven stamped his authority early on when, in a comment on a suggestion of Dr Connery that a special sub-committee of the council be set up to strike and collect the county rate, he asserted that such was a function of the FC. Like all other sub-committees, the FC was obliged to send a report of its proceedings to the next council meeting for scrutiny and approval.

As business was not completed that day, the county council met again four days later. Then Dunraven proposed, seconded by Anthony Mackey, vice chairman, that the FC meet after the adjournment of the council to elect a chairman. This was in fact done during the luncheon break and, on resumption, Dunraven announced that he had been elected chairman⁵² and he proceeded to read a statement of business transacted.⁵³ A sum of £6,786 was required immediately, £4,286 to meet pressing needs and £2,500 to cover the costs of the recent election. Applications from the various poor law unions were also considered and it was agreed that one quarter of the sums applied for be granted. As yet, the council had no funds to deal with this situation. Dunraven brought a number of measures before the July meeting of the council.⁵⁴ He asked for approval for the finance committee to borrow £11,000 to pay gratuities and entitlements to collectors of the cess under the outgoing grand jury system, and to borrow a further £16,000, also from the treasurers, the National Bank, to meet council

⁵¹ LL, 24 April 1899.

⁵² CCM, 26 April 1899.

⁵³ LL, 26 April 1899.

⁵⁴ CCM, 15 July 1899. Dunraven amusingly recalled that he had difficulty getting members of the FC to consider large sums of money but 'sums that they had been accustomed to handle they would examine closely and critically' (Dunraven, *Past times*, i, p. 31).

expenses to the end of September. All these proposals were agreed. Further information on that meeting is contained in a contemporary newspaper report.⁵⁵ The estimated expenditure to 31 March 1900, the end of the financial year, was £128,171 which, after deducting grants from the Local Government Board, amounted to £74,824. To raise this sum a county rate of three shillings, two and a half pence in the £1 valuation was necessary. The FC obviously foresaw that the task of collecting that sum would not be easy so they recommended the appointment of nine rate collectors. However, only seven collectors, all evicted tenants, were appointed at a council meeting in August,⁵⁶ at which Dunraven was not present. The council was not setting a good precedent because, if compassion rather than suitability were the criterion for appointments, then nepotism would surely follow.

The FC was in danger, for a short while, of becoming embroiled in the potentially dangerous direct labour controversy. When, in November, the county council members wished to defy the LGB and award road contracts to labourers without official permission, Dunraven was quite adamant that should the FC sanction and pay such contractors, then the members of the FC would, individually and collectively, be liable to surcharge, an opinion shared by William Leahy, the council solicitor.⁵⁷ The members of the FC were then rather quickly brought to their senses.

By the end of the year 1899, after eight months of operation, The *Limerick Leader* reported that the finances of the county council were in order, a tribute to the astute management of the finances to that point, and an indirect commendation for Dunraven, though that newspaper could not bring itself to mention his name or single him out for praise.⁵⁸ The rest of the first year was rather uneventful. In order to give councillors a better understanding of the working of the FC, it was agreed⁵⁹ by the county council that, rather than having a report read at the monthly meeting of the council, a copy of the FC minutes be sent, at the same time as the county council minutes and notification of meetings, to each member. In December 1899 the FC was also entrusted with the task of deciding the salary of the new county secretary following the announcement of the resignation of Poole Gabbett, who was inherited from the defunct grand jury system. Following a successful

55 LL, 17 July 1899.

56 LL, 7 August 1899.

57 LL, 13 November 1899.

58 LL, 20 December 1899.

59 CCM, 27 January 1900.

recommendation from the FC the council adopted a rate for the following year at the March meeting in 1900.⁶⁰

At the AGM, on 13 June 1900, the question was raised whether sub committees had been appointed for a one or three year term.⁶¹ The matter seemed quite innocuous at the time, but, as emerged later, it had serious ramifications for Dunraven. The council could not make up its collective mind on any change, and the status quo remained, though three names were added to the original nine, making a total of fourteen members in all. Curiously, the quorum, in an increased membership, was reduced from five to three. The first inkling that all was not well in the affairs of the FC occurred when it reported to the council that uncollected rates were becoming a serious problem.⁶² Administrative difficulties resulting from under resourcing created further problems for the FC. A county council meeting,⁶³ on 23 February 1901, was informed by the FC that it was failing in its responsibility to the ratepayers and to the finances generally, as it could not do its duty adequately unless it was properly instructed by the FC and the latter body could not advise the council unless it had all the facts and figures in sufficient time to go through them, and adequate staff to make out the relevant reports. Something must have been done as, at the following meeting⁶⁴ of the council, four days later, Dunraven, who was present on that occasion, read FC reports for 9, 23, and 27 February. Not all the looming problems of the FC were the fault of the county council. Falling attendance at FC meetings had become a major problem. The reduction of the quorum to three did not seem to have the desired effect. In an effort to remedy a potentially embarrassing situation, the council decided⁶⁵ that, when it was appropriate, the FC should meet prior to council meetings. Matters did not much improve. At an important meeting⁶⁶ of the FC, on 6 March 1901, when the rate for the coming year was to be considered, only three attended. Dunraven, as was usually the case, was an absentee. At the following county council meeting, with Dunraven again absent, Robert Coll told the councillors that the FC could not confirm the figures and estimates laid before them. The council, in the absence of a firm enunciation of the financial position, took the opportunity to

60 CCM, 3 March 1900.

61 CCM, 13 June 1900.

62 CCM, 1 December 1900.

63 LL, 27 February 1901.

64 CCM, 27 February 1901.

65 CCM, 3 April 1901.

66 CCM, 13 March 1901.

reduce the rate by two pence in the £1.⁶⁷ At a rare enough attendance at a council meeting, on 31 August 1901, Dunraven presented a report⁶⁸ detailing the financial position of the council, including expenditure and receipts, from 1 April 1899 to 31 March 1901. The financial position of the council occupied the attention of the editorial writer of the *Limerick Leader*⁶⁹ who described the report as startling. Dwelling on one aspect of the problem, the writer quoted Dunraven as saying that the council was unable to pay weekly labour bills due to the fact that the rates did not come in regularly and went on to presage that bad news was in store for the county ratepayers, who were already overtaxed. Dunraven was smitten by the implied criticism in that newspaper leader. At the following council meeting,⁷⁰ he said that he would move at the next FC meeting that where no quorum was present within half an hour of the start of the meeting, the secretary would record the fact and call another meeting one week later. It is difficult to see how that suggestion could remedy the underlying cause of the poor attendance - the unwillingness or inability of members to attend. Dunraven also referred to the danger of trying to transact FC committee business without the attendance of the then law officer, James Coffey.

The advent of the year 1902 did not bring any change in the financial problems of the council, though steps were taken to remedy the situation. At a meeting on 18 January, reference was made to irrecoverable rates and arrears. The next council meeting agreed to submit the arrears sheet to the district councillors, who were closer to the ground than county councillors, to see what observations that group might make with a view to partial recovery of monies due.⁷¹ One month later, the council was forced to reduce the rates estimate by £7,775, thereby curtailing certain services.⁷² The rest of the council term lumbered on without any noticeable improvement in the financial position.

In attempting to analyse the working of the FC during the first triennial council, a number of factors must be considered, the most important being the poor attendance at meetings. The example of the chairman was crucial in this regard. If members took their cue from him then they too need only attend when it was convenient for them to do so. Perhaps the second council was not too wide of the mark in seeking a better attender to chair the FC.

67 LL, 13 March 1901.

68 CCM, 31 August 1901.

69 LL, 2 September 1901.

70 CCM, 26 October 1901.

71 LL, 27 January 1902.

72 LL, 22 February 1902.

The hard decisions to be made could have caused nationalist members to absent themselves but should not have prevented the unionist members from persevering with the programme as laid down by Dunraven. The immense number of ordinary council meetings during the first year, together with the difficulty of travel, and the fact that many members were on several sub-committees, put severe pressure on councillors. Another cause was that as attendance dwindled, the few who were present found that they were obliged to take decisions of enormous consequence, very often without adequate legal advice, which could rebound on themselves, as was seen from the possible surcharge on members over the direct labour issue. Even when finance committee meetings took place prior to ordinary council meetings, the attendance rate hardly improved. No meaningful remedy was suggested or implemented to right the attendance issue. The non-payment of rates dealt a serious blow to the solvency of the county fund. The disinclination of Irishmen to pay rates or taxes to anybody was a factor, and was exacerbated by a failure on the part of ratepayers to distinguish between payments to the new regime as against that of the old. Tough hardened rate collectors were required, men who were not averse to bringing miscreants before the courts. The rate collectors appointed were all evicted tenants, who had suffered at the hands of these same courts, and were understandably reluctant to proceed against defaulters. The council itself was hugely to blame for having appointed them in the first place. That body was also to blame when, on a number of occasions, it overruled the decision of the FC and reduced the rate burden.

The severe financial problems that came to the fore in the second council had their origin in the first three years. Much of the blame must be laid at the feet of Dunraven. Having been entrusted with the important task of chairing the FC he had started off vibrantly but, in the final analysis, he allowed things to drift out of control. As was seen in his later life of service to Ireland, he was a 'chapter one man', an innovator and philosopher rather than a doer. Due to pressure of business elsewhere, much of it across the Irish channel, his inability to assiduously attend meetings of either the county council or of the finance committee meant that there was no follow-up to ensure that best practice, as he correctly saw it, was implemented. In the vacuum thus created what should have been the main concerns of the FC, as enunciated by Dunraven at the first meeting of the county council, were neglected.

THE OLD ORDER CHANGES

The fact that the inaugural meeting of the county council, on 22 April 1899, did not complete its business on that day was an ominous omen for Dunraven because, having many business and political interests in both London and Wales, his attendance and therefore his usefulness at council meetings was likely to be curtailed. After the contentious question of the chairmanship had been settled another thorny issue immediately came to the fore which, while it did not affect membership or voting strength on the council itself, had serious implications for Dunraven and other non nationalists who might be moved to offer themselves for public service then or later. Sir David Roche, a former member of the grand jury, and one of the ex-officio members nominated by that body to serve on the new county council, raised the matter of the non co-option, by Croom RDC, at its inaugural meeting on 17 April 1899,¹ of three ex officio members who, as was expected, would come from the unionist side. This was a measure designed to give representation to unionists on the new council in order to achieve some sort of balance. Dunraven did not speak in the lengthy and sometimes acrimonious discussion, beyond suggesting² that the matter be referred back to the Croom body. This was readily accepted. The impasse was not resolved satisfactorily at local level so it again surfaced at the county council meeting on 5 August.³ This time the county councillors were in agreement that Croom RDC should urgently consider the matter, with a view to a speedy resolution of the impasse, as it was proving an embarrassment, not only to the county council itself, but also to the notion of co-operation between nationalists and unionists, which local democracy was expected to cement. At a meeting⁴ on 11 September Croom RDC strangely decided that the selection would be left to the chairman, John Coleman. The names of the candidates for co-option were submitted to the next meeting of the county council but brought no crumb of comfort to the non-nationalist side. Among the three chosen by Coleman were Lord Emly, a Catholic unionist landlord who had conformed to nationalism during the late election campaign (and was a successful candidate at the recent county council election for the Patrickswell division) and R. W. Ievers who hailed from a

1 LL, 17 April 1899. The irony of the matter was that having rejected the proposal to co-opt the three nominated unionists, the council proceeded to co-opt three 'gentlemen qualified to sit as district councillors'. Amongst them was John Coleman who was later unanimously elected as chairman. The ultra-unionist *Daily Express*, contrary to what might be expected, made no reference to the non co-option of the unionist trio, merely noting that Coleman, who unsuccessfully contested the county councillorship with Dunraven, was co-opted a member of Croom RDC and later elected chairman (*Daily Express*, 18 April 1899).

2 LL, 26 April 1899.

3 LL, 7 August 1899.

4 LL, 11 September 1899.

Protestant landlord family but who had nationalist leanings (he was one of the nominees rejected previously). The manner of selection was a neat ruse. The councillors agreed to these names and there the matter ended. Dunraven was absent from that meeting so his views remain unknown. This was an example of how his inability to attend regularly at council meetings militated against his desire, and that of the minority in Ireland, that a proper balance should now pertain on public bodies. A new hard line no-surrender attitude to unionism was now in place in the county and, with hardly any exceptions, it became the principle by which the nationalists asserted control and authority on the Limerick County Council. Dunraven was to fall a victim, as we shall see later, to this new policy in 1902 and again in 1905 as he had at the election for the chair at the inaugural meeting in 1899.

Dunraven, from his experience as a councillor on both the London and Glamorganshire County Councils, was usually to the fore when such factors as the logistics or mechanics of holding meetings were being considered. It was he who suggested⁵ the length of time to be allotted to each speaker and the desirability of circulating to each member, prior to the following meeting, the agenda for that meeting together with the minutes of the last meeting. In days when travel was difficult, the latter suggestion proved to be of inestimable benefit to those who were unable to be present at all council meetings. Dunraven may not have been fully disinterested in the substance of that same suggestion, as he gauged, from early on, that he would be unable to attend meetings regularly, so a means of keeping in touch with council business was provided for him as well as others. The councillors, some of whom would have been involved in the Land League, GAA and other nationalist organisations were, as a body, largely inexperienced in such a new arena, and were only too pleased to adopt the above suggestions, which were later incorporated in the standing orders,⁶ drawn up by Dunraven. When they were presented to a council meeting on 4 July, they were passed without any dissent, Coleman, in a rare moment of bonhomie, even doing the honours by proposing⁷ their adoption. While Dunraven might have been objectionable to the majority of the councillors as a personage and as a political opponent, they did not shrink from making use of his ideas or suggestions, whenever the occasion warranted it.

5 CCM, 20 May 1899.

6 Standing Orders, Limerick County Council, 1899. They were co-signed by Dunraven, chairman of the Standing Orders' committee and T. B. Mitchell, chairman of the council.

7 LL, 5 July 1899.

During those early months of April, May, June and July 1899,⁸ the council met on twelve occasions, two in each of three months, with a total of six meetings in May. Dunraven attended twice in April and July, together with three attendances in May, giving him seven in total. It was obvious, given the constraints of time and place that Dunraven could not keep up that attendance rate. Neither could the rest of the council, because for the remaining five months of the calendar year, the council met on nine occasions, Dunraven, during that period, attending only twice.

A number of interesting appointments were made during the early years. As laid down in the relevant legislation, Poole Gabbett, who had served as secretary of the grand jury, continued as secretary of the county council but announced, on 30 December 1899, that he intended to resign his position. The position of solicitor also fell vacant as Barrington and Son, for whom William Leahy was acting since May 1899,⁹ also resigned. It was decided that both positions would be filled at the council meeting on 3 March 1900. In the final vote for secretaryship, Robert Roche, the nephew of a councillor and future chairman, Robert Coll, JP, defeated the nephew of the chairman by the narrowest of margins, sixteen to fifteen.¹⁰ During the several rounds of voting Dunraven supported Roche. The only explanation seems to be that he had some slight dealings with Coll who he had appointed to the bench of magistrates in his capacity as lord lieutenant of the county. The introduction of blatant nepotism, at this early stage in the life of the council, which unfortunately set a headline for the future, had serious long-term effects on the financial viability of the council. Almost one year later the new county committee of agriculture and technical instruction appointed¹¹ James Coleman, son of John Coleman, as secretary. This too had repercussions.¹² The contest for the other vacancy was more interesting. The two candidates were Leahy, the incumbent, and James Coffey, a labour member of Limerick town council and proponent and mouthpiece of Coleman at the late election. Leahy, however, by his strict interpretation of the law particularly in the early days of the Direct Labour controversy, had not endeared himself to the majority side on the council. Dunraven proposed Leahy, praising him for his contribution to council business for the past year or so, while Coleman put forward the name of Coffey. The contest then became, in a sense, a re-run of the Croom council election of

8 CCM, April to July, 1899.

9 CCM, 6 May 1899. In a three cornered contest, Leahy got eighteen votes, Coffey nine and John Dundon three.

10 CCM, 3 March 1900.

11 LC, 20 February 1902.

12 See section on county council election of 1905.

1899. From a nationalist standpoint Leahy did not have sound credentials, for not only was he crown solicitor for Limerick county and city but he had represented¹³ the Land Corporation, against the tenants, in the infamous Cloncurry evictions, near Murroe, in April 1882. On this occasion, Coffey went into the contest with the blessing of the *Limerick Leader*¹⁴, and was successful¹⁵ by the narrowest of margins, 16 votes to 15. Dunraven, even if he did not propose him, would have supported Leahy towards whose legal background he had a natural inclination.¹⁶ Leahy fell victim to nationalist bias and the new policy of exclusivity, which policy was understandable since that had been the measure by which public appointments had been controlled in Ireland heretofore.

At the county council meeting¹⁷ of 26 October 1901, Dunraven raised the question of the law officer, Coffey, who had absented himself from meetings for the previous four or five months, without the permission or knowledge of the council. He went on to say that, as chairman of the FC, he considered it dangerous to proceed with meetings of that body without the services of legal advice. This topic evoked much discussion and eventually it was proposed by Delmege and seconded by Coleman that no action be taken before the quarterly meeting on 30 November. The council agreed to this but added the proviso that should Coffey not make himself available by that date, the council would have to consider the advisability of dispensing with his services. The *Limerick Leader* later informed¹⁸ the public that Coffey had already left Limerick but before he did so, he asked his brother, then a law clerk or apprentice in his office, to seek out somebody to look after the affairs of the firm. P. E. O'Donnell, solicitor, was so engaged and had been attending council meetings since late August at least. Dunraven, having raised the non-attendance of Coffey, now wanted to know by whose authority O'Donnell was present; who was paying him and what was to become of a sum of £58, shown in Coffey's books as monies collected by him on behalf of rate collectors but not yet handed over to them. O'Donnell agreed with Dunraven that the sums due were not the responsibility of the council. Dunraven then asked, with his usual perspicacity and to point out the absurdity of the situation, was the council to instruct its

13 *LL*, 28 February 1900. For more on the Cloncurry evictions see Dom Mark Tierney, *Murroe and Boher* (Dublin, 1966), pp 158-75.

14 *LL*, 28 February 1900.

15 *CCM*, 3 March 1900.

16 Leahy was originally recommended by the firm of Barrington and Son, legal advisers to the grand jury, who had declined to serve the county council. That firm also looked after the affairs of the Dunraven estate at Adare.

17 *CCM*, 26 October 1901.

18 *LL*, 28 October 1901.

solicitor, Coffey, to proceed against himself? In the event, no response, either in person, or by way of explanation, ever came from James Coffey, so the council decided,¹⁹ in the absence of Dunraven, to proceed to the appointment of an alternative solicitor in the new year when Leahy was reinstated as solicitor.²⁰ Dunraven was not present at that meeting.

Dunraven was present at the last meeting of the triennial council where he proposed a vote of thanks to the chairman and vice-chairman for the ‘ability, impartiality and justice with which they discharged their duties.’²¹ The record of Dunraven’s attendance at council meetings shows a gradual decline as the three years went by.²² Progressively he lost touch with council business and decisions, a trend that was to continue into the second council.

Year	Co. Council meetings	Dunraven’s attendance	percentage
1899 – 1900	31	11	35%
1900 – 1901	21	6	28%
1901 – 1902	19	4	21%
Total	71	21	29%

19 CCM, 14 December 1901.

20 CCM, 10 March 1902.

21 CCM, 31 May 1902.

22 CCM, book 1, 22 April 1899 to 11 March 1902. Lest a discrepancy be noticed between the total number of council meetings held during the first triennial council between my figures and those of the *Limerick Leader*, 19 May 1902 (see section on council election of 1902), I counted all gatherings of the council, be they actual meetings or adjourned meetings. For instance the business of the inaugural meeting of 22 April 1899 had to be adjourned and continued on 26 April. Similarly the meeting of 6 May 1899 was continued on 13 May 1899. By law each county council was required to hold only four quarterly meetings each year. It was on that basis, presumably, that Dunraven felt that he could be a regular attender at meetings. In practice, however, the business of the council required a plethora of meetings each year.

A CLOSE CALL

Even before the triennial span of the first council came to an end, plans were already in motion for the forthcoming elections. At its meeting on 22 February 1902,¹ the council members decided that polling would take place on the first Wednesday in the following June. Towards the end of March, the nationalist *Limerick Leader*² commented on the likely fortunes of the two probable candidates in the Croom division, Dunraven and Coleman. Of the former it was of the opinion that, as he was an indulgent landlord and a large employer of labour, his chances seemed very good. On the other hand, Coleman faced an uphill battle, as both the UIL and the ILLA were weak in the division, a factor that was likely to cause indifference among the voters as to which candidate they might support. Writing to the *Limerick Chronicle*,³ ‘An Old Critic’, who professed to have been horrified that people at the last election should have seen fit to vote for Dunraven and other unionist candidates, now vented his ire on some nationalist councillors, whom he described as family place-hunters, mentioning that three of them used their positions to obtain places for their sons and relatives. One of those alluded to was John Coleman, whose son, James, was appointed as secretary at the first meeting of the new county committee of agriculture and technical instruction.⁴ Unwittingly, the ‘Old Critic’ set the scene for the ensuing contest in Croom when he contrasted what he called the good, generous, open-hearted, disinterested gentlemen of the unionist line with the blatant self seeking outlook of some councillors. Indeed the appointment of Coleman the younger had serious repercussions for the nationalist cause. Into the coming contest came William Molony who, despite repeated pleas to retire and not split the nationalist vote, refused to do so. Molony was a farmer living at Manister, close to Croom, and had publicly supported Coleman at the last election.⁵ He was horrified at the onset of nepotism among nationalist councillors and was determined to bring the practice to the attention of the electorate by standing as an independent nationalist against Coleman in the Croom division.

Around the beginning of April, the nationalist side decided upon a new strategy in

1 CCM, 22 February 1902.

2 LL, 31 March 1902.

3 LC, 1 March 1902.

4 LC, 20 February 1902.

5 Molony was among the platform party at Coleman’s first election meeting in Croom on 12 February 1899 (LL, 13 February 1899). In addition, when the election of 1899 was over, Molony sent a cheque for £1 to the editor of the *Limerick Leader* with a view to starting a testimonial fund for the benefit of Coleman (LL, 12 April 1899). Molony’s suggestion was not followed through.

respect of the coming elections in County Limerick in order to discourage candidates such as Molony. The UIL summoned the secretaries of the various branches, in the parliamentary constituencies of east and west Limerick, together with other interested parties, to a meeting in the Town Hall, Limerick, to decide on the following resolution, 'to consider the representation of our public bodies with a view to making them more representative of the national feeling and sentiment in the county.'⁶ In the spirit of the resolution Coleman, having the Croom situation in mind, proposed a motion at the meeting that conventions be called to select candidates, but in cases where difficulties were likely to arise, special conventions would decide on the most suitable candidate.⁷ This motion was agreed, a course of action, which was heartily approved by the *Limerick Leader*.⁸

Meantime, Dunraven's campaign was resurrected. Following a meeting of his old election committee, a letter, dated 13 April 1902, and signed by thirty three of his closest supporters, was sent to inquire whether it was his intention to contest the forthcoming election. The reply, from his London address, where he was then under doctor's care, was emphatically to the effect that he was standing.⁹ Anticipating a favourable response, the Rathkeale correspondent of the *Limerick Chronicle* had already written, 'Dunraven's return at the head of the poll against all comers is already assured.'¹⁰ This supposition seems to have been prompted by the fact that the meeting in Adare was apparently attended by a representative body of influential men, comprising all shades of opinion in the Croom and Adare districts and the certainty that there would be at least two candidates on the nationalist side. To many, the coming election was a mere re-run of the last occasion, the result likely to be copper-fastened by the advent of a second candidate on the nationalist side. Many of Dunraven's supporters, on that account, saw the contest as needless and an unnecessary expense on their candidate.

By mid April, Croom was indeed shaping up into a three cornered contest as Molony refused to submit to either Coleman or the *Limerick Leader* by withdrawing. Coleman was adopted as a candidate on 1 May at a special convention in Croom jointly hosted by the UIL

6 LL, 9 April 1902. The meeting was held that day.

7 LL, 11 April 1902.

8 LL, 16 April 1902.

9 LC, 26 April 1902, when the letters were made public.

10 LC, 17 April 1902.

and the ILLA.¹¹ Molony, as expected, did not attend nor was he suggested as a candidate. A major blunder was made at that meeting by giving the coming election a political connotation, portraying it as an opportunity to protest against British misgovernment and coercion - a ploy that had failed badly in 1899 and which was likely to fail again against a benign and well-meaning landlord. A more simple and effective campaign would have been to keep hammering home to the voters the differences between Dunraven and Coleman in respect of attendances at meetings and contributions to council business. Molony, despite being ridiculed at the Croom convention, was determined to carry on with his crusade. His election address, which appeared on the same day in the *Limerick Leader* as Coleman's candidature was announced, was blunt and to the point:

I am against Nepotism, Jobbery and the consequent inefficiency of our popular bodies. In this connection, I may state that I have no relatives aspiring to highly paid positions at the ratepayers' expense.¹²

The continuing presence of Molony was a major cause of concern to the nationalist camp. Since the Croom contest was pivotal to nationalist sentiment in its determination to eradicate the last vestiges of unionism and the taint of the grand jury from local administration in County Limerick, it was necessary that Coleman succeed on this occasion and therefore vital that he not be encumbered by another candidate on the nationalist side, especially as the strength of Molony's support could not be gauged. As early as mid April a letter-writer, *Ratepayer*, in the *Limerick Leader* claimed that 'Molony has been promised very influential support from all classes of the electors.'¹³ The *Limerick Leader* was also full of concern over the outcome of the Croom contest:

The three-cornered fight in Croom must be viewed with the strongest disapproval...not a patriotic action by Moloney (sic) to oppose the selected candidate...may give the Tory candidate a signal victory...therefore, asks all nationalists to vote in mass as their duty dictates.¹⁴

11 *LL*, 2 May 1902.

12 *Ibid*.

13 *LL*, 18 April 1902.

14 *LL*, 9 May 1902.

At a meeting of the Croom UIL, ten days later, there was a unanimous call on Molony to stand down as ‘he was no longer a nationalist but a supporter of Dublin Castle Rule’¹⁵ and therefore eligible to share the unionist vote with Dunraven. This deft ploy was an insult to Molony and designed to cost him nationalist votes.

Dunraven was duly nominated as a candidate for the division on Saturday, 3 May.¹⁶ Once again, in a show of strength and apparent popularity, he was proposed and seconded on eleven different voting papers, signed by voters from diverse corners of the division. The contest itself was quite different from the hectic campaign of 1899. Gone were the huge public demonstrations or meetings, which were such a feature of the previous campaign.¹⁷ In the case of Dunraven, this was a necessity as he was still ill in London,¹⁸ while Coleman had no intention of once again exposing, to the electorate, his lack of competence in public speaking. Nevertheless the campaign was carried on vigorously on a less public level. Active canvassing, from door to door, was engaged in by both Dunraven’s and Coleman’s election committees. The contest was almost without rancour, though the redoubtable James Naughton, late of Croagh, but then living in Adare, managed to allude to the famous or infamous last minute circular of the 1899 election. The opportunity for him to do so was foolishly given by the *Munster News* where, in an article of support for Coleman, it referred to ‘the honourable and sturdy fight’¹⁹ put up by him at the last election. When that paper refused to publish Naughton’s rebuttal, the *Limerick Chronicle*²⁰ was only too happy to oblige. In any event, the main focus of attention was the contest between Coleman and Molony, who were mockingly referred to by the *Limerick Chronicle* as ‘the factionists who have now made themselves the laughing stock of every free thinking man who has a stake in

15 LL, 19 May 1902.

16 LC, 3 May 1902.

17 In view of William O’Brien’s opposition to the candidature of Dunraven at the 1899 election and his ongoing campaign against landlords and landordism it is unusual that he took no part in the 1902 Croom campaign. He was invited to a meeting in Castleconnell in support of Alban Ryan, who was contesting the division with John B. Barrington, a unionist landlord and land agent. See exchange of letters between Frank Harty, hon. sec., Murroe branch, UIL, and O’Brien, May 1902 (UCC, O’Brien papers, box AM, folder 3, items 55, 56) in which O’Brien, in a letter of support, stated that a victory for Barrington was a victory for the landlords and for the government and that every man of his class would have to be isolated. Ryan was not successful in the election. In September 1902, O’Brien remonstrated with the clerk of the Gort Board of Guardians where a non-unionist was elected to the chair, ‘the election of any representative of landlordism by nationalist voters is an act of treason to the nationalist cause’ (UCC, O’Brien papers, Box AM, 8/142).

18 LC, 8 May 1902.

19 *Munster News*, 3 May 1902.

20 LC, 13 May 1902. Naughton’s rebuttal was dated 8 May 1902. The *Munster News* gained far more for Dunraven’s campaign by its short-sightedness than would have followed the publication of Naughton’s letter.

the country.²¹ According to the *Limerick Chronicle* last minute attempts were under way to get either Coleman or Molony to retire and decide, by some form of ballot, which should run, but this was acceptable to neither of them. The newspaper then proceeded to use the occasion to the advantage of the unionist candidate by asking the electorate to contrast the dignified and telling addresses of Dunraven with the splenetic and windy effusions from the disunited nationalist candidates and reminded its readers that, despite repeated calls on Molony to stand aside, he obstinately refused to do so saying that ‘he would only retire in favour of any strong candidate with a clean record.’²²

Dunraven’s election address appeared first in the *Limerick Chronicle* of 17 May 1902. It was a summing up, in his own estimation, of his work on the council during the previous three years. It dwelt on his chairmanship of the finance committee; his drawing up a code of bye-laws and standing orders for the conduct of council business, and his support for the vexed and complicated question of direct labour on the roads. All in all, it was an impressive record. Less impressive, however, was his record of attendance at council meetings, which appeared in the *Limerick Leader* on the same day as his election address first appeared in that newspaper.²³ Over the three-year life of the outgoing council Coleman attended fifty three council meetings, as well as forty five finance meetings. By comparison, Dunraven, attended thirteen and eighteen, respectively. This placed Dunraven second from the bottom of the attendance league at council meetings, as Daniel Hedderman, a co-opted member, made a mere ten attendances.

Polling day was Wednesday, 4 June. Dunraven topped the poll with 474 votes, closely followed by Coleman, 436, while Molony was nowhere with a mere seventeen votes. Dunraven’s majority of 123, three years ago, had now fallen to thirty-eight, and even less if Molony’s votes were taken into account.

The *Limerick Leader*²⁴ took solace from the closeness of the result, arguing that it was a hopeful sign for the nationalists in the next election. Referring to the third candidate it warned off any future ‘Molony’ by hoping that the lesson of such a miserable vote would not

21 *LC*, 27 May 1902.

22 *LC*, 22 May 1902.

23 *LL*, 19 May 1902.

24 *LC*, 6 June 1902.

be lost. The *Limerick Chronicle*²⁵ was subdued in its summing up, but devoted some attention to Dunraven's achievements in the last council, no doubt advertising his suitability for the highest office on the council, should he contest it. Dunraven's victory was celebrated in the now customary fashion of a torch light procession to a huge open-air meeting in Adare.²⁶

While the recent election was said to have been 'conducted with the utmost harmony and good-will,'²⁷ certain ripples were surging under the surface. Coleman, in reply to Dunraven's victory speech at Adare on 10 June, made five points regarding both sets of canvassers and their *modus operandi*.²⁸ His own canvassers, he said, brought no undue influence to bear on the voters; voters were not told that they would be untrue to faith and country if they voted for Dunraven, and Dunraven was not branded a villain for going to fight the Boers in the South African war. Dunraven's canvassers, on the other hand made extravagant promises to voters, especially by telling them that the half gales (half yearly rents) would be wiped out, while others behaved in such a manner as would astonish his lordship. James O'Connor, Dohora, Croom, a canvasser for Dunraven at the recent and past elections, replied. He insisted that no threats or intimidation were used; that tenants on the estate were not allowed half-gales of rent, and that he had in his possession a letter in which Coleman made false statements to one of Dunraven's supporters.²⁹

The election result did indeed come as a severe shock to Dunraven who saw his majority fall drastically despite his worthwhile contribution to the working of the council in its formative years. Molony's intervention, which was welcomed by Dunraven's supporters, in reality, did little for Dunraven's cause. In a sense Coleman was the real winner since he closed the gap between himself and his main opponent, something that augured well for the future. As the 1905 election drew near Dunraven did consider³⁰ his position very carefully as he realised that his return to the county council could not be taken for granted.

25 LC, 10 June 1902.

26 LL, 11 June 1902.

27 LC, 7 June 1902.

28 LL, 25 June 1902.

29 LL, 2 July 1902.

30 Dunraven to O'Brien, 29 September 1904 (NLI, William O'Brien papers, 8554/5).

THE GREENING OF THE COUNCIL

The first meeting of the second triennial council took place on Monday, 16 June 1902. When it came to the nominations for the different sub-committees, Coleman, who despite his election defeat was again a member of the council due to his continuing chairmanship of Croom RDC, proposed that the whole council would automatically become members of the new Finance Committee. An amendment whereby the FC would be made up of fifteen councillors was defeated - Dunraven voting for the amendment. Coleman's proposition was then passed.³¹ As the business of the meeting was not completed on the opening day, the council met again on the following Saturday, Dunraven being an absentee. It was inevitable that the decision on the new FC would come to the surface that day. The chairman, Robert Coll, stated³² that the decision reached was contrary to standing orders, which fixed the number at nine, and that, in any event; the LGB had over-ruled the decision. Coleman then demanded that standing orders be revised so as to allow his proposal to stand.³³ This was not acceptable to William Leahy, the council solicitor, as a notice of motion was required to expunge or change any item on standing orders. Robert Pigott, chairman of Rathkeale RDC, and a member of the outgoing FC, then proposed a list of nine names, including that of Dunraven. As other names were subsequently suggested, the chairman decreed that nominees would be balloted on. A new turn was then given to events. In order to expedite matters the council agreed³⁴ that the composition of the new FC would be as follows - the chairman and vice-chairman of the council, together with one representative from each of the five largest rural district councils (Limerick, Kilmallock, Rathkeale, Newcastle West and Croom) and two representatives from the remaining three RDCs (Mitchelstown, Tipperary and Glin), a total of nine. Each rural district council was then voted on separately, and in the polling for Croom, Coleman was the preferred choice. Neither of the two unionist members on the council managed to secure a place on the FC.

The whole exercise must be viewed as a cynical ploy to remove any vestige of unionist influence in the working of the council's affairs. Coleman's selection, *per se*, could not be faulted, as he was an assiduous attender of all council meetings and sub- committees of which he was a member. During the prior three-year period, he attended³⁵ forty five FC meetings as

31 CCM, 16 June 1902.

32 CCM, 21 June 1902.

33 LL, 23 June 1902.

34 CCM, 21 June 1902.

35 LL, 19 May 1902.

against eighteen attendances by the chairman, Dunraven. Coleman, however, lacked the financial expertise of Dunraven. The partial success of the first FC, acknowledged on both sides of the political divide, and none more so than by the county ratepayers, could be construed as being, in part, due to the management and expertise of the unionist members. The indifferent attendance of Dunraven was countered by the fact that, in his absence, one or other of his fellow unionists, took the chair and guided the proceedings on the principles laid down by the chairman. Clearly the nationalist majority on the council was unwilling to allow the unionist minority any kudos. Unseating Dunraven, the chairman of the moderately successful outgoing FC, was simplicity itself, made easier by his non-attendance at that meeting. As the council was overwhelmingly nationalist, the outcome, in a head to head contest between Dunraven and Coleman was never in doubt.

This unexpected turn of events did not meet with approval in Adare. A public open-air meeting, on Monday, 30 June, said to have been called at the behest of several of the largest ratepayers in the division, fulminated against the new arrangements. Speaker after speaker spoke of the injustice to Dunraven; the huge saving to ratepayers he had achieved during the last council, and the fact that Dunraven had guided the last FC to do its job so well. Since any reversal of the decision was up to the county council, all the protesters could do was to hope 'that the next meeting of the council would correct its mistake and put the right man in the right place.'³⁶ Dunraven, then back in London, and having just read an account of the meeting in the newspaper, wrote on 3 July, to Thomas Butler, JP, chairman of the Adare election committee, who had taken the chair at the protest gathering. As was his wont, he was quite philosophical about the snub to himself:

It is very satisfactory that my course of action on the last council was understood and appreciated by my constituents. Had I been elected I would have done my best to justify the selection. As I am not selected, I shall continue to the best of my ability to carry out the duties as member for the Croom Division, which had been entrusted to me by the voters of my constituency.³⁷

One further attempt was made to secure a place for Dunraven on the FC. Pigott

³⁶ LL, 2 July 1902.

³⁷ LC, 8 July 1902. Dunraven apparently did not see any dereliction of duty in his patchy attendance at meetings of either the county council or the FC.

submitted a notice of motion to the secretary of the county council, asking that standing orders be rescinded so that the number on the FC be extended from nine to twelve, ‘so as to admit of Lord Dunraven and others being appointed thereon.’³⁸ When this came before the council Pigott said that Dunraven was one of the ablest financiers in the South of Ireland and that men of his class should have representation on that important committee. An amendment, that the FC remain as constituted, then came before the council. Coleman proposed a further amendment, his own proposal of the last meeting, that the FC consist of the whole house, but this was not accepted by the chair. After a brief discussion, the amendment to Pigott’s motion was taken, and passed³⁹ by the narrowest of margins, twelve votes to eleven. It is ironic that had Dunraven been at the meeting, a tie would have ensued and the chairman, Robert Coll, who had voted against the amendment, would more than likely have used his casting vote to reject the amendment and thereby ensure the passing of Pigott’s motion. That meeting also nominated⁴⁰ John Ryan, Knockatane, as chairman of the FC, a change from what had happened in 1899. The matter then died, save for a sub-editorial in the *Limerick Chronicle*, which deprecated the outcome of the whole saga, ‘the loss is not Lord Dunraven’s, it is that of the [finance] committee, who are deprived of his keen judgement and ripe experience in matters of financial detail.’⁴¹ The words, sadly, were quite prophetic. Prophetic, too, as it now turned out, were the words of the *Limerick Chronicle* on election day in 1899:

However the voting may turn out, the unionists have done their duty by their party and the people, and if they are relegated to private life, they can retire with a safe conscience.⁴²

This event, unimportant and all as it seemed, marked a sea change in relations between ordinary Irish folk, epitomised by the members of the council, and the representatives of the formerly all-powerful Anglo-Irish aristocracy. Here, an earl of the realm, one of the wealthiest and most influential peers in the British Isles, was rejected for a relatively minor position on Limerick County Council. The fact that Dunraven had defeated Coleman in the

38 LL, 8 August 1902.

39 LC, 14 August 1902.

40 CCM, 13 August 1902.

41 LC, 14 August 1902.

42 LC, 6 April 1899.

recent election should, in equity and fairness, have meant that the latter, with good grace, might have stood aside but the nationalist people interpreted the passing of the local government act as the giving of control of local affairs to the majority population. The presence of co-opted members of the outgoing regime on the first county council, as was their right under the act, was seen as symbolising the handing on of the baton of power from the grand juries to the democratically elected councils. The presence of any unionists on the second council was regarded as unnecessary as well as being unhelpful to nationalist aspirations. The Limerick county councillors were, in a sense, emulating the conduct of their fellow councillors in the north of Ireland where a more substantial minority was deprived of any meaningful say in the running of local affairs. This first opportunity of fostering harmony and co-operation between majority and minority was slowly but callously strangled to death by county councillors, north and south. This was a lesson not learned by Dunraven when a few years later he, under the banner of the Irish Reform Association and with the help of a small band of stalwarts, attempted to chart a middle course in politics in order to attract moderates from both sides of the religious divide. The experiment ended in inevitable failure as the seeds of dissension were by then deep rooted in Irish society.

BACK TO BASICS

The second triennial council, 1902 to 1905, was a much more sombre and workmanlike affair compared to its immediate predecessor. If the members were meeting-weary at the end of the first three-year session with seventy one meetings, they managed to transact the business of the second triennial council in forty three gatherings. It met on thirteen occasions for each of the last two years of its existence. One must take into account that the great time-consuming conundrum of DL was well on its way to being settled, and more mundane matters needed to be attended to. One such matter was the decision of the nationalists to re-jig the Finance Committee so as to exclude the unionist members. The resolution of this problem took some time at the beginning of the first year of office.

Dunraven, true to his role as moral watchdog of the council, especially in financial matters, took a special interest in one particular case. At a council meeting¹ on 21 June 1902, it was disclosed that James Coffey, the law agent, had received the sum of £349, from council funds to pay, as well as various amounts due to rate collectors, a London firm of solicitors, Batten, Profitt and Scott, who had acted as parliamentary agents for the county council while a railway amalgamation bill was going through the house of commons. The original account of Batten and Company came to £243 but, on appeal, a sum of £150 was agreed between the parties. After some time, neither the rate collectors nor Batten and Company had been paid. Coffey was not then attending council meetings and was rumoured to have left Limerick, so he could not be questioned on the matter. When this business came before the FC on 27 June² that body refused to honour the account with Batten and Company as the council had already passed the necessary funds on to its solicitor, who was then responsible for the settlement. The council endorsed³ this decision at the following meeting. Dunraven, who had been absent for the two previous meetings, had seen the matter in the circulated minutes, and raised it on 30 August 1902. He was appalled by the decision of the councillors not to honour the debt, and said that he would put down a notice of motion for the next meeting, and thereby force the council into paying. The councillors, once their unreasonable stance had been pointed out to them, went along, rather sheepishly, with Dunravens's suggestion. His motion did not come before the council until the October meeting, when Coleman, in an

1 LL, 23 June 1902.

2 CCM, 13 August 1902.

3 Ibid.

uncharacteristic gesture, due to the absence of Dunraven, moved the resolution.⁴ It was speedily agreed that the monies owed be paid. Once again, common sense had triumphed.

During the first year of the council, Dunraven attended about half of the council meetings, his best attendance up to then. During the final two years, his attendances slumped and the intervals between meetings grew lengthier, e.g. 13 June 1903 to 9 January 1904, and again, from 28 May 1904 to 29 April 1905. As a result he lost contact with his fellow councillors, though the circulated minutes kept him up to date with the happenings at the meetings. An example of his estrangement may be given. At a meeting on 13 April 1904, Patrick Vaughan proposed that a memorial from the council be sent to the lord lieutenant praying a free pardon for Patrick O'Shaughnessy, Glin, a member of the council. O'Shaughnessy, after two inconclusive trials, had been sentenced⁵ to one month hard labour in Limerick Jail, for alleged misconduct, i.e. stone throwing in Glin, during the previous council election. The memorial was agreed and drawn up. Dunraven dissented⁶ from the action as he said that he was unacquainted with the facts of the case and that he 'would not interfere with a decision given by a properly constituted court.'⁷ The council was informed at its next meeting that an acknowledgement only had come from the lord lieutenant on receiving the memorial. Dunraven, who was present that day, told the members that the memorial was tantamount to asking the lord lieutenant to do what he was not entitled to do, i.e. to over-ride the law. He suggested that the inclusion of the phrase 'if possible' in the resolution would have it more acceptable in Dublin. By this time, however, the memorial was futile as O'Shaughnessy was on the point of release, having served his sentence in full.

On the whole, this session of the council was largely uneventful. A number of political type motions,⁸ dealing in the main with the land bill of 1903 and subsequent land purchase, were introduced at meetings. Whenever Dunraven was present, he dissented when he thought it appropriate, though on occasions he defended the substance of the measure and pointed out its merits. All the time, he saw such resolutions as a necessary manifestation of the emerging independence of the council and a desire, on the part of councillors, to be seen to be of assistance to their particular constituency.

4 CCM, 22 October 1902.

5 LL, 29 April 1904.

6 CCM, 13 April 1904.

7 LL, 13 April 1904.

8 CCM, 20 September 1902; 17 January 1903; 13 April 1904.

UNOPPOSED VICTORY AT THE ELECTION OF 1905

The life of the second triennial council was due to end in mid 1905. In the previous September, Dunraven was pondering his future involvement, bearing in mind his narrow victory in 1902. He explained to William O'Brien that membership was a great tie on him; that he found it difficult to attend meetings, and had rendered all the practical help he could in enabling the council to make a good start. Considering all these matters he was inclined not to seek re-election. Before making a final decision he asked O'Brien to weigh up the consequences of his not seeking re-election or being defeated.⁹ O'Brien's reply is not extant. Any doubts about Dunraven's continued involvement were dispelled when his intention to contest the forthcoming election was announced, at a meeting in Croom, in the middle of February 1905, some three months in advance of the polling day.¹⁰ It is interesting to note that his campaign was set in motion in Croom, the heartland of Coleman support, but where, remarkably, no local person could be found to chair the meeting. While it could be seen as a direct challenge to Coleman it should be noted that negotiations, with a view to purchase, had already opened between householders in the town of Croom and the estate office in Adare. Dunraven could thereby be seen in a more favourable light there than at the two previous elections. At a follow-up meeting¹¹ in Adare, opinion was expressed that it would be ungracious of Coleman to put the earl to the trouble and expense of a contest after his services to the country at large in connection with the land conference and subsequent land act.

The early emergence of Dunraven as a candidate took the nationalist side by surprise. Thomas Landon, MP, drew the attention of delegates at a joint meeting of the executives of the city and county UIL, held on 15 March, to the fact that a committee had already been appointed in Adare to further Dunraven's interests in the coming election. To counter this, Landon proposed a resolution pledging the wholehearted support of the meeting to Coleman's campaign. Coleman strangely felt that it was better not to commit the executives and said that he was more concerned that, at the last revision session, Dunraven's supporters had objected to a large number of persons on the list of voters whereas he believed that everybody was entitled to a vote. Landon then withdrew his resolution.¹² The action of

⁹ Dunraven to O'Brien, 29 September 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/5). Bearing in mind the election of 1899, the irony of Dunraven seeking advice from O'Brien on his continued membership should be noted.

¹⁰ LC, 18 February 1905.

¹¹ LC, 25 February 1905.

¹² LL, 15 March 1905.

Dunraven's supporters at the revision session showed, if such were necessary, that Dunraven was determined to vigorously contest the election.

A surprising development took place some weeks later when Coleman, in a letter, to Croom RDC, dated 12 April, announced that, in order to pay more attention to his own affairs in the future, he had decided to retire from public life.¹³ The *Limerick Chronicle*, taking its cue from the Adare meeting and mindful of the tremendous advantage the withdrawal would be to Dunraven, said that the news would be heard with satisfaction throughout the county.¹⁴ The unexpected nature of the withdrawal coupled with the lateness of Coleman's announcement, a decision he refused to reverse despite persistent pressure, meant that no suitable nationalist candidate could be found and so, when nominations closed on 17 April, Dunraven was returned unopposed.¹⁵ The Dunraven side did not take anything for granted on nomination day, lest some surprise last-minute candidate might emerge, and handed in eleven different supporting papers, the now familiar show of strength and support.

The withdrawal of Coleman was most fortuitous for Dunraven and probably saved him from the ignominy of defeat at the hands of his nationalist rival. His vote had surprisingly dropped at the 1902 election leaving him just twenty-one votes better off than the combined nationalist total. Dunraven was no longer regarded as being a popular national figure. The abuse and ridicule that both he and his close ally, William O'Brien had endured, since the passing of the land act, from members of the Irish Parliamentary Party and the nationalist press, made them objects of derision while Dunraven's Devolution proposals hardly endeared him to either the unionist or nationalist sides of the Irish divide. If that public perception were translated into votes, even in a mere county council election, then the margin of victory in 1902 would be easily overturned. Fortunate then to have survived, Dunraven followed up his surprise victory by placing a notice¹⁶ of thanks in the public press and, later mailed a circular¹⁷ to each registered voter, thanking him or her for the honour they conferred on him. Whether in victory or defeat, Dunraven never failed to display his graciousness.

The chairmanship of the new council was undoubtedly on the agenda of Dunraven supporters, if not on his own. He had failed ignominiously in 1899, did not contest in 1902,

¹³ LL, 14 April 1905.

¹⁴ LC, 13 April 1905.

¹⁵ LC, 18 April 1905; LL, 19 April 1905.

¹⁶ LC, 27 April 1905.

¹⁷ LC, 4 May 1905.

and the time now seemed ripe following the raising, in his own estimation, of his national profile in the land conference and his involvement in the attempts to settle the university imbroglio, while at local level, his participation in the completion of the tricky DL scheme should have increased his esteem among his fellow county council members. In addition, many members of the council would have been beneficiaries of the land purchase scheme, initiated by him through the medium of the land conference. If ever the time seemed right to win the chair, it had to be now. However there was no huge outcry of public demand for any move in favour of Dunraven, though, in a letter to the *Limerick Leader*, a letter writer, 'Nationalist', opined:

I am no personal or political admirer of Dunraven, neither am I going to lose my head over his Devolution scheme. But under existing circumstances I consider that his election [as chairman] for even one year would perhaps open up a new road for a lot of much needed reform, while it would serve as a counter stroke to the beating of the Orange drum by Grand-Master Long.¹⁸

Lest the publication of the letter be taken as editorial approval of its sentiments, the editor was quick to distance the newspaper from its contents:

While we give publicity to the letter we are not in favour of it. We hold that a staunch nationalist or home ruler can readily be found among the ranks of the county council who is as capable of filling the chair as any titled unionist.¹⁹

Dunraven's chances of capturing the chair were dealt a blow a few days later. W. H. Ievers, who was of landlord stock and president of the Evicted Tenants' Association of County Limerick, and who worked with the earl on that particular problem, stated in a letter to the press that a nationalist should fill the chair.²⁰ The *Limerick Chronicle*, however, confidently believed that Dunraven would:

¹⁸ *LL*, 2 June 1905. Walter Long, born in Bath, succeeded Wyndham as Irish secretary in March 1905. In 1906 he was returned as MP for South County Dublin and succeeded Col Edward Saunderson as leader of the Irish Unionist Party. He was followed as leader in 1910 by Sir Edward Carson.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *LL*, 5 June 1905.

be offered unopposed election to the chairmanship of the council. Messrs Hurley & Ryan, the other candidates who have been mentioned have, we understand, agreed to withdraw in his Lordship's favour.²¹

The first meeting of the new council took place on 19 June.²² The outgoing vice-chairman, Thomas Hurley was chosen as acting chairman. John Coleman, having reversed his earlier declaration to retire from public life, was present as chairman of Croom RDC.²³ The first business completed was the rejection of a motion to co-opt two members on to the council, with Dunraven supporting an amendment to the contrary, which was lost by 14 votes to 12. For the election of chairman, four candidates were nominated, including Dunraven. His proposer, John O'Neill, chairman of Tipperary No. 2 RDC, did him no favours by alluding to the service he had rendered to the empire by going out to South Africa to fight against the Boers.²⁴ A councillor, William Gubbins, mentioned during nominations that an arrangement had been entered into, but it was not that promulgated by the *Limerick Chronicle*, but rather that the outgoing vice-chairman, Thomas Hurley, would be the unanimous choice on the nationalist side. In the ensuing cross talk, two nominees, including Hurley, retired, leaving a straight fight between Dunraven and Patrick Vaughan, Feenagh, member for Dromcollogher. The result was a foregone conclusion, Vaughan succeeding by 16 votes to 8. Lord Emly had left the chamber before the vote was taken, while Dr Connery, Kilfinane, who had voted for Dunraven in 1899, for which he was reprimanded by the UIL, declined to vote. In the circumstances the number of votes secured by Dunraven was remarkable, some of them coming from parts of the county having no contact with the earl.²⁵

Dunraven's attempt to secure the chair was doomed to failure from the outset. A mere two unionists, J. B. Barrington, member for Castleconnell, and himself, sat on the council and

²¹ *LC*, 17 June 1905.

²² *LC*, 20 June 1905.

²³ Intense pressure was brought to bear on Coleman to continue in public life. He finally agreed at the end of May to allow his name to go forward for co-option to Croom RDC. This took place on 13 June when Coleman was again elected as chairman (*LL*, 29 May, 14 June 1905).

²⁴ In December 1899 Dunraven became chairman of a committee set up in London to raise a corps of mounted sharpshooters for service in the South African or Boer War (1899-1902) and travelled out with them in April 1900. Climatic conditions in the war zone did not suit a man of his rather delicate and frail disposition and after an undistinguished tour of duty he was invalided home, finally reaching Southampton in August 1900. See Dunraven, *Past times*, i, pp 226-30; *LC*, 1 February, 29 March, 28 July 1900. As nationalist sympathy in Ireland was solidly on the side of the Boers, Dunraven's involvement did not endear him to the majority of his fellow countrymen.

²⁵ Dunraven was supported by Barrington, Clancy (Roxborough), Hayes (Bruree), Madden (Kilmallock RDC), O'Neill, O'Shaughnessy (Newcastle West), Pigott (Rathkeale RDC). See *LL*, 19 June 1905.

any assistance from co-opted members had been cut off at the start of the meeting. Vaughan, in his speech of thanks, admitted that Dunraven would be far more suitable for the office than he and hoped that some day, in the near future, the council would be honoured by having the earl occupy the chair. To do so, however, Dunraven would have to renounce his unionist principles, something that he was not prepared to do in the past and unlikely to do in the immediate future. Dunraven's rejection, apparently, raised more eyebrows in London than in Limerick. Citing both the *Evening Standard* and the *St. James's Gazette*, the *Limerick Chronicle* wrote that 'his defeat ... is a curious if characteristic requital of services which, whatever else may be said of them, were certainly sincere.'²⁶ The next meeting of the east and west executive of the UIL was quite pleased with the outcome, passing a resolution congratulating the county council on electing an uncompromising nationalist while the delegates passed a motion of 'gentle remonstrance' on Daniel Clancy who had broken ranks and voted for Dunraven as chairman.²⁷

²⁶ LC, 24 June 1905.

²⁷ LL, 21 June 1905.

THE FINAL CURTAIN

Once the annual general meeting was concluded, unsuccessfully, for Dunraven, the council went about its usual business. During that council year,¹ up to 26 May 1906, nineteen meetings were held. Dunraven attended four, the general meeting in June, 25 November, 23 December 1905, and 11 April 1906. He was not, however, the poorest attender; Dr Maurice Connery registered three and Edmond Kiely, chairman of Mitchelstown No. 2 RDC, two. Coleman, as usual, was present on eighteen occasions. For the second year,² from 18 June 1906 to 1 June 1907, Dunraven was present twice, 14 July and 22 September. His attendance was the poorest, while Coleman was present at fourteen meetings. During the third³ and final year, from 18 June 1907 to 30 May 1908, the council came together on thirteen occasions. Dunraven was present twice, 20 July 1907, and 11 April 1908, his last appearance at a council meeting. His two attendances in that final year, equalled those of Patrick Vaughan, who had defeated him for the chair in 1905, and who was replaced by William Gubbins at the annual general meeting in 1907. Two others made only one attendance each, while Coleman was ever present.

The third triennial council saw no great controversies like that of Direct Labour to occupy the minds of the members and the interest of newspapers and the public. During the time that had elapsed since Dunraven was chairman of the finance committee, matters had deteriorated⁴ to such a state that the treasurers, the National Bank, were not disposed to advance the council a sum in excess of £20,000 to help it trade out of its difficulties. This undesirable state of affairs came about due to a number of factors, nepotism among councillors, an example of which has been adverted to already; the appointment of evicted land tenants to rate collectorships,⁵ and the softening of attitude by the finance committee to defaulting rate payers. As Dunraven was such an infrequent attender of meetings, his familiarity with the problem and therefore his ability to suggest a remedy was severely curtailed. His only contribution to a resolution of the highly embarrassing position was made at a county council meeting at which he happened to be present when the councillors were considering whether to switch from the National Bank to the Munster and Leinster Bank,

1 CCM, Book 3, p. 518.

2 CCM, Book 3, p. 517.

3 CCM, Book 4, p. 550.

4 LC, 14 July 1906.

5 LL, 7 August 1906.

consequent to the refusal of the former to sanction an advance. Dunraven was of the opinion⁶ that the position did not arise from insolvency but because payments to rural districts councils and various creditors were made before the rate monies had been lodged in the council's account. He suggested that a reserve fund be set up, by borrowing £15,000 and proposed⁷ that the Munster and Leinster Bank be approached to see whether they would offer the facility. That motion was voted on and passed.

Dunraven's passing from the council was like a candle being extinguished in daylight – he or it having no further purpose. John Coleman was elected for the Croom division in 1908 and continued as a member until he, too, was swept aside and forgotten in the landslide victory of Sinn Fein candidates in 1920.

⁶ LC, 14 July 1906.

⁷ CCM, 14 July 1906.

DUNRAVEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE COUNTY COUNCIL – AN OVERVIEW

When one attempts to evaluate the contribution made by Dunraven to the fledgling council one must look at the reasons why, in the first instance, he offered himself for election. While he was a supporter of the outgoing grand jury system, he had never been a member. He had no need to widen his sphere of influence by being in a position to dispense patronage to his tenants or their dependants. In putting himself forward as a candidate he was taking a huge risk. His reputation as an improving landlord was largely confined to the limits of his undoubted vast estate. He was an uncompromising unionist seeking support from an overwhelmingly nationalist electorate. While he was born at Adare Manor he had spent, unlike his father, little time there since his late teens. Accordingly he was unknown outside a very select group in Limerick and while he was involved in the political life of the United Kingdom, his sphere of influence had hardly touched Ireland. Why then was he prepared to take the risk of being defeated? One is inevitably drawn back to his own words uttered during the campaign of 1899 that the election provided him with the first opportunity he ever had of being of service to his fellow countymen.

The chairmanship of the county council was one of his goals should he be elected to that body. His best chance was in 1899, when six unionists sat on the council. The prestige of his personal standing and reputation, together with his vast experience from having served as under-secretary for the colonies in a British administration, as well as being a serious and frequent contributor to debates in the house of lords, had made him a formidable candidate for any public office. The lack of experience, amongst the nationalist majority, in the conduct of public affairs should have given him a huge advantage despite the anti-unionist whip imposed by the UIL. In the end, the nationalist consensus held firm, and, as we saw, Dr Connery was reprimanded by the UIL for supporting Dunraven for the chair. Apart from other more obvious objections, the nationalists feared that Dunraven, as chairman, would stunt or impair their legitimate aspirations by disallowing or watering down motions of a political nature. As it turned out, this was unlikely to happen as, whenever such motions came before the council when he was present, he rarely spoke against them, except to point out that such matters were sprung on the members without due notice; their passing or otherwise was generally of no practical benefit, and they were a distraction by wasting the valuable time of the council. When he next contested the chair, in 1905, his standing among the councillors was mixed. While he had become a national figure due to the land conference and land purchase, this could be seen as a two edged sword. As many councillors were

former tenants, or tenants who had agreed to purchase, they were now free from the tentacles of landlord influence, and so could vote as they really chose. As only one other unionist was returned at the previous election, it was a genuine tribute to his popularity that, despite the ubiquitous nationalist whip, six from that block broke ranks and supported him. Hints were often given to Dunraven, the latest coming from the successful candidate for the chair in 1905, Patrick Vaughan, that should he renounce his unionist principles he would be honoured with the chairmanship. This did not and could not find favour with the earl, for he was a man of principle, who could have wrapped the green flag around him in 1899 as did his cousin germane, Emly. Despite his adherence to the new cause the majority on the council never accepted Emly as a true nationalist. The same measure of cold shoulder could well have been meted out to Dunraven in turn.

Dunraven's most enduring legacy to the council was the operating procedures he was instrumental in setting up. At the very first council meeting, once the question of the chair had been settled to the satisfaction of the majority, the nationalist side of the house was quite content to allow the earl to advise and suggest such measures as would ensure the smooth transition from administration by the grand jury to that of a democratically elected assembly. His experience on both Glamorganshire and London County Councils [of neither body, incidentally, was he chairman] stood him in good stead and the councillors were only too happy to allow him to guide affairs at that meeting. He listed the names and duties of the various sub-committees needed, together with the number of personnel required. The council without any difficulty passed his version of standing orders, and today, after a lapse of one hundred years, it still forms the basis for the conduct of council meetings. As has been pointed out, Dunraven was the voice of reason and sanity at council meetings. He masterminded the replacement of Coffey as council solicitor when nationalists vacillated, not from any sense of resentment or revenge, but simply because legal opinion was a necessity at all meetings, especially when decisions of a delicate or sensitive nature needed to be taken by the finance committee. It would have been quite easy for Dunraven to withdraw into himself and not co-operate with or further the interests of the council as a mark of disapproval of the attitude adopted by the nationalists towards him and the other unionist members. On the contrary, that small but influential group embarked on the work of the finance committee with enthusiasm, vigour and a great deal of skill, so that the *Limerick Leader* could say, at the end of 1899 when commenting on the achievements of the council over the previous six months, that the new system of administration had got going and that the finances were in

perfect order.³⁰⁹

Dunraven was a man of immense influence not only in the corridors of power in London, but also in the offices and chambers of Dublin Castle. He was an intimate of George Wyndham, the Irish chief secretary who, during the deputation from Limerick County Council was persuaded to expedite the introduction of a provisional order for County Limerick to facilitate the advent of the direct employment road scheme. When the council was discussing the composition of the delegation to visit Dublin, Patrick Coll objected to Dunraven and Monteagle being part of the group. His kinsman, Robert Coll, later chairman from 1902 to 1905, had the good sense to see that 'if Dunraven and Monteagle would consent to go on the deputation, they would add very great weight to the deputation.'³¹⁰ With the help of the chairman, Mitchell, the two peers were included. Indeed some members expressed fear that they might not then travel due to the anti-unionist turn the discussion had taken. Some council members, at least, let their heads rule their hearts. One could speculate that had Limerick County Council made greater use of Dunraven's entree into government thinking and decision making, for instance as chairman, the teething difficulties of the council's early years might have been resolved sooner and in a more agreeable manner. The councillors dared not give him any such pivotal role - the eye of the *Limerick Leader* was perpetually on them.

Dunraven bore no ill will towards the members of the council who, it could be said, had limited his role, but was always generous in his tributes to them. Speaking in Manchester on 12 May 1905 he praised them, describing them as all small farmers or labourers, who, by their intelligence, prudence, honesty and industry, had administered the affairs of the county wonderfully well.³¹¹ He treated no less kindly his old sparring partner, John Coleman, with whom he had crossed swords on many issues, both inside and outside the council chamber. When, in 1914, a presentation³¹² was made to Coleman to mark forty years of endeavour on the nationalist side, Dunraven, contributed the then large sum of £5. On the other hand, the council members looked upon Dunraven with a certain amount of esteem, ever grateful for his contribution to the successful start-up of business. Dunraven was happy to record a tribute, paid to him in 1901, by the council vice-chairman, Anthony Mackey, who he

309 *LL*, 20 December 1899.

310 *LC*, 4 December 1900.

311 *LC*, 16 May 1905.

312 *LC*, 13 August 1914.

described as an advanced nationalist:

Not only was Lord Dunraven the first member to inaugurate the financial department, but his lordship had helped them in every other way to carry out the business of the council, and had largely helped them in the foremost position as regards the financial committee, which was a credit not only to the county, but to Munster.³¹³

On analysing that tribute one could detect the ‘them and us’ syndrome running through it. While Dunraven was accepted as a more than useful member of the council, he was not accepted as one of ‘them’. On the negative side one would have to question Dunraven’s continuing council membership at the end of the first triennial period in 1902. By then, the technicalities of effectively running local government in the county were firmly in place and the direct labour ideal was on its way to becoming a reality. On the other hand, the decline in the efficacy of the finance committee, due to lack of attention from Dunraven and the other members, was a source of worry. By election time in 1902, it should have dawned on Dunraven that his attendance at meetings was not what was expected and not likely to improve in the future. What he achieved from 1902 to 1908 could have been equalled, if not bettered, by a diligent locally-based member. Dunraven would better have served the voters of the electoral division of Croom if he had departed the scene in 1902 with an enhanced reputation, based on a solid workmanlike performance up to then. As it was, he lingered on, attending meetings infrequently, and becoming estranged, not only from his fellow councillors but, more importantly, from council business.

An English observer commented, in 1916, on the success of local government in Ireland, as he saw it. It mirrored the faults, foibles and successes of the measure and represented a fair judgement of the working of Limerick County Council in its early years. It reflected, in a sense, the problems that Dunraven confronted there and the way in which it served as the preparation of local legislators for the next phase of Ireland’s metamorphosis, as he [Dunraven] saw it, the introduction of his devolution proposals:

Defects may, of course, be found in the working of the Irish county and district councils. Political and partisan prejudices may sometimes enter; resolutions may be passed on general questions of politics that are extravagant and irrelevant; and the appointments of local

³¹³ Dunraven, *Past times*, i, p. 30.

officials made by the councils may occasionally be liable to criticism. None the less, evidence goes to show that local representative bodies in Ireland have acted with efficiency and with financial economy; and it is fair to argue that success in the lesser affairs of local self-government is a safe augury of success in the greater matters of national autonomy.³¹⁴

Using Dunraven's own pledge, 'to do the utmost in his power to see that the affairs of the district and county were properly looked after and administered economically, honestly and well,'³¹⁵ his performance was, at best, mediocre and, at worst, disappointing. If the commitments made were not fulfilled to the letter, it was not on account of lack of intent by Dunraven but rather his ineffectiveness in dealing with contentious council business and his influence on his fellow councillors being severely impaired by his poor attendance. Taking all in all, his contribution to Limerick County Council was noteworthy without being spectacular.

314 Ernest Barker, *Ireland in the last fifty years (1866-1916)* (Oxford, 1917).

315 LC, 17 January 1899.

PART TWO

IDEAS INTO REALITY

When the Horse was King

The return of a Conservative government to power in 1896 was interpreted in Ireland as a continuation of the general policy of ‘killing home rule by kindness’, initiated by the chief secretary, Arthur Balfour and now, hopefully to be reactivated by his brother, Gerald. As yet the time was inopportune for tackling such major reforms as land purchase and local administration so a fresh start was contemplated in a minor but not insignificant area. In the 1890s farming methods in Ireland were increasingly coming under the spotlight as competition from abroad threatened Irish exports to the valuable British market and so needed to be met by improved methods and standards at home.

Ireland was long recognised as a country suitable for the breeding of horses of the finest quality, ‘the soil and climate being peculiarly favourable to the development of this industry.’³¹⁶ A valuable export trade was in existence in hunters and horses suitable for the army, known as remounts, but the industry itself was fragmented and unorganised and was suddenly placed in jeopardy by a huge increase in the numbers of horses being exported from the United States of America to Great Britain, rising from 13,707 in 1893 to 40,000 in 1896.³¹⁷ Since the Act of Union the Royal Dublin Society administered such help, as the government was willing to expend on horse breeding. The sum for distribution was derisory so that the society was only able to offer sixteen premia of £200 each for thoroughbred stallions suitable for siring hunters and other half-bred horses.³¹⁸

In mid-May 1896 a deputation of gentlemen, interested in racing and hunting, waited on the lord lieutenant, the earl of Cadogan, to point out that the introduction of hackney stallions into the congested districts by the Congested Districts Board (CDB) was likely to impair the breeding of hunters in other parts of the country to the detriment of the whole Irish

316 William G. Fitz-gerald (ed.), *The Voice of Ireland* (Dublin, n. d.), p. 322.

317 Report on Commission on Horse Breeding, 1897, Appendix E, p. 794 (hereafter Commission).

318 Fitz-gerald, *The Voice of Ireland*, p. 323.

horse breeding industry.³¹⁹ On foot of that, the lord lieutenant set up, on 20 July 1896, a Commission of Inquiry to examine the industry in Ireland.³²⁰ Thirteen persons were nominated with Dunraven as chairman. Dunraven had a long and varied connection with horses going back thirty years. On coming down from Oxford in 1862, without taking a degree, he was gazetted a cornet in the 1st Life Guards and from then until his departure as a war correspondent in the Abyssinian War, in late 1867, he spent much time in Newmarket with Captain James Machell, a recently retired fellow officer who had turned his hand to horse training. As well as part-owning a number of horses in Machell's yard, Dunraven also earned some fame as a steeplechase jockey for which he was given the nickname 'The Fly', as it was said of him that 'he had the heart of a lion but the body of a fly.'³²¹ Dunraven is noted as a steward at the two-day Limerick race meeting in 1867, at Newcastle, close to the city.³²² In the late 1880s and early 1890s Dunraven, in partnership with his political soul-mate, Lord Randolph Churchill, owned a number of race horses, the most successful of which was *L'Abesse de Jouarre*, which won the Oaks in 1889 and the Manchester Cup in 1890. On Churchill losing interest after 1891, Dunraven became the sole owner of the horses, enjoying modest success, most notably with his mare, *Molly Maguire*, that won the Cambridgeshire in 1893.³²³ According to himself³²⁴ Dunraven was never a good judge of horses but always had a keen interest in breeding, setting up the highly successful Fort Union Stud at Adare in 1876. While the newly appointed commission was not concerned with the breeding of racehorses, Dunraven's background made him an admirable choice as chairman and author of the final report. Of the other nominees four were titled gentlemen – the marquis of Londonderry, who later crossed swords with Dunraven on the university proposals of 1904 and the home rule controversy from 1911 onwards; the earl of Enniskillen, a steward of the Irish Turf Club, and Lords Ashtown and Rathdonnell - while two were Parnellite MPs, James Carew and Sir Thomas Grattan-Esmonde,³²⁵ a Catholic landowner who denounced landlordism. Most

319 *IT*, 19 May 1896.

320 Commission, Report, p. 263.

321 Dunraven, *Past times*, i, pp 207-8. Dunraven was small in stature being only five feet six inches tall.

322 F. A. D'Arcy, *Horses, lords and racing men* (Kildare, 1991), pp 191-2.

323 W. S. Churchill, *Lord Randolph Churchill* (London, 3rd edition, 1951), pp 720-1. The winning horse was named after an anti-landlord secret society, the Molly Maguires, which flourished in Ireland from 1835 to 1855. It then spread to America (becoming a society to protect workers against exploitation) where Dunraven would have heard the term. Later the expression, Molly Maguire, became a pejorative term, common in Ireland in the early 1900s, to denote members of the mostly northern-based Ancient Order of Hibernians, an organisation that supported the Irish Party and so was anathema to William O'Brien and his group of followers.

324 Dunraven, *Past times*, i, pp 169-70.

325 Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Parnell and his party* (Oxford, 1957), p.153.

notable among the rest were Fredrick Wrench, who was a land commissioner and a member of the board of the CDB, and Percy La Touche, who had a banking and racing background.

The first meeting of the commission was held in Dublin Castle on 29 August 1896 when a questionnaire was drawn up.³²⁶ Subsequently it was printed and distributed in all parts of Ireland to persons who had an interest in the subject. Returns were analysed and laid before the next meeting, on 19 October, so that the commission had a vast store of information by the time the taking of evidence was due to commence. In all, 119 witnesses, including some in England, were examined. These included persons interested in horse breeding, farmers, judges at shows, land agents, veterinary surgeons from within and without the army, and experts with specialist knowledge on the subject. Fifteen meetings for the taking of evidence were held before Christmas, usually three or four days in the same week with an interval between weeks. Dunraven chaired on nine occasions with Ashtown, Rathdonnell or La Touche deputising in his absence.

On 4 January 1897 the commission inspected horses, mainly stallions, which were being wintered at the Chantilly Stud Farm, near Dublin, belonging to the Congested Districts Board, which administered funds and benefits to the breeding fraternity within areas under its jurisdiction. Sessions sixteen to nineteen were held during four consecutive days beginning Tuesday, 5 January 1897, Dunraven chairing three of the gatherings. In March 1897, the commission travelled to England to visit the horse shows of the Hackney Society and the Hunters' Improvement Society. While in London, six days of evidence, beginning on 3 March and ending on 12 March, were held at 12 Hanover Square, Dunraven presiding over all meetings. A difference is noticeable in the type of person spoken to here. Few were breeders on a small scale; many were buyers of horses in Ireland, mainly, but not exclusively, for transport to army-controlled studs in India; others were dealers, jobmasters (who let horses out on jobbing), or were involved in the sport of hunting. As in Ireland little emphasis was placed on the breeding of thoroughbreds for racing. The last of the twenty-five meetings to take evidence took place on 12 March 1897.³²⁷

In May and June 1897 the commissioners visited the western seaboard to see for themselves the nature and condition of mares and foals in those areas, which were

³²⁶ Commission, Report, p. 265.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

administered by the CDB. Two places were visited in County Donegal, Stranorlar³²⁸ on 20 May, and Ardara.³²⁹ Belmullet, Co. Mayo was visited on 22 May. The local correspondent of the *Mayo News* was not aware of the significance of the visit and merely referred to those on the visitation as distinguished visitors, listing them as Lord Russell (sic), the earl of Dunraven, the Misses Wyndham-Wynne (sic), who were Dunraven's daughters, the Knight of Glynn (sic) and Messrs Fitzgerald and Neville, the secretary.³³⁰ Neither Glin nor Fitzgerald was a member of the commission. Glin was shortly to marry one of Dunraven's daughters while Fitzgerald was a most useful person to have on any such visit. Not only was he land agent to the Adare estate but also had given evidence³³¹ before the commission in his capacity as chairman of the County Limerick Horse Breeding Committee. One who did sense the significance of the tour was George Hewson of Dromahaire, County Leitrim. He wrote to the *Sligo Champion* stating that Colonel St. Quinton, a member of the commission, would attend at Dromahaire on 14 May in his capacity as buyer of cavalry remounts for Ireland. The letter further stated that the colonel hoped that Dunraven, the chairman of the commission, would be present in order to see the class of horses produced in Sligo and North Leitrim.³³² Since Dunraven was in England at that time and unlikely to be present it is probable that Hewson, who had given evidence³³³ before the commission, was availing of the opportunity to encourage farmers to make their best horses available to the army buyer.

The party then travelled on to Achill Sound³³⁴ where a large number of horses, bred on the island, had been collected and were inspected by Dunraven, Enniskillen and Clandonnell (sic). Clifden,³³⁵ County Galway was next visited where 130 mares and foals, gathered at the instigation of the CDB, were inspected. The commission members were pleased with some of the Connemara mares and satisfied with the quality of the foals of the CDB stallion, a hackney, which stood at Clifden that year. On 26 May the group visited Dingle. 110 horses were inspected and pronounced satisfactory. Afterwards in the day-room of the RIC barracks a deputation from the Corkaguiny Ratepayers' Association, said to represent 1,500 ratepayers in the barony, met the six commissioners. They objected strongly

328 *Donegal Journal* (Letterkenny), 21 May 1897.

329 No reference to the visit there is recorded. The journey from Donegal to Mayo was made aboard the CDB's steamer, *Granuaile*.

330 *Mayo News*, 29 May 1897.

331 Commission, Minutes of Evidence, 26 November 1896, pp 459-79.

332 *Sligo Champion*, 8 May 1897.

333 Commission, Minutes of Evidence, 26 Nov. 1896. Dunraven did not chair the meeting that day.

334 *Connaught Telegraph*, 5 June 1897. The date of the visit was not given.

335 *Galway Vindicator*, 29 May 1897. The date of the visit was not given.

that the only stallion available to them, under the auspices of the CDB, was a hackney, whose progeny was unfit to sell at a profitable price.³³⁶ Dunraven promised to place their concerns before the next full meeting of the commissioners. Clearly the hackney stallion was not considered of much use in West Kerry. Quite the opposite was the case the following day when the party visited Cahirciveen and found general satisfaction with the efforts of the CDB in helping them to build up a better breed of horse. Sixty horses were inspected and the quality was so good that forty seven were awarded prizes or premia by the commissioners.³³⁷ This ended the fact finding tour of the areas where an improvement in the quality of horses suitable for sale would be most beneficial to the numerous small farmers who needed some cash enterprise in order to eke out a living. If the commissioners had hoped that the merits or otherwise of the hackney stallion would be clearly established for them, they were sadly disappointed. The hackney controversy just would not go away but rather would later return to haunt them.

Two reports emanated from the commission. What was described as the majority or anti-hackney report appeared on 19 July 1897 and was signed by Dunraven as chairman, Carew, Fitzwilliam, La Touche, Londonderry, Rathdonnell and St. Quinton. The salient points from the report may be briefly summarised. It concluded that, in the CDB areas of the western seaboard, the breeding of horses for sale was hardly profitable and that time and money might be better spent in some other enterprise; noted an alarming drop in the prices of an overabundant supply of inferior horses; bemoaned the paucity of decent stallions at affordable stud fees; deplored the meagreness of yearly government aid to the breeding industry compared to France, Germany, Austria and Hungary, and opined that any sums which the parliament might grant for the encouragement of better horse breeding should be confined only to one government department.³³⁸ Seven recommendations, which would be of considerable benefit to the horse breeding industry in Ireland, were appended to the report. Here the commissioners proposed that greater aid should be given to the industry of horse-breeding; that a system of registration of stallions should be established in a more extended form and that the encouragement of hackney stallions should not be continued at public expense.³³⁹

336 *Kerry Evening Post*, 29 May 1897.

337 *KEP*, 2 June 1897.

338 Commission, majority report, pp 265-76.

339 Commission, majority report, recommendations, p. 276.

Four days later a minority report, signed by Enniskillen, Ashtown, Grattan Esmonde, Gilbey and Wrench was promulgated. They differed from the majority report on a number of points, the two most relevant being, that a large number of small farmers, in every part of Ireland, must continue to remain horse breeders in conjunction with their other agricultural operations and, in order to promote and improve the industry, a separate and substantial grant should be made available by the state from which stallions including hackneys, suitable for the needs and requirement of different types of breeders, would be purchased or subsidised.³⁴⁰

A number of appendices were included in the report, the most pertinent of which was Appendix B. It noted that the CDB, on seeing that the horses in the districts under its control were of a very weedy character, thought to improve the breed by introducing hackney stallions from England.³⁴¹ Hackneys were harness horses used for general transport or for hire and though they were large-bodied they were, in Dunraven's opinion, 'very spongy as compared to the thoroughbred and the animal itself is soft'³⁴² and not suitable for siring top class hunters or remounts. Prior to the taking of evidence, a motion was received from the County Kerry Grand Jury with resolutions from agricultural societies in such diverse areas as Clonmel, Mullingar, Navan, Cork, Limerick, and Ballinasloe requesting that the practice of the CDB regarding the hackney breed be discontinued. It was on this basis and the evidence they heard that the majority report recommended that the use of hackney stallions should not be encouraged at public expense. The minority report was less conclusive.

Seven months after the two reports had been submitted to the lord lieutenant, Colonel J. McCalmont, Antrim East, on 1 March 1898, put a question in the house of commons to Gerald Balfour, the chief secretary, concerning the outcome of the commission.³⁴³ In reply he was informed that the matter was one for the consideration of the CDB but Balfour added that he could not hold out any hope that the board were likely to agree to a complete reversal of their policy upon the reports of a commission so divided on the subject of the hackney stallion. In the following May the lord lieutenant met a deputation³⁴⁴ on the subject at which the members were told that the want of unanimity among those who were supposed to

340 Commission, minority report, pp 277-94.

341 Commission, Appendix B, pp 787-8.

342 Dunraven, *Past times*, i, pp 171-2.

343 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 54, cols. 279-80, 1 March 1898.

344 *IT*, 20 July 1898, quoting from Dunraven's speech in the house of lords the previous day. No record of the deputation was to be found in the *Irish Times*, *Irish Daily Independent* or *Limerick Chronicle* of May 1898.

understand what was required for horse breeding in Ireland left the government in a quandary. In such a situation the government, like their counterparts the world over, did nothing nor were they prepared to issue any instruction to the CDB.

Perturbed by such inactivity Dunraven raised the issue in the house of lords on 19 July 1898 in a lengthy and comprehensive speech. He explained that while he was not seeking increased government aid, though it was badly needed, it was fair and legitimate for him to question and criticise the use being made of the money grants in existence. In a scathing attack on the framers of the minority or hackney report, he accused them of carefully culling specimens from the answers of witnesses and ignoring most of the evidence of experts opposed to their viewpoint. Dunraven addressed some harsh words to the CDB whose promotion of hackney blood caused the setting up of the commission in the first place and was the main point of difference between the commissioners afterwards. Acknowledging that it had done work of incalculable value in encouraging advances in fisheries, cottage industries and animal husbandry, he averred that it had gone wrong in the area of horse breeding. He regretted the attitude of the CDB towards the inquiry where, instead of remaining neutral, it had actually submitted a public letter to the commission complaining that the board's action had been impugned.³⁴⁵ Special scorn was reserved for Fredrick Wrench,³⁴⁶ a member of the commission as well as being the person on the board of the CDB responsible for the business of horse breeding. Wrench was described by Dunraven as being looked upon by the inhabitants of the congested districts as an all powerful deity whose smiles or frowns were portents of good or evil and that it took considerable courage or strong feelings of urgency for men to speak out publicly against the well-known wishes of such a powerful benefactor.³⁴⁷ During the inspection tour of the western counties Wrench was ever present as was his influence. Winding up for the government the earl of Denbigh said that the work of the commission had not been lost sight of but that the difference of opinion precluded the lord lieutenant from issuing any instructions to the CDB. Denbigh concluded by saying that a regulatory body would soon be established in Ireland.³⁴⁸ As standing orders prevented Dunraven from further intervening, the discussion ended, as many thought, on a hopeful note.

³⁴⁵ The letter in question is not contained in the report of the commission.

³⁴⁶ Wrench was a board member from 1891 to 1903 (W. L. Micks, *History of the congested districts board* (Dublin, 1925), p. 28).

³⁴⁷ *Hansard*, 4th Series, vol. 62, cols. 258-76, 19 July 1898.

³⁴⁸ *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 62, cols. 281-2, 19 July 1898.

In the absence of any progress Dunraven was obliged to address the house of lords on the subject in 1902. This time he was mainly concerned with the future of the horse breeding industry, as it affected the supply of remounts for the army, consequent to the practice of selling off good quality breeding stock to continental buyers. He said that, at the least, the government should provide additional funds to encourage farmers to keep sound mares to breed from.³⁴⁹ The duke of Devonshire, replying for the government, reverted to the old doctrine of laissez-faire – an evil always had a tendency to affect its own cure, implying that it behoved breeders to improve quality to meet the demands of the lucrative continental market, or any other market. The only constructive suggestion he could make was that he would consult with government colleagues to seek a method of paying an increased price for remounts.³⁵⁰ Dunraven then withdrew his motion on that dubious commitment.

Dunraven's last public statement on horse-breeding was made in the house of lords in 1906. On that occasion it was the earl of Donoughmore who moved a resolution concerning the improvement of the breeding of horses, stressing that the industry should be left in private hands but with enhanced government assistance. Dunraven made a shorter than usual contribution towards the end of the debate. He deprecated the loss of Ireland's best brood mares, not because the farmers of Ireland did not understand the advantages of breeding from a good horse but because of lack of other incentives. They could not resist the temptation of the high prices they got from foreign buyers. He took issue with the so-called free trade school on the grounds that if there was a danger to the home horse supply, especially for military purposes, then it was legitimate for the state to step in and assist. In conclusion and indeed for the only time in his dealings with the breeding industry, Dunraven made a direct appeal to the government for financial support for the industry and more particularly for the Brood Mare Society.³⁵¹

The commission was born out of contention so it was inevitable that disagreement would dog its every step. Commenting on the deputation in May 1896, the *Irish Times*, for instance, showing a measure of support for the CDB, pointed out that for every one man who bought a hunter there were ten who wanted a harness horse and so Ireland should excel in the production of every class of light horse.³⁵² When the commission set to work Dunraven was

349 *Hansard*, 4th Series, vol. 104, cols. 1227-35, 13 March 1902.

350 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 104, cols. 1236-8, 13 March 1902.

351 *Hansard*, 4th Series, vol. 160, cols. 1289-90, 16 July 1906.

352 *IT*, 20 July 1898,

adamant that the whole subject be examined very thoroughly but he found that, in the end, the exertions of the commissioners were reduced to one comparatively minor point, thoroughbred stallion versus hackney.³⁵³ This was the genesis of the two reports that provided the government with an excuse for inaction, as it had neither the funds nor the goodwill to improve the lot of Irish breeders, or else was unable or unwilling to confront the CDB. While, in the end, the commission achieved nothing, it need not have been so. Omitting the main point of contention, an amalgam of the two reports laid out a course of remedial action for the future of the industry. A single-minded comprehensive plan, spurred on by a sustained campaign of pressure on the government, might have served the commissioners better. As it was, both sides travelled separately along the road to failure. Dunraven, who had a natural propensity towards the hunting fraternity and, displaying for the first time his innate stubborn streak, resolutely believed in the correctness of the majority report and endeavoured to foist its views on the government. In July 1898 he challenged the government on inaction consequent to the publication of two conflicting reports, yet he might have served the cause better if, even at that late hour, he had not confronted and disaffected the hackney lobby.

Dunraven, the public face of reform in this area, added little to his growing reputation as a national figure with the failure of the government to move the industry forward. In 1898, the *Irish Times*, in the sure knowledge that an authoritative body would soon be set up to regulate the industry in Ireland, commended him for keeping the matter before the public.³⁵⁴ The *Limerick Chronicle* was more fulsome in its praise a few years later. Apart from the inevitable commendation of Dunraven, 'we are grateful for the lively and constant attention he is giving to one of the staple industries of this country,'³⁵⁵ it lauded his foresight and courage in adverting to the danger to the nation from the unavailability of an adequate reserve of horses, for cavalry and field artillery regiments, in the event of war.

After 1906 the government was soon to be let off the hook and Dunraven was relieved of his difficulty with the inadequate response from that quarter. While horses remained crucial to military strategy for the following decade, the mechanical age was fast approaching.

353 Dunraven, *Past times*, i, p. 171.

354 *IT*, 20 July 1898.

355 *LC*, 15 March 1902.

THE ROUNDEST OF ALL ROUND TABLES

While the notion of a conference between landlords and tenants had been bandied about earlier in 1902 there was some surprise when a little known scion of a County Galway landlord family, Captain John Shawe-Taylor, called, in a letter to the press in September, for a conference of representatives of landlords and tenants to come up with some solution to the seemingly obdurate land problem.¹ After some time the nationalists gave it a cautious welcome but the position remained deadlocked as the powerful Irish Landowners' Convention (ILC) refused to even consider taking part. In an inspired move Shawe-Taylor contacted Dunraven, now a confirmed advocate of purchase as the only solution to the problem, to seek his opinion on the proposed conference. It appears that Shawe-Taylor, after the publication of the letter, had appealed to him for help, probably on the advice of George Wyndham, the chief secretary. Dunraven published his reply in a long letter to the press. While broadly in favour of a conference, he felt that two conditions were essential to make such productive of success:

firstly, mutual agreement on the part of the members on certain fundamental propositions relating to principles, and secondly, honest mutual determination to efface all personal feelings and objects in an effort to arrive at a working agreement on details.²

This declaration from Dunraven must have given immense heart to those landlords who were not happy with the views of the landlords' convention, most of whose leaders had publicly repudiated the suggestion of a conference. Here, out in the open, came one of the largest landowners in the south of Ireland, a protestant and committed anti-home ruler, who was espousing a conference, whose proposals, if agreed upon, could lead only to one outcome – the abolition, in some shape or form, of the dual system of land ownership. Furthermore, there was no necessity on the part of Dunraven, unlike a growing number of middle ranking landlords, from a financial or any other reason, to seek such a settlement. He was well regarded and respected by the majority of his tenants and was elected to Limerick County Council in 1899 and returned in 1902 against a strong nationalist opponent. His letter could

¹ *IT*, 3 September 1902.

² *IT*, 7 October 1902. Wyndham was much pleased with this letter. 'Dunraven has weighed in with a fine letter on land,' he wrote, 7 October 1902, to Mrs Drew, daughter of W. E. Gladstone, some time British prime minister (cited in Mackail and Wyndham, *Life and letters of George Wyndham*, ii, p. 451).

also be taken as a coded message to those who were seeking to circumvent the recusant attitude of the leaders of the Convention. Since it was patently obvious that Barrymore and the ILC were not capable of thrusting personal prejudices aside then it would not be proper for them to negotiate on behalf of the landlords in the event of a conference. Dunraven was making a brave leap into the unknown in offering his services as a catalyst. In any event, his intervention at that time was crucial to the efforts of Shawe-Taylor.

During the early weeks of October, the spotlight of public opinion was firmly on the executive committee of the ILC as it strove to quell discontent among rank and file members dissatisfied with the obstinacy and obduracy of its anti-conference stance. The *Irish Daily Independent*, determined to get the opinion of a representative body of landlords, announced³ that it was sending a ballot paper to lieutenants and deputy lieutenants in every Irish county inviting them to return the paper, indicating whether they were for or against a land conference. As these were invariably of the landlord class this would serve as a very limited but useful sample of opinion while the mere act of returning the paper would indicate whether there was any interest in securing a settlement of the land question at that time.

Later a similar procedure was adopted to test the views of county councillors.⁴ These were generally better class tenants on estates, so they could be taken as a representative sample of their category. Dunraven, lieutenant for County Limerick, did not return either ballot paper until 22 October.⁵ The *Irish Daily Independent* made special references to the fact that, although the paper had published several letters from Dunraven expressing support for a conference, it was surprised that his preference did not come in earlier. The occasion was used, however, to urge all who had received ballot papers to cast a preference one way or another. Dunraven, who was in London at that time, wrote a further letter⁶ to the press in which he scathingly rebuked the executive of the ILC for its efforts to prevent an appeal, over their heads, to a section of the landlord class. The final results of both ballots were announced on 27 October, Ballot 1, that of lieutenants and deputy lieutenants, 103 for with 33 against; Ballot 2, referring to county councillors, 358 for, 3 against. The results, while decisive, were overtaken by other events.

3 *IDI*, 7 October 1902.

4 *IDI*, 13 October 1902.

5 *IDI*, 23 October 1902.

6 *IT*, 24 October 1902.

Meanwhile, the earl of Mayo, who by now had become the spokesman for a number of pro-conference landlords, made strenuous efforts to persuade the executive committee of the ILC to change its attitude. When he failed to do so at a meeting on 10 October, where many delegates, who had been mandated otherwise by their county associations, were persuaded on the day to adopt an anti-conference stance, a split seemed inevitable. The pro-conference group, fourteen in number, but excluding Dunraven, who was in Britain at the time, satisfied that the meeting of 10 October did not adequately represent the wishes of the vast bulk of landlords, set up⁷ a provisional committee of 12, including Dunraven, to ballot all landlords, county by county, as to their conference preference.

Dunraven's participation in the events leading up to the establishment of the provisional committee of the Irish landlords was seemingly incidental if one did not fully understand Dunraven's intentions towards Ireland. One might imagine that he became unknowingly implicated in the agitation and, later in the conference itself. Wyndham's land bill failed in 1902 and, in the second week in September, the week after Shawe-Taylor published his letter, the chief secretary, George Wyndham, was a guest⁸ at Adare Manor. As Dunraven and Wyndham were old political allies as well as kinsmen and personal friends, the content of Shawe-Taylor's letter was undoubtedly discussed. On 7 October, as we have seen, Dunraven wrote to Shawe-Taylor through the medium of the public press replying to a request for advice, in which he gave qualified approval to the step taken by the young County Galway landlord. Dunraven, giving an account of his involvement in the making of the conference, states in his autobiography, *Past Times and Pastimes*, that:

I wrote one or two letters to the *Irish Times*, urging that while a conference might do good, it could not possibly make matters worse than they were; and that at any rate it showed that we landlords had confidence in our case.⁹

He then went on to say that Shawe-Taylor telegraphed him begging him to go up to Dublin to help and that he went immediately. Sophie, wife of William O'Brien, MP, gives a different account of his first commitment to a conference. She states that Shawe-Taylor visited Adare to seek advice after the landlord representatives he had nominated in his letter all refused to

⁷ *IT*, 18 October 1902.

⁸ *LC*, 11 September 1902.

⁹ Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, p. 6.

act. The discussions went on late into the night as Shawe-Taylor urged Dunraven to take the initiative by calling publicly for a conference. Dunraven was unwillingly to commit himself and suggested that it was time to break up for the night. Also present was Lady Aileen Wyndham-Quin (later countess of Meath), who is supposed to have said then, ‘no father, we must not go to bed before you make up your mind’. The account concludes that Dunraven made up his mind there and then.¹⁰

Unfortunately, Dunraven, himself gave no such account in his autobiography, nor did Sophie O’Brien give any date for that occurrence. We know that Dunraven was in Adare in September 1902, as he attended a meeting of Limerick County Council on Saturday the 20th. His letter to Shawe-Taylor, dated 4 October, was his first statement giving public approval for the holding of a conference. One might assume that Shawe-Taylor’s initial appeal to Dunraven was by way of a letter, but it need not have been so. If Sophie O’Brien’s version of events, said to have been recounted by Shawe-Taylor to her husband, is accurate, then the gathering at Adare took place in late September 1902, the letter of early October being the result. It is possible that Dunraven’s own account may refer to his first going to Dublin in regard to the matter, when, on 13 October, at an informal meeting¹¹ of pro-conference landlords, which included the earls of Dunraven, Meath and Mayo, Lord Castletown and Shawe-Taylor, it was decided to send a circular and ballot paper to all Irish landlords. In addition, the pro-conference landlords set up another provisional committee of ten, including Dunraven, for the sole purpose of conducting the ballot of landlords. Once the circulars and the ballot papers had been distributed, the provisional committee, following Dunraven’s advice, ‘took steps to keep the project before the public.’¹² Pro-conference letters began to appear in various newspapers¹³ that, together with the landlords’ poll in the *Irish Daily Independent*, enabled the provisional committee to keep the pressure on the ILC. Dunraven himself, now gaining stature in the campaign, gained much valuable publicity for his cause when he both presided and was principal speaker at a meeting of County Limerick landlords on 29 October. As Dunraven was not a member of the ILC, this meeting was called independently of the county branch and was designed to rally enough support to give a timely boost to the pro-conference lobby and a gentle rebuff to the intransigents in Dublin. The

10 Undated documents referring to 1902 (NLI, Mrs Sophie O’Brien papers, 4215, pp 36-7).

11 NLI, Land Conference papers, 10,907.

12 Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, p. 8.

13 See *IT*, 15, 21 October; *IDI*, 13 October; *LL*, 24 October 1902.

purpose of the Limerick meeting was to consider a motion on ‘the advisability of holding a conference between representatives of landlords and tenants.’¹⁴ Pronouncing that dual ownership was a gigantic failure, Dunraven went on to say why he felt personally so strongly in favour of a conference. The present system made it impossible for the owner to do anything with his land and it offered the occupier a direct inducement to neglect his farm as much as possible. Single ownership, he said, could only be accomplished by offering reasonable and equitable terms to landowners to facilitate the transfer from landlord to tenant.¹⁵ He went on to say that, even if a conference proved abortive with no agreement achieved, the landlords would come well out of it as they would then have demonstrated, particularly to the British public, that they had a just cause and were prepared to adhere to their principles by coming face to face with the tenant side. Dunraven was ever a landlord, whose cause he never deserted, in the same way, as he never flinched from his unionist principles during the county council election campaign of 1899. After other speakers were heard, the motion passed unanimously. It was an easy victory on that occasion for Dunraven and the pro-conference committee. Other more searching examinations would follow.

The result¹⁶ of the conference poll was announced on 17 November and showed 1,128 in favour, 558 against. In percentage terms, the figures, 66% in favour; 34% against, were slightly down on the comparable but more restricted poll conducted by the *Irish Daily Independent*. The result was regarded as highly successful and was seen as indicative of a desire to press forward with the stated object of the poll. Accordingly, the meeting agreed to disband the provisional committee and form a new committee¹⁷ of twelve with Dunraven again as chairman. A suggested framework¹⁸ for the holding of a conference was then set out and agreed. So as not to make it too cumbersome and unwieldy it was felt that four representatives from each side would suffice, as suggested by Shawe-Taylor, with power to co-opt legal or financial experts, as required, and that, in the interests of equity, an outside chairman might be more acceptable.

Before embarking irrevocably on a divisive course of action one final attempt was

14 LC, 30 October 1902.

15 Ibid.

16 NLI, Land Conference papers, 10,907, 17 November 1902.

17 *IT*, 19 November 1902.

18 NLI, Land Conference papers, 10,907, 17 November 1902.

made to entice the ILC to co-operate in holding a conference. The next meeting¹⁹ of the pro-convention group was held at Buswell's Hotel, Dublin, on 28 November 1902, with Dunraven in the chair. At the same time, the ILC was holding a meeting in nearby Kildare Street. During the afternoon there was an exchange of documents but the executive committee of the ILC refused to countenance the holding of a conference and, further, declined to offer any assistance to Dunraven and his committee. Two reasons for refusal were cited. Firstly, that the tenant or occupier side had failed to publish either its views or aims, and, secondly, that a conference would be detrimental to the interests of small landowners. The reply showed a slight movement in strategy while not fully closing the door on the pro-conference committee. Undeterred, Dunraven and his group, now called the Land Conference Committee (LCC), decided to press ahead and set about naming the four landlord representatives.²⁰ Ten names were put forward including Dunraven, and Mayo but omitting Shawe-Taylor. It was agreed to poll the landlords and a small sub-committee²¹ of seven, with Dunraven as chairman and Mayo as honorary secretary, and including Shawe-Taylor, was appointed to carry this out. The sub-committee met on 5 December when the ballot paper was prepared. Four names were dropped from the earlier list and the remaining six, Dunraven, Mayo, Colonel Nugent Everard, Sinclair, Colonel William Hutcheson Poe, and Gore-Booth were entered on the ballot paper, curiously enough, in that order.²² On 15 December it was announced that Dunraven, Mayo, Everard and Hutcheson Poe were the chosen nominees. Thus ended the process of selection, necessary if the LCC was to claim to be democratic, but more importantly, it was vital that as many landlords as possible be brought into the selection process because on their acceptance of whatever terms would emerge rested the ultimate success of the whole conference idea.

With the likelihood that a conference would take place, Dunraven, in early November, was anxious²³ to meet John Redmond, the chairman, yet recognised leader of the Irish Party. Doing so would be in accord with Dunraven's own thinking, as he stated in his first letter to the *Irish Times*²⁴ that if preliminary propositions were accepted without prejudice by both sides beforehand then the conference would be in a better position to discuss the real issues

19 *IT*, 29 November 1902.

20 NLI, Land Conference papers, 10,907, 28 November 1902.

21 *Ibid.*

22 NLI, Land Conference papers, 10,907, 5 December 1902.

23 Shawe-Taylor to O'Brien, 5 November 1902 (UCC, O'Brien papers, Box AM, 9/165).

24 Dunraven to *IT*, 7 October 1902.

when it met. Dunraven felt, for another more serious reason, that such a meeting was necessary as ‘feelings on both sides were very bitter.’²⁵ Dunraven’s effort to meet with Redmond pre-dated a brief exchange of letters between Mayo and Harrington,²⁶ yet both had the same intention – to build up a measure of familiarity between the parties, which up to then were poles apart politically and indeed where the leaders may never have even spoken to each other. Redmond was, however, still in America and not due to return until the middle of November. Once he returned, Dunraven lost no time in meeting him. Redmond was most impressed with the positive attitude of Dunraven when he reported the outcome of that initial meeting to William O’Brien. The only danger they both saw was that the ILC would manage, by some means or other, to appoint men to act for them with a mandate to wreck the conference. On a more positive note Dunraven was of the opinion that the conference should, in general terms, suggest a scheme of purchase to be put forward by the government the nucleus of which would be that the annuity payable by tenants would show a very substantial reduction compared to second term rents; that landlords should obtain a substantial equivalent of their income based on second term rents and that the government should provide the necessary funds to carry this out, which, Dunraven reckoned, would amount to not more than £300,000 a year.²⁷

Although Dunraven was committed to the abolition of dual ownership the above indicates that his ideas regarding purchase were not yet clearly formulated. What was important from that first meeting was that Dunraven recognised that no settlement could be achieved without direct government intervention and that the basis for a successful outcome should be firmly established at the outset. Redmond went on to tell O’Brien that Dunraven favoured exceptional treatment for the western problem and for the reinstatement of evicted tenants and that a conference should urge the government to include remedial measures in those areas in any subsequent land bill. Any doubts that O’Brien might still harbour regarding the genuineness of Dunraven and his pro-conference committee were now likely to be dispelled since the solution of the problems of the west and evicted tenants were dear to his heart. Dunraven was not idle in London as he awaited the return of Redmond. He had met with Sir Antony MacDonnell, the newly appointed under-secretary for Ireland, who told him that recommendations of any conference should be with him by 15 January 1903 at the

25 Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, p. 11.

26 NLI, Land Conference papers, 10,907.

27 Redmond to O’Brien, 22 November 1902 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 10,496/6).

latest. This was quite a tall order seeing that the conference was still only a pious aspiration. However a satisfactory start had been made; both parties seemed anxious to make progress and the nationalist side, in the person of Redmond, an experienced negotiator and politician, was much encouraged by the outcome of that first meeting.

Replying²⁸ to Redmond, O'Brien expressed no misgivings on the contents of the letter he had received but urged Redmond to get Dunraven to hurry on the conference. This was apparently because he had learned that Davitt and Dillon, both of whom were not enamoured of a conference, were soon to set out from America for Ireland. O'Brien also suggested that, on the lines recommended by Dunraven, a further meeting between both men could usefully be held. One could infer from the Redmond/O'Brien exchange of letters that, while Redmond was the titular leader on the nationalist side, he was reluctant to proceed without the sanction or approval of O'Brien, the chief remembrancer of agrarian agitation. Dunraven was the clear leader and philosopher on the landlord side, having taken over from the earl of Mayo, and was empowered, apparently, to make decisions and arrangements without reference to any third party. The second meeting between Dunraven and Redmond, a lengthy affair, took place in London on 1 December. From this it emerged, as Redmond again kept O'Brien informed, that Dunraven was quite convinced that 'the government meant a big thing and that Wyndham is breast high for a big deal.'²⁹ Dunraven had his information from MacDonnell who, by now, he had met some three or four times. O'Brien was also informed that Dunraven had further ideas as to some kind of home rule afterwards and that the men to act on the tenant side must be nominated by the Irish Party and, in order to move things on, Dunraven suggested that a meeting of the party be held for that purpose within ten days. Dunraven then broached with Redmond an extraneous matter but one likely to be crucial to the holding of a conference:

He [Dunraven] says he is greatly embarrassed by the stopping of hunting in County Limerick and begs of us, for a month or so, to induce our local friends to do nothing of this nature.³⁰

While Dunraven was not an active member of the County Limerick Foxhound Club, though a

28 O'Brien to Redmond, 25 November 1902 (NLI, O'Brien Papers, 10,496/6).

29 Redmond to O'Brien, 1 December 1902 (NLI, O'Brien Papers, 10,496/6).

30 Ibid.

supporter, many of the followers of the hunt had thronged to Limerick to attend the meeting of the County Limerick landlords on 29 October 1902 where a pro-conference resolution was unanimously agreed. Interference with or stopping of hunting had been used successfully by land agitators in the county in the hunting season of 1882-3 and in 1886, as well as periodic bouts, over the years, of hound poisoning.³¹ A recurrence of this nuisance to huntpersons had flared up again. These actions were regarded in the county as legitimate forms of protest against landlord excesses. Now, however, such actions had the potential to damage the pro-conference cause, still in a fragile state, as well as cause embarrassment to Dunraven himself and to persons of higher standing. On 17 November the lord lieutenant, the earl of Dudley, and his wife, while guests at Adare Manor, had hunted³² with the county foxhounds in Athlacca in the company of the Countess of Dunraven and Lady Aileen Wyndham-Quin, in the absence from home of the earl. Imagine the discomfiture of both the Dunraven family and the distinguished guests if the hunt had been stopped on that day, particularly as Dudley was in favour of a land settlement through purchase. Furthermore the interference had the potential for public disorder and subsequent notoriety as rival supporters faced one another in menacing fashion. The whole episode also had the immediate capacity of unnerving pro-conference landlords, not only in County Limerick but elsewhere, lest this carry on was to become the norm in the event of a successful transfer of land ownership to the tenants and thereby sending out a clear signal that there was no future for hunting-loving former landlords in the new Ireland if they opted to remain after selling. On receipt of a communication from Redmond, the MP for Limerick West replied,³³ rather defiantly, pointing out that the hunt was only stopped when what he termed objectionable persons³⁴ were present and that the feeling on the ground was clearly anti-hunting. However the request from Dunraven was acceded to and the UIL declared that all opposition to hunting in County Limerick was to be withdrawn from 13 December 1902 to 1 February 1903³⁵ though the hunting fraternity gave a less contentious and more prosaic explanation for the cessation of hostilities.³⁶

31 Col Wyndham-Quin, *The foxhound in County Limerick* (Dublin, 1918), pp 147-51. See also L. P. Curtis, Jr., 'Stopping the hunt, 1881-2:

An aspect of the Irish land war' in C. H. E. Philpin (ed.), *Nationalism and popular protest in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1987), pp 349-402.

32 Wyndham-Quin, *The foxhound in County Limerick*, p. 266.

33 P. J. O'Shaughnessy, MP, to Redmond, 4 December 1902 (NLI, Redmond papers, 15,241(11)).

34 See Michael O'Rourke, hon. sec., Bruree UIL, to Redmond, 8 December 1902 (NLI, Redmond papers, 15241 (11)).

35 NAI, Dunraven papers, N/2/9.

36 Wyndham-Quin, *The foxhound in County Limerick*, pp 170-1.

In early December, Dunraven sent Redmond a copy of what he considered to be the ‘Subjects for Discussion’³⁷ with his own opinion on some of the points and asked, in a covering letter,³⁸ whether they adequately covered the ground or required any alterations. He also felt that the conference agenda should be published when it was agreed, as it would show all and sundry ‘that we mean business.’ On both points Dunraven was anxious for a quick reply as his own committee of pro-conference landlords had a meeting scheduled for 5 December. The subjects for discussion were neatly laid out under three headings: -

No. 1 Preliminary points

- (a) That the land to be dealt with at the conference was land, which was *bona fide* farm land, let or rented to tenants. This would exclude what could be called demesne lands or lands which would remain or become the property of the landlord who wished to stay in Ireland. Dunraven suggested that this definition be agreed to, as a fundamental principle or else it would lead to endless discussion.
- (b) Should sporting rights be reserved to landlords? Dunraven suggested yes and gave three reasons.
- (c) As congested districts were exceptionally circumstanced they should receive exceptional treatment but the conference should only make recommendations in a general way.

No. 2 In what direction is a solution of the land question to be sought?

- (b) Was the preferred option of Dunraven, namely the transfer of the whole interest of the landlord to the tenant. This he considered preferable to (a) conversion of half, or some other proportion, of the rent into a permanent land tax and purchase of the balance of the rent and (c) any other plan.

No. 3 Purchase

³⁷ Dunraven to Redmond, [1 December 1902] (NLI, Redmond Papers, 15,187(1)).

³⁸ Dunraven to Redmond, 1 December 1902 (NLI, Redmond Papers, 15,187(1)).

- (a) What constitutes a fair basis of rent? (1) existing rents, (2) second term rents or their equivalent, (3) any other means.
- (b) What terms of purchase would be fair to the tenants?

In neither of the two points in No. 3 did Dunraven offer any personal opinion. The question of purchase was a delicate and intricate matter with which the conference would have to grapple. The value of the rental income would determine the price to be paid to the landlord at time of sale while the yearly rent payable by the tenant would have a bearing on the price upon which he could afford to purchase.

This document was followed the same day by a further letter³⁹ to Redmond. Dunraven pointed out that the 'Subjects' paper was designed to concentrate discussion on the one great issue, namely the settlement on general lines of the land question as per 2 (b). Should this be agreed to and a speedy resolution achieved, then the conference should express an opinion on topics that he considered worthy of note and which had proved quite divisive in the past. These were, firstly, if a large measure of purchase was agreed upon then evicted tenants should be catered for, provided no sitting occupier of those lands would be disturbed. Secondly, that the machinery for carrying any measure of purchase should be rapid in its operation. Thirdly, that it was desirable that the executive machinery should have power to enquire into exceptional cases and, if thought fit, to deal with them by a departure, within limits, from the general rule regulating terms of sale and purchase. It could be argued that all three above were stanced from a landlord point of view. Evicted tenants might be reinstated in lands other than those from which they were originally evicted. Disturbing sitting tenants on such land would cause further trouble to the landlord, as they in turn would have to be provided for. In the second case, a speedy settlement and prompt payment would best serve the landlord's interest. Dunraven and his committee were only too well aware that not all landlords were financially solvent. Many had, for one reason or another, mortgaged their lands and so Dunraven was anxious, in a pre-emptive strike, that special consideration be given to such, even to the point of bending the rules of sale and purchase. This was a point that Dunraven was to return to at a later date.

The next meeting between Dunraven and Redmond, the third, was due to take place in London on Monday 8 December, an indication of the earnestness of both to settle as much as

³⁹ Dunraven to Redmond, 1 December 1902 (NLI, Redmond papers, 15,187(1)).

possible before any conference actually began. Dunraven was unable⁴⁰ to fulfil that engagement so they met on the previous Saturday. Redmond, as usual, reported⁴¹ all to O'Brien. Prior to this, Redmond and O'Brien were also working on arrangements and topics for the conference. These were submitted to Dunraven at the Saturday meeting but, while he agreed to them in principle, he needed time to reflect on them before giving final approval. These were: -

- 1 that Dunraven take the chair
- 2 to have the conference about 20 December
- 3 to publish no agenda
- 4 to confine the conference to the following principal points:-
 - tenants to get substantial reductions on second term rents
 - landlords to get net second term income
 - Treasury to supply deficit
 - the conference to recommend settlement of evicted tenant question
 - to agree that the west requires separate and exceptional treatment

Dunraven was also given a detailed memorandum from O'Brien in which he laboriously laid out the sums required from the treasury as well as the correct price at which tenants could afford to purchase.

The question of who might chair the conference was interesting, particularly when it surfaced at such an early stage. It had been intimated to Redmond by official circles that Lord James⁴² of Hereford should preside at the deliberations. O'Brien and Redmond both rejected this and plumped instead for Dunraven. This would have one huge advantage for the tenant side. By consigning Dunraven to the chair the landlord case would be deprived of one of its most outspoken and vociferous proponents in the rough and tumble of the debates that would inevitably take place within the conference. On the other hand, his selection would indicate that the tenant side did not intend to dominate the proceedings; that the landlord case

40 Telegram, Dunraven to O'Brien, 6 December 1902 (NLI, Redmond Papers, 15,187(1)).

41 Redmond to O'Brien, 7 December 1902 (NLI, O'Brien Papers, 10,496/6).

42 Lord James of Hereford, 1828-1911, lawyer and sometime cabinet minister, was a vigorous anti-home rule campaigner in 1886 and 1893. He appeared for the *Times* before the Parnell Commission of 1888-9 and made a memorable twelve day closing speech (*DNB*). Apart from the desirability of having an Irishman to preside, James's past would have made him unacceptable to Redmond and O'Brien.

would have a fair hearing since Dunraven, as chairman, would have the task of compiling the final report, and that while Dunraven would also lend a certain *gravitas* and importance to the proceedings he would be assured of the same entrée into officialdom as Lord James.

Dunraven replied the following day and sounded a note of caution lest Redmond and O'Brien be carried away imagining, from the conciliatory and amenable attitude of Dunraven, that an amicable settlement was on the cards. He warned that the Landowners' Convention had not closed the door on participation if for no other reason but to wreck it. Dunraven again harped back to his submission on 'Subjects' feeling that it was not getting due consideration from Redmond and O'Brien and stressed the importance of a prior understanding of the landlords' position, particularly on the question of sporting rights which offered 'the principal inducement to former landlords to remain in Ireland to the benefit of labour if not the whole community.'⁴³ Dunraven then alluded to what, in his opinion, was to be the main topic for discussion - the terms of sale and purchase. O'Brien in his memorandum to Dunraven had suggested that the basis for sale and purchase should be the market value of the land. Dunraven rejected this idea as impracticable as market value was likely to vary from locality to locality and even within an estate itself; would lead to inordinate delay in arriving at such figures, and argued that the adoption of present rents as the desired basis would greatly simplify matters. Dunraven then went on to outline how a purchase scheme could work:

The bedrock idea is that the state should purchase from the landlord for a sum, which invested at 3.25% or 3.5%, would give him his [annual] income. I [Dunraven] concede at once that that is more than he would get in the open market, and the difference may be said to be a bonus to him. The State is then to sell to the tenant, which will give him a substantial reduction in rent and that is the bonus to him.⁴⁴

Of the three participating elements mentioned above the landlord would undoubtedly come out the best. The capital sum to be paid to him at time of sale would be the equivalent of thirty years his annual rental. Neither of the other two elements, the state or the tenant, had their positions or outgoings defined in a similar precise manner. It was becoming clear that

⁴³ Dunraven to Redmond, 8 December 1902 (NLI, Redmond papers, 15,187(1)).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

the success of the conference would hinge on the cost of sale and purchase and so Dunraven reiterated that the aim should be agreement on general principles and that a veil of secrecy should be cast, not only over preliminary discussions such as they were having, but on the actual working of the conference itself lest the public might be led to expect something in the nature of a land bill. As regards the chairmanship, Dunraven admitted that while he could see the logic of O'Brien's arguments in the matter, he himself felt that a perfectly disinterested chairman would be better, as he was obviously anticipating heated exchanges at the conference, but that, if he was pressed by the representatives of both sides then it would be difficult to refuse. In that event Dunraven laid down a number of conditions that he considered necessary for the proper discharge of the office. He should be entitled to confer privately with the representatives of either side in the absence of the other and to give any advice or assistance to any individual; that, during the sittings of the conference, he be allowed to seek clarification of points that appeared to him to be doubtful or obscure, and have legal and secretarial assistance available to him. Finally Dunraven in that letter alerted Redmond to the possibility that, on both sides, distrust or worse existed towards the conference and that, in the case of his own side, his committee members and supporters were prepared 'for strong, though veiled antagonism and that this is not unlikely to take the shape of belittling the conference as a sort of hole and corner gathering unworthy of consideration.'⁴⁵ In that likely event and to ensure that such nuisance would not unduly descend on them, the names of representatives on both sides ought not to be made public until the eve of the meeting.

Redmond was quite alarmed when he received that letter, as it appeared to him that Dunraven was overstepping the mark and fleshing out what had been mere suggestions as to terms of purchase and sale. He first of all wired Dunraven in London to ask him when he was coming to Dublin again as it was imperative that the earl and O'Brien should meet and iron out any differences that seemed to be creeping in. Dunraven wired⁴⁶ back to say that Friday, 19 December - the day before the conference was due to sit - was the earliest he could be over unless something exceptional and pressing required an earlier trip. Obviously Dunraven had no sense of anything being amiss on the other side of the water. On receipt of this, Redmond wrote immediately to O'Brien and explained his dilemma. Without a face-to-face meeting between Dunraven and O'Brien, Redmond wondered:

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Telegram, Dunraven to Redmond, 10 December 1902 (NLI, Redmond papers, 15,187(1)).

Would it be safe, do you think, to go on with arrangements [for the conference] and trust on being able to smoothen out all outstanding matters with Dunraven the day before the conference when you and I could see him in Dublin?⁴⁷

O'Brien was not unduly worried about Redmond's concerns, as he did not reply. Still oblivious to the consternation he had caused to Redmond, Dunraven followed his telegram with a letter to Redmond to explain that he had to attend a royal investiture on Thursday, 18 December but could, with the permission of the king, absent himself if he was urgently required in Dublin. Dunraven then confirmed that he would act as chairman if asked by both parties.⁴⁸

A missive from an unexpected source caused a further ripple of uncertainty amongst those busily preparing for the conference. Jasper Tully, a maverick member of the Irish parliamentary party, wrote to Dunraven on 9 December stating:

Having consulted the Irish members [of parliament] who have been acting together on the [English] education bill and other matters I wish very respectfully to convey an intimation to you, as chairman of the committee of Irish landlords, that no meeting of the kind will be satisfactory to us, or the interests we represent, unless Mr [Tim] Healy, MP and Mr Maurice Healy, who are leading experts on the Irish land laws, are invited to co-operate on equal terms with other members of the conference.⁴⁹

The only action Dunraven took was to inform Redmond of Tully's letter and send Tully⁵⁰ a simple letter of acknowledgement. The action of Tully was a warning to the tenant side to name their representatives without further delay.

In the end, Redmond, with the consent of his party, nominated the four suggested by Shawe-Taylor in September. These were Redmond, O'Brien, Harrington (who was also lord mayor of Dublin) and T.W. Russell. Dunraven acknowledged receipt of the nominees and,

47 Redmond to O'Brien, 10 December 1902 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 10,496/6).

48 Dunraven to Redmond, 8 December 1902 (NLI, Redmond papers, 15,187(i)). In that letter Dunraven suggested 'that a perfectly uninterested chairman would be better'.

49 Tully to Dunraven, 9 December 1902 (NLI, Redmond papers, 15,187(1)).

50 Dunraven to Tully, 11 December 1902 (NLI, Redmond papers, 15,187(1)).

blithely unaware of the consternation caused by his letter of 8 December, expressed a wish to meet O'Brien, in London, to 'clear the road of minor difficulties which may possibly perplex us and cause delay at the conference.'⁵¹ In the event, O'Brien did not travel to London, and as the two still had not yet met, Dunraven promised to meet with him on the day before the opening of the conference, which was fixed for Saturday, 20 December.⁵² Dunraven, as before, was not idle while in London. He communicated with Russell, selected to represent north of Ireland tenants at the conference, and also closely studied O'Brien's memorandum, in which the market value was to be the base-mark for sale and purchase but which he now returned to Redmond as being too contentious and entirely non-operative.

The Friday preceding the opening of the conference was one of feverish activity. Dunraven presided at a meeting⁵³ of the LCC where the principal item was consideration of a paper presented by the chairman, after which final arrangements were made for the meeting on the morrow. This was followed in the afternoon by a meeting of the finance sub-committee of the group. Dunraven also met with O'Brien and Redmond that evening. O'Brien and Dunraven were meeting for the first time. It says a lot for Dunraven's standing as a benevolent landlord because if the case were otherwise, then he would most certainly have encountered O'Brien in his former role of the fiery land agitator. O'Brien however had seen⁵⁴ Dunraven once before. On the day before the conference, O'Brien too was busy. In order to achieve agreement on the tenant side, he exchanged ideas with Russell, who might not be completely *au fait* with nationalist thinking on the lines the conference ought to take.

Thus the stage was set for the historic conference. Both sides were truly representatives of their constituencies, well versed in their opposites' viewpoints as well as in the veracity of their own, and both parties seemed to have a genuine interest in arriving at an equitable solution, without the interdict or veto of persons far removed from the conference itself who, therefore, would be unaware of the personal interaction and interplay being worked through, overtly and covertly, as the various delegates subtly strove to reach

51 Dunraven to Redmond, 12 December 1902 (NLI, Redmond papers, 15,187(1)).

52 Dunraven to Redmond, 15 December 1902 (NLI, Redmond papers, 15,187(1)).

53 NLI, Land Conference papers, 10,907.

54 In January 1902, O'Brien and his wife, Sophie, stopped off in Egypt on their way home from Australia. In a hotel at Helwan, close to Cairo, they were joined by an English friend who told them that he had just finished playing a game of tennis with Dunraven and his daughter. The O'Briens observed the father and daughter 'without realising that before the year was out Dunraven and O'Brien would be working hand in hand for one of the biggest achievements Ireland could boast of' (NLI, Sophie O'Brien Papers, 4215, entry for 1902).

agreement. *The Irish Times*,⁵⁵ prior to the opening of the conference, listed the names and property details of those on the landlord side. Dunraven owned 16,441 acres in counties Limerick, Kerry, and Clare; Mayo had 7,824 acres in counties Kildare, Meath and Mayo; Hutcheson Poe held 10,000 acres in County Tyrone and 1,600 acres in Queen's County, while Everard possessed a mere 2,500 acres in County Meath, land which was held in direct succession by his family for the previous 700 years. They were a representative cross section of their class. All were proven supporters of the conference idea; had come to realise that dual ownership was pernicious, and all had brought the wrath of their peers in the ILC down upon themselves for daring to cross the divide. Yet, they seemed to have garnered a considerable amount of support from fellow landlords in the manner in which they initiated and then proceeded with their design of bringing an end to the land crisis. But support is a fickle thing. The four conference participants, in particular, were running a huge risk, as failure to achieve success at the conference table or the inability to convert it, afterwards, into tangible results, would inevitably result in ridicule at the hands of the landowners' organisation or continued taunting from the nationalist side. In the case of Dunraven, since he was now embarked on a course of ameliorating the distresses of Ireland, his future credibility was very much on the line. Failure at such an early juncture could have had disastrous results, not only for the earl himself, but also for the many ventures on which he subsequently left his mark.

The formation of the tenant side was fortuitous, to say the least. It was a matter of conjecture as to who could best represent their cause. If evicted tenants, who knew better than anyone the injustices of the system, were chosen then no settlement could ever be achieved as they would prove to be too intransigent, and, in any event, they had too much baggage to carry. Existing tenants, on the other hand, would most likely be regarded as being too soft, too deferential to their social betters, and if they achieved a settlement they would be regarded as gaining it on the backs of the victimised in order to copper-fasten their own positions and those of their kind. In the final analysis it was not an agricultural conference but one to decide the future ownership of the soil of Ireland. The original nomination of members of the Irish parliamentary party was an inspired choice on the part of Shawe-Taylor. They were all hardy debaters; objective enough in their overview of the shambles that was the land position, and interested enough in the future of the country to secure the best deal possible for those whom they were to represent. In addition Redmond was himself a

⁵⁵ *IT*, 20 December 1902.

landlord. The limited number of conference participants was a distinct advantage as camaraderie could easily be established and barriers broken down. Finally it was a non party undertaking, which both sides had freely entered into, yet were committed to an equitable solution that had the exciting possibility of endearing itself to the hearts of all Irishmen, whether unionist or nationalist, landlord or tenant.

The commencement of the conference was a hurried affair after the long months of pre-conference debate and argument. Dunraven said⁵⁶ that he learned from Redmond, during their pre-conference discussions, that both John Dillon and Michael Davitt had set sail from New York. This event could have serious repercussions for the future of the convention, even before it started. Dillon had previously expressed himself in favour, in principle, of a conference, but both Dunraven and Redmond now felt that it was likely that, by then, he was under the extreme left wing views of Davitt so they considered it better that the conference should be in session before the arrival of the two from America.

⁵⁶ Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, p. 11.

THE ACTUAL LAND CONFERENCE

Very little is known of what transpired at the actual conference, which sat on five days, 20 [Saturday], 22, 23, 31 December 1902, and 3 January 1903.⁵⁷ By prior agreement between Dunraven and Redmond a veil of secrecy was cast over the proceedings, contrary to what the former had advocated in the beginning, but better in the circumstances as otherwise a series of parallel debates would ensue in the columns of newspapers and in public discussions, based on the proceedings of the conference as adumbrated in periodic releases to the public. Such a course of action would have had an unsettling affect, not only on the deliberations of the participants, but also on the expectations of the public. Of the nine [Shawe-Taylor also attended as secretary] who gathered together on that historic day only three, Dunraven, Russell and O'Brien, gave any account of what transpired, brief in the case of the first two but lengthy in the case of O'Brien, who needed, afterwards, to show that the demands of the tenant side were adequately addressed. The peculiar position in which O'Brien found himself was understood and wryly noted by Dunraven:

[O'Brien] with pardonable pride, pointed out in his book [*An Olive Branch in Ireland*] that most of the requirements made by himself and his colleagues were, after discussion, accepted by the whole conference.⁵⁸

While the sessions were conducted in private it was necessary that some public intimation be given of the existence of the conference. Accordingly, a brief press release was prepared for circulation at the end of each session. According to the release⁵⁹ at the end of the inaugural session, Dunraven was moved to the chair on the proposition of Redmond and Everard. Likewise, Shawe-Taylor was nominated as secretary on the proposal of Russell and Mayo. Neither proposal was challenged. This was a remarkable show of unanimity on the part of the participants and a vote of confidence on the part of the nationalists in allowing the two most important posts to pass to the landlord side. Dunraven then submitted a set of proposals, as did Redmond on the other side. O'Brien also submitted items for consideration. Dunraven was mandated to formulate the subjects for discussion at the second session, arranged for the following Monday. A flavour of how the items for discussion were listed and the order in

⁵⁷ For the seating arrangements see article by T.W. Russell, *FJ*, 6 January 1903.

⁵⁸ Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, p. 12.

⁵⁹ *IT*, 22 December 1902.

which they were to be taken can be gleaned from the agenda⁶⁰ for day two, Monday, 22 December 1902. Since the agenda was prepared by Dunraven as chairman it could be construed as being more in favour of landlords than tenants. However it is well to consider that unless the landlords were induced to sell, on what to them were fair and attractive terms, then the conference had no further business to transact. That was always Dunraven's premise and he remained true to it in this instance. The first two items dealt with the legal owners and how they were to have assurance of their income in the event of a sale. Less attention was given to whether the instalments/annuities payable by tenants should reflect a reduction on yearly rents. The agenda recognised that a scheme of purchase could not be carried through without assistance from the state but the details of transfer from owners to occupiers was one for discussion. Other matters for consideration were evicted tenants, congested districts, sporting rights and, as a further sop to landlords, the not inconsiderable matter of what was to become of land agents and land clerks if a wholesale measure of purchase went through.

Since O'Brien found himself in a peculiar position it behoved him to ensure that not only did substantial advantages accrue to the tenant-purchasers but that they originated from the nationalist side. Prior to the opening of the conference, O'Brien drew up a concise list of requirements essential to the tenant cause. This was the document, presented to Dunraven on his election as chairman, which was to act as a counter balance to the landlords' demands and as a guide to the chairman who, according to parliamentary precedent, was obliged to frame a draft report for consideration by the entire group. O'Brien's list consisted of eight points and in order to highlight the marvellous victory achieved by the tenant side he compared⁶¹ his requirements with the final report showing that in almost every point his suggestions were agreed to. But O'Brien seemed to have forgotten that practically his entire list and the basis for the conference, i.e., the abolition of landlordism, were identical to suggestions or ideas put to Redmond [who passed all relevant information to O'Brien] by Dunraven at their first meeting prior to 22 November; were contained in the 'subjects for discussion' document of 1 December; were teased out in Dunraven's analysis of 8 December, or were discussed at their third meeting of 6 December. O'Brien made further capital out of the fact that Dunraven, in his draft report, failed to include references to the abolition of landlordism, the question of evicted tenants, and the distribution of population and pasture lands of the west. In the light of Dunraven's well-publicised views on those topics their exclusion in the draft report is

60 NLI, Redmond papers, 15,241 (11).

61 O'Brien, *An olive branch in Ireland*, pp 174-6.

difficult to comprehend. At the second sitting of the conference Dunraven announced that he had been in communication with persons in authority and that the notion of a bonus (to bridge the gap between what the landlord was willing to accept and what the tenant could afford to pay) and which Redmond and he had discussed at their first meeting, was quite out of the question due to financial constraints at the treasury. O'Brien made⁶² great play out of the alleged timidity and deference of the landlord side, including Dunraven himself, towards the powers that-be and the cavalier never-say-never attitude of the Irish Party members towards treasury restrictions.

From over-reliance on O'Brien's not unbiased account of his role in the arrangements for the conference and its conduct, some recent commentators have given undue credit to O'Brien, to the detriment, in particular, of Dunraven and Redmond, and, to a lesser extent, of Harrington and Mayo. One commentator⁶³ speaks of the crucial role of O'Brien and supports it by listing five instances of how he placed his mark on the conference. While it is true that O'Brien was the first to advocate Dunraven's candidacy for the chair, something which has been pointed out may not have been entirely disinterested, the two most important of the five credits listed, that O'Brien was insistent that agreement on general principles should be the aim of the conference and that the main aim to concentrate on was land purchase, had already been advocated by Dunraven in his letter to Redmond of 1 December:

[The document] 'subjects for discussion' was designed to keep discussion to the one real issue, namely the settlement [involving the transfer of the whole interest of the landlord to the tenant] on general lines of the land question. I think it most important that we should strictly limit ourselves to that.⁶⁴

Another commentator treats the views of O'Brien on the proposed agenda for the conference as if they were his alone.⁶⁵

62 Ibid, pp 177-8.

63 Sally Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien and the Irish land war* (Dublin, 1990), pp 225-6.

64 Dunraven to Redmond, 1 December 1902 (NLI, Redmond papers, 15,187 (1)).

65 J.V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien and the course of Irish politics 1881-1918* (Berkeley, 1976), p. 146. When O'Brien outlined to Redmond the agenda to be followed at the conference (O'Brien to Redmond, 4 December 1902 (NLI, Redmond papers, 15,212/9) they were not necessarily his own as he was already aware what Dunraven had in mind (Redmond to O'Brien, 22 November 1902 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 10,496/6)). It is understandable, too, that Sophie O'Brien would credit her husband with the success of the conference. For

During the course of the sittings of the conference two stand-offs occurred; one threatened to end the discussions while the other, less serious, seemed likely to cause a delay in the production of the final report. Dunraven was involved in the first incident only as chairman and part of the landlord side but he was at the centre of the second one. In the first case, after the conference had agreed as a matter of principle that the dual system of land ownership needed to be abolished, the real crux was reached when the participants came to decide the basis on which sale and purchase should take place. It was agreed in the case of sale that the amount to be paid to the landlord, if invested at 3% or 3.25% would yield an annual income equal to that which he received in annual rental (less cost of collection) under the terms of the 2nd term rent reductions of 1896. This agreement was later included in the final report under articles V and VI. When it came to the amount the purchasing tenant ought to pay, the landlord side was less specific. As an encouragement to the tenant to buy, it was necessary that the annuity should be less than the yearly rent. Dunraven spoke of a substantial reduction for the tenant but was not prepared to put a figure on it. This was too vague for the tenant representatives and so a reduction of 20% was bandied about. The landlord side would not accept this as they argued that the value of land was not necessarily determined by rent (this indicated a slight movement in landlord thinking, as outlined by Dunraven when he rejected O'Brien's memorandum prior to the conference) and that, in any case, the less the tenant paid in annuities the less the selling landlord would receive and so 'the advantage to the tenants would be gained entirely at the landlords' expense.'⁶⁶ At this stage O'Brien said that the conference was on the verge of collapse but the chairman wisely decided to adjourn and allow both sides to take stock. On resumption a compromise was speedily reached – the suggested 20% was replaced by an average reduction of between 15% and 25%. This was incorporated later in article X11 of the report.

The conference sat from 10.30 am to 6pm on each of the first three days. When it broke for Christmas at the end of the third day, 23 December, most of the hard work had been done and the important decisions taken in principle. All that remained was for the chairman to compile his draft report and submit it to a further meeting or meetings for approval. Harrington was surprised therefore when Shawe-Taylor visited him that night with an amended proposal with reference to landlords' incomes based, not on 2nd term rents, but on

that purpose she quoted the words of T. W. Russell, 'but for the moderation shown by the man who had the hardest row to hoe [O'Brien] we could never have achieved the success' (NLI, Sophie O'Brien papers, 4215).

⁶⁶ Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, p. 14.

rents fixed since 1896 and defining the ‘equivalent’⁶⁷ as such a sum as would be agreed upon by landlord and tenant, or in the event of their disagreement, would be fixed by the land commission. Harrington was horrified; pointing out to Shawe-Taylor that this was an alteration not only of words but also of principles already agreed. Harrington pointed out that the conference had conceded that it was the duty of the chairman to draft the report as agreed upon and to give notice separately of any alteration he intended to propose at the next meeting. Shawe-Taylor then invited Harrington to meet the chairman on the matter but the latter refused as he considered that it was a question that any two members had no power to decide upon. The following morning, Shawe-Taylor again approached Harrington, this time with a proof copy of the draft containing what the latter described as a milder form of the amendment but still unacceptable to the lord mayor and therefore to the tenant side. Harrington reported all this to O’Brien, opening his letter by saying, ‘our friend, the chairman, is one of the most unmanageable men I have met in my time.’⁶⁸ In addition, since Dunraven had also completely altered O’Brien’s suggested winding up paragraph, Harrington concluded that:

we must therefore have the whole thing thrashed out again on Saturday [the day of the next scheduled meeting] as you will see when you get the draft. I have told Russell and I am also writing to Redmond although I hear he cannot come over [from London]. I am sure the other three delegates [Everard, Mayo and Poe] will stand to the report as it was adopted.⁶⁹

The Saturday meeting, as envisaged by Harrington, would be a most uncomfortable occasion for Dunraven. Not only would Harrington and O’Brien denounce him but also he could expect little support from those on the landlord side. But the Saturday meeting was not to be. On Christmas Day, O’Brien received a telegram⁷⁰ from Shawe-Taylor to the effect that Dunraven was ill and wished to postpone the next meeting to the following Monday [29 December], extending the length of uncertainty and frustration for the tenant side. We know that Dunraven was still in Dublin on the morning of Christmas Eve [Wednesday] but was not

⁶⁷ ‘Rents or their fair equivalent’ was the agreed form of words upon which tenants’ annuities were to be based. The term ‘equivalent’ had not been defined previously.

⁶⁸ Harrington to O’Brien, 24 December 1902 (UCC, O’Brien papers, Box AM, 11/205).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Shawe-Taylor to O’Brien, Christmas Day [Thursday] (UCC, O’Brien papers, Box AM, 11/206).

well as he went south to Adare. The onset of the illness, said to be an attack of gout, may well have been precipitated by the furious debates, session after session, reputed to have taken place between himself and O'Brien as they attempted to fashion some point of disagreement into a form acceptable to both. It was subsequently recorded that as the intensity of the discomfort of the earl increased, so did his temper, 'not that he showed it to his colleagues of the tenants' representatives, but his landlord brethren had to bear the brunt.'⁷¹ On Christmas Day O'Brien, having heard from Harrington, wrote to Russell to voice his condemnation of the new turn of events, 'the Christmas comfort was ruined by the letter from Harrington this morning,' and continuing, 'Dunraven has been *again*'⁷² mutilating our agreement in a vital point.'⁷³ O'Brien, like Harrington, was astounded and annoyed because there was the fullest agreement at the last meeting that the draft of the final report was not to be further altered or tampered with until considered by the full group at the following meeting. As it was known that Redmond would not be present the tenant side was now placed in somewhat of a quandary. Could they enter into fresh negotiations and accept changes to what had been already decided without the presence of their leader, Redmond? It is little wonder then that O'Brien was so severely critical of Dunraven:

That, in face of the agreement reached at the last meeting, Dunraven should, of his own authority proceed to upset the most vital article in the whole treaty, is to me astounding . . . Harrington tells me that he has also mutilated other portions of our agreement . . . I am afraid Castle influence must have been at work to induce him to repudiate our agreement . . . If Dunraven breaks off his right to upset an agreement fully and finally (as to substance) adopted by the conference his conduct will be so inexcusable that we will have lost nearly all we could gain by a unanimous publication.⁷⁴

This was incisive criticism of the chairman but more damaging was the threat that the tenant side would be forced to issue a minority report which would have the effect of negating any good likely to result from the conference and stultifying any government intervention.

71 NLI, Sophie O'Brien papers, 8507 (ii).

72 The italics are mine.

73 O'Brien to Russell, Christmas Day 1902 (UCC, O'Brien papers, Box AM, 11/208).

74 Ibid.

The quandary visited upon the tenant side and not of their making was as quickly defused as it had burst on the scene. On 26 December Harrington wrote to O'Brien saying that he had a letter from Dunraven and was satisfied that the latter did 'not want to play any trick and is as anxious to go as far as he can to disarm criticism on his own side'⁷⁵ in regard to the definition of landlords' income. The lord mayor stated that a simple amendment such as 'income as it appears to us is second term rents (including all rents fixed for the first time since 1896) or their equivalent'⁷⁶ would suffice to suit all parties. Harrington also said that Russell saw no difficulty in patching up the whole misunderstanding, and so this brief but unsavoury impasse ended.

Dunraven, in the course of a long letter to Harrington the following day, dealt more fully with the reason for his tinkering with what had been agreed. He did what he did in trying to avoid misapprehension arising from sheer ignorance:

There is a general idea that first term rents show a reduction of say 22% and that second term rents show a reduction of say 20% and I am sure that numbers of people will imagine that second term rents or their fair equivalent means 20% off rental in cases where any rents have been fixed or 42% off rents received in cases where no rents have been fixed by the land commission. I may exaggerate the matter but I am sure it is in the light in which it will be viewed by a great number of landlords and tenants and that rabid denunciation of our proposals on the part of the former will be the result.⁷⁷

Dunraven feared that the term 'or their fair equivalent' might be misconstrued by certain landlords as meaning a reduction of 20% on first term rents and 42% on rents which had not been fixed by the land commission. If tenant annuities were based on rent, as the conference envisaged, a rent reduction of say 42% on which the annuity was then to be calculated would cause a calamitous drop in the price of land on which the landlord was expected to sell. Dunraven failed to convince Harrington or the tenant side of the conference of the validity of

75 Harrington to O'Brien, 26 December 1902 (UCC, O'Brien papers, Box AM, 11/210). For additional information on this misunderstanding see Dunraven to John Redmond, 25 December 1902; Dunraven to Redmond, n. d.[but in reply to Redmond's of the 29th] (NLI, Redmond papers, 15,187 (i)).

76 Ibid.

77 Dunraven to Harrington, 27 December 1902 (NLI, Harrington papers, 8587).

his proposed amendment or the apprehensions of the wider landlord community and the words ‘including all rents fixed subsequently to the passing of the act of 1896’ were added to article IV of the final report and, importantly, prior to the words ‘or their fair equivalent.’ Dunraven also failed in another of his proposed amendments when he wished the term ‘and that sitting tenants not to be interfered with’ to replace ‘on an equitable basis’ in article XV which dealt with the reinstatement of evicted tenants. He argued⁷⁸ to Harrington that the word equitable as used above, could be interpreted as implying that sitting tenants, to the number of about fifty, could be removed without compensation or alternatively that they had no moral right whatever to have taken the farms in the first place.

In the light of the postponement of the Saturday [27 December] meeting, O’Brien did not travel to Dublin but Harrington kept him in touch with developments when he wrote to him that day. It happened that Poe, not having received word of the postponement, had travelled to Dublin whereupon he, Shawe-Taylor, Russell and Harrington held an impromptu get together and having gone through Dunraven’s proposed amendments, made certain alterations and included them in yet another draft report. It can be inferred that Dunraven’s proposed amendments were his alone because if they were the collective wisdom of the landlord side then Poe would not have had the power to mutilate them (to use Harrington’s own words) but would be obliged to stand by them. The position of Harrington is also curious. If he confessed to Shawe-Taylor that he was unable even to discuss the proposed amendments with Dunraven when they first came to his notice then why did he now take part in a cabal of four, not representative or influential conference members, not only to discuss but to alter Dunraven’s amendments? Two other points of interest arise from that letter. The gathering sent a telegram to Dunraven, still under doctor’s care and not allowed to travel for some eight or nine days, to say that if he was unable to come to Dublin the conference would meet on Wednesday, 31 December and if the draft was agreed a messenger would then be sent to Adare for his signature. That seemed to imply that the conference could better dot the eyes and cross the tees without the chairman. Harrington also became aware that Dunraven was not in touch with Dublin Castle when he brought forward his amendments. He told O’Brien:

The man whom he is consulting is Askwith, an English counsel, who was adviser to the English Land Government Board. He has no desire to change any principle we

⁷⁸ Ibid.

have agreed upon. He is only particular about the form of words. So I do not anticipate any trouble.⁷⁹

Dunraven was quite within his rights to seek outside advice. This was one of the stipulations he made when agreeing to take the chairmanship, something that was accepted at the time by both Redmond and O'Brien.

Although the conference seemed to have progressed amicably, yet, under the surface, there were feelings of hostility and discontent. Now Dunraven was the complainant. He reminded Harrington that the conference met on the broad basis of establishing a peasant proprietary by means of the transfer of landlords' interests to the tenant without any fear of threat or compulsion. Dunraven now accused Russell, who had sent him two proposals for perusal or as amendments, of attempting to introduce two entirely new principles, namely compulsion and nationalisation. In dealing with the term 'second term rents or their fair equivalent' Russell suggested that the government, with their skilled advisers, should be left the task of putting a monetary figure on the term 'fair equivalent'. Thus, Dunraven argued, landlords would be compelled to accept the sale price offered to them, which amounted to compulsion. On the other side under a five-year clause suggested by Russell, tenants, although they purchased the freehold of their farms, would be prohibited from raising loans on their newly acquired property or disposing of them by auction without the permission of Dublin Castle. Dunraven called this nationalisation. Russell, Dunraven further pointed out, was, in addition, going against a principle decided upon by the conference, namely that, except in certain cases, the settlements should be made between owner and occupier without any recourse to the state. Dunraven urged Harrington to talk the matter over with O'Brien and Russell and, issuing a veiled threat, suggested that:

Unless you [Harrington] also desire to shift the whole basis upon which the conference met, try and persuade Russell that he has not perhaps foreseen the full scope and tendency of his proposals.⁸⁰

79 Harrington to O'Brien, 27 December 1902 (UCC, O'Brien papers, Box AM, 11/211).

80 Dunraven to Harrington, 27 December 1902 (NLI, Harrington papers, 8587).

Despite such setbacks and apparent antagonism the bond of trust between opposing players had grown so strong from working at such close quarters, that such doubts could be, and were, cleared up before they festered. When Harrington wrote to Dunraven on 26 December expressing fears on the viability of using either first or second terms rents as the yardstick for the calculation of the number of years purchase necessary to induce the landlord to sell, Dunraven, ever anxious to avoid misconceptions, replied the following day, ‘what I want is to avoid misapprehension from sheer ignorance.’⁸¹ He went to great lengths to explain his views on topics such as fair rents or their equivalent; the definition of evicted tenants, and the five-year limit of Russell. Dunraven had served as a war correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* back in the late sixties and so had a professional interest in seeing that, in the finished document, i.e. the final report, words should mean exactly what they were intended to. Regarding how to arrive at a fair equivalent, he told Harrington that they should:

make the meaning sufficiently clear to avoid the misconstruction that I [Dunraven] dread, and commit us to no exact definition of the exact process by which a fair equivalent is to be arrived at.⁸²

Even as Dunraven was remonstrating with Harrington over Russell’s amendments the easy friendship that had risen between the two was discernible. Dunraven was able to tell Harrington ‘perfectly candidly and at the same time, perfectly privately,’⁸³ that Russell, one of the tenants’ representatives, seemed hell bent on introducing new and dangerous matters. At the same time, Dunraven was in correspondence⁸⁴ with O’Brien on the complex question of what constituted second term rents or their equivalent. Replying two days later, O’Brien hoped that this would present no difficulty when they met again with ‘as many apparently insuperable difficulties having been already surmounted.’⁸⁵

Dunraven was an absentee when the fourth session was held on Wednesday 31 December. Although considerable progress on the final draft had been made at the third session on 23 December and at the unofficial gathering four days later, it was not ready for

81 Ibid. Dunraven wrote two long letters to Harrington on 27 December 1902.

82 Ibid.

83 Dunraven to Harrington, 27 December 1902 (NLI, Harrington papers, 8587).

84 Dunraven to O’Brien, 25 December 1902 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/2).

85 O’Brien to Dunraven, 27 December 1902 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/2).

presentation to the public that day. Dunraven had anticipated many problems on day four and had written a very long dispatch to Harrington urging that the conference might depute himself, the wordsmith and Harrington, the lawyer, to settle these purely verbal questions⁸⁶ before they surfaced at the fourth session. He even suggested an itinerary for Harrington. If the lord mayor left Dublin by the 9.15 morning train, he could be at Adare Manor by 2.30. The questions could be considered and resolved that afternoon and after staying the night, he could be back in Dublin by one o'clock the following day. The question of when (and where) Dunraven signed the final report has not been definitively settled. Sophie O'Brien, no doubt on the telling of her husband, states:

At last he [Dunraven] had to stay in bed at Adare. On the last day of the conference his colleagues tried to get his consent to the report by telephone, but they could not come to any understanding and it was decided to send representatives of the conference to Adare and the report was accepted by Dunraven.⁸⁷

The final session of the conference was held on Saturday, 3 January 1903, when the document was signed⁸⁸ by those present and cleared for publication. It is not known whether Harrington did in fact travel to Adare (see n. 86) but based on the evidence in n. 87 it is certain that Mayo did make the journey. In its report on the final day of the conference the *Freeman's Journal* stated that all the members were present except Dunraven and Redmond; that telephonic communication with Dunraven at Adare Manor was kept up during the meeting; that those present resolved that the conference not be dissolved, and that O'Brien and Everard moved the following motion of thanks to Dunraven:

86 Dunraven to Harrington, n.d., but most likely after 27 December 1902. Only pages 8 and 9 are extant (NLI, Harrington papers, 8587).

87 NLI, Sophie O'Brien papers, 8507 (ii). A somewhat contradictory account of the ending of the conference is given in the O'Brien papers in UCC. At the fourth or penultimate session, Dunraven, still ill in Adare, made it known that he had strong objections to seven different points being insisted upon by the tenant side [these may have emanated from the impromptu meeting of four on 27 December]. Mayo [a marriage relation of Dunraven] undertook to travel to Adare after the meeting of 31 December [in a special train laid on by the railway company, without expense, so important were the deliberations, according to William O'Brien] and did so. 'Mayo has just come back from Adare and has seen Dunraven. Dunraven considers certain amendments, mostly drafting, are necessary before appending his signature' (Shawe-Taylor to O'Brien, 1 January 1903 (UCC, O'Brien papers, Box AN, 1/5)). At the final meeting on 3 January, Dunraven was still not satisfied but, as the rest of the conference members were not prepared to revisit the negotiations, the landlord representatives spent some four or five hours on the phone supporting the tenants' views. Finally, around six o'clock Dunraven yielded on six of the seven points and authorised his signature to be affixed on the report (UCC, O'Brien papers, Box BV, p. 33).

88 *IT*, 5 January 1903.

That we cordially thank Dunraven for the ability and courtesy with which he presided over our deliberations and continued to give us the advantage of his counsel during his illness; and we beg to offer him our congratulations upon the result of the labours of the conference.⁸⁹

That the conference ever got off the ground in the first place was the work of many hands. Shawe-Taylor's letter, probably inspired by officialdom,⁹⁰ was the catalyst. Yet it was due to the tenacity and persistence of the earl of Mayo that the powerful ILC was confronted and eventually bypassed. Mayo then gave way to the more public persona of Dunraven who, with the aid of Redmond and O'Brien, successfully brought the participants to the conference table. During the conference, O'Brien and Harrington emerged as the dominant figures on the nationalist side – a worthy counterbalance to the chairman in technical and legal matters. The successful completion of the work of the conference was a tribute to the chairman, Dunraven, who was also the chief advocate on the landlord side that was, with the exception of Mayo, not particularly strong. Facing

him was a formidable team of seasoned political campaigners and tacticians, well versed in matters relating to the law and land tenure. To successfully juggle the two hats, simultaneously, could not have been easy. It required the use of astute tactics. The rapport built up between himself and the tenant side enabled him to defuse potentially explosive situations. A quiet word in the ear of somebody from the opposite side, rather than utterances at the conference, which might not be taken too kindly, always headed off any likely flashpoint. The interchange between himself and Harrington, on the Russell compulsion suggestion, was a case in point. Yet one should not go away with the idea that through the awesomeness of his social position and political standing, he was allowed to dominate the proceedings even though he was mandated to draw up a first draft of a likely final report.

89 *FJ*, 5 January 1903.

90 Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, in a diary note of 31 March [1903], gives a brief historical account of how Wyndham engineered the holding of the Land Conference

in the Autumn and Winter of 1902. 'The first thing had been to secure the *Times* without which nothing could have been effected . . . Then he used his

personal influence on the landlords and went to stay with Dunraven, had encouraged Mayo, and had expostulated privately with the leaders of the

Landlords' Convention (W. S. Blunt, *My diaries, being a personal narrative of events, 1888-1914* (London, single volume edition, 1932)), p. 459.

Blunt does not explain the involvement of Shawe-Taylor.

The rest of the conference members opposed his views when they considered it necessary or desirable. One matter can be looked at. It was the wish of both sides that a resolution be suggested for the problem of evicted tenants. Dunraven on behalf of the landlord party was, however, adamant that the so-called sitting tenants should not be interfered with in any settlement. These were the men, about fifty in number, known as grabbers or emergency men in nationalist parlance, who shored up the landlord cause during the land war by occupying and working farms from which tenants had been evicted. The landlords were now prepared to stand by them. In his letter to Harrington, dated 27 December 1902, Dunraven begged to be told what was the nature of the nationalist opposition to the phrase, 'sitting tenants not to be interfered with', as only then could an alternative wording be suggested. Whether Harrington replied or not to that point we do not know.

EPILOGUE

No sooner was the report published than consternation broke out in certain quarters. Davitt, lately returned from the United States, led the attack on the document, directing his most vituperative arrows towards the chairman. Dunraven anticipated such antipathy, if not to himself, at least to the report. Writing to O'Brien following the publication of the report, he regretted his non-attendance at the final session as he 'would have liked to consult the conference as to the line to be taken towards adverse or foolish criticism.'⁹¹ His advice to O'Brien then was to lie low, 'I am strongly inclined to masterly inactivity.'⁹² This advice Dunraven closely followed himself. His only public utterance on the outcome of the land conference was the speech he made to his election committee, on 9 January 1903, on the occasion of the presentation to him of an address on the successful ending of the conference. There he defended the decision to man the conference with unelected representatives, as elections would require elaborate machinery with consequent delays. More importantly, he took the opportunity to point out that the object of the conference was not to formulate exact terms, binding upon all parties, but 'to arrive at conclusions which, by being just and equitable conclusions, would generally recommend themselves'.⁹³ While, in his opinion, the report was generally well received, he was aware that criticisms had been voiced, often neither wise nor accurate, but he insisted that he himself was not willing to either comment on such strictures or offer explanations for his actions. Finally, he told his supporters in Adare that the report gave a window of opportunity to the government:

We have given his majesty's government a good line. We have no right whatever to assume otherwise than that they are honestly desirous of making a satisfactory settlement; and, pending the introduction of a bill, my attitude is one of confident, if silent, expectation that it will be a good bill.⁹⁴

91 Dunraven to O'Brien, 10 January 1903 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/2).

92 Ibid.

93 LC, 13 January 1903.

94 Ibid.

LEVELLING THE EDUCATIONAL PLAYING PITCH

The establishment of the Royal University in 1879 did not solve¹ the demands of the majority population in Ireland in the field of university education. Despite pleadings, threats, half-promises and two royal commissions the situation remained deadlocked until the early twentieth century. A major impetus to a search for a just solution to a very complex issue came in September 1902 with the appointment of Sir Antony MacDonnell as under-secretary to George Wyndham, MP, chief secretary for Ireland. MacDonnell was not willing to take the appointment offered to him unless the four great questions facing British rule in Ireland were taken in hand. These were the problems associated with land tenure and university education together with the material improvement of the population and the replacement of the chaotic rule from Dublin Castle with an acceptable form of administrative structures. On these being broadly accepted by Wyndham a new era of hope seemed set to dawn in Ireland.

During the summer of 1903 Captain Shawe-Taylor, the *fons et origo* of the land conference of the previous year was pondering the possibility of calling together a conference to consider the Irish university dilemma. Despite a note of caution expressed by William O'Brien, whom he had informed,² Shawe-Taylor decided to press ahead and fire the first shots³ in a new campaign to settle the university question. The *Irish Times*, the organ of moderate Protestant and unionist opinion in Ireland, was not particularly enthusiastic, calling it a premature proposal and more likely to 'endanger the improvement in relations between the various classes of Irishmen which recent events have been tending to promote.'⁴ Since his letter engendered no public enthusiasm and because he was doing the bidding of the Dublin administration,⁵ Shawe-Taylor took his campaign one step further. On 25 September 1903 he issued a further call to the public, listing, as on the occasion of the land conference, possible participants. These, fourteen in number, included Dunraven, the earl of Mayo, Bishop O'Dwyer of Limerick and John Dillon MP.⁶ Bearing in mind that Shawe-Taylor had

1 For a brief background view see Norman Atkinson, *Irish Education* (Dublin, 1969), pp 121-41; John A Murphy, *The College: A History of Queen's College, UCC, 1845-1995* (Cork, 1995), pp 161-2.

2 Shawe-Taylor to O'Brien, 31 Aug. 1903 (UCC, William O'Brien papers, Box AN, 3/44).

3 Shawe-Taylor to *IT*, 11 September 1903.

4 *IT*, 11 September 1903.

5 O'Brien, *An olive Branch in Ireland*, p. 258, footnote. This was corroborated by Murray Hornibrook (secretary to Wyndham, the Irish secretary), who wrote 'when the education question was under consideration Shawe-Taylor was allowed to intervene. . . and Shawe-Taylor made a mess of the business' (Note by Hornibrook, July 1924, Mackail and Wyndham, *Life and letters of George Wyndham*, ii, appendix A, p. 792).

6 *LC*, 26 September 1903.

acted as secretary to the land conference and had seen there the benefit of a small number of participants it is somewhat puzzling that his new list included so many. He was perhaps acutely aware of the intrinsic difference between a conference on land, which was non-sectarian, and one on higher education where the protestant interests would have to give ground in order to create a level playing pitch for their catholic fellow-citizens. Again the suggestion was coolly received. Even the moderate nationalist *Irish Daily Independent*,⁷ in reply to what it called the well-intentioned patriotic efforts of Shawe-Taylor, could merely highlight the lamentable comparison between the hopefulness of the youth of Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester, where new universities had been established, and the hopelessness of the catholic youth of Ireland. The newspaper felt that, without a crusader, newspaper or political party to take up the challenge, the suggestion of Shawe-Taylor seemed doomed to failure. It will be recalled that the proposed Land Conference might well have gone the same way had not Shawe-Taylor personally contacted Dunraven. With Shawe-Taylor as the torch bearer in respect of university reform, the chief secretary was determined to stick with his programme of amelioration in Ireland, as is evident from two letters he wrote to Dunraven on Irish affairs, the first written in November 1903 following the resignation of O'Brien from parliament and from the directory of the UIL:

I have stuck to my post and I trust you will persist in your efforts. An Ireland that had said good-bye to faction could win almost anything. We live in an age of transformation. Irish education, Irish industry, Irish nationality, her pride of place, all hang in the balance and must be lost if she will not change with the changing year.

Perhaps on this occasion Wyndham was also taking it upon himself to make the initial approach to Dunraven to try and encourage him to back the Shawe-Taylor initiative as W. S. Blunt alleged he did prior to the commencement of the Land Conference. Earlier Wyndham had written:

I have much to say to you. I stay here, in Ireland, whatever happens. . . I have sketched out all my work before me and shall be very glad to submit all my views to

⁷ *IDI*, 29 September 1903.

you. We can then select and work up to something definite for next session.⁸

It was inevitable, once a conference to settle the university question was bandied about, that public opinion would seize on the story and that rumours would soon emanate from all sorts of quarters. These flagged some of the problems facing any settlement – seeking an arrangement with Trinity College to establish an RC college within the University of Dublin⁹ and persuading the government to press ahead despite non-conformist opposition in Great Britain.¹⁰

Ignoring the spectre of sectarian tension that was beginning to take centre stage in Ireland, Shawe-Taylor moved ahead with his conference project. He informed the public,¹¹ in early November, that all arrangements were made for his conference to meet in the Mansion House, Dublin, sometime between then and 15 December. On 14 December¹² he announced a peculiarly lopsided list of members of the Irish University conference, now reduced to twelve. While it was divided equally on religious lines, it listed neither a representative of TCD, nor any protestant bishop and yet contained the names of three catholic prelates. It included a newcomer, Dr Douglas Hyde, president of the Gaelic League with Dunraven as the most prominent layman. Shawe-Taylor, who had appointed himself as secretary, listed the terms of reference - to secure an equitable settlement of the Irish university question and to end sectarian animosity in Ireland. The whole exercise seemed increasingly futile. As it was extremely unlikely that the second aim could be achieved, due to soundings already taken on the university question, then the first must also fail by default. Just before Christmas, Shawe-Taylor, with his [William] O'Brienesque enthusiasm for lost causes, announced that the conference was on standby until January 1904 to sit and offer a practical solution to the university question. It is difficult to see how Shawe-Taylor's proposed conference could be taken seriously in view of a letter from Dunraven on 15

8 Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, pp 24-5. Both letters are undated. See exchange of letters, Dunraven to O'Brien, 9 November 1903, O'Brien to Dunraven, 12 November 1903 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/2) for events surrounding the resignation of O'Brien. While Wyndham became Irish secretary in 1900, the appointment of MacDonnell as under-secretary, in September 1902, encouraged him to proceed with his programme of reform.

9 *LL*, 28 October 1903.

10 *LL*, 30 October 1903.

11 *LL*, 2 November 1903.

12 *LL*, 14 December 1903. A few days later Shawe-Taylor informed the public that of the twelve, only one had definitely refused to attend but that he could be replaced (*IDI*, 19 December 1903).

December:

I see my name has been published as a member of the Irish university conference. I have always been and am most desirous to see a satisfactory settlement of this difficult question and I would naturally, therefore, be glad to do anything in my power to assist at the arriving at so desirable an end. But whether such a solution would be helped forward by the proposed conference is a matter about which I am not in a position to form an opinion and I must ask leave to state that the publication of my name was without my knowledge or consent.¹³

As happens on such occasions extraneous events overtake dilatoriness or, in the case of Shawe-Taylor, rank inefficiency. The real promoters of the university project decided that the conference kite as aired by Shawe-Taylor was a dead letter and that a more direct approach was needed if public opinion was to be attuned and moulded.

A long letter, signed by Dunraven, appeared in the *Irish Times*,¹⁴ early in January 1904, in which he propounded a solution to the university question. The kernel of his scheme was the establishment of two additional colleges within the University of Dublin, the Queen's College in Belfast, to cater, as heretofore, for presbyterians, and the King's College, in Dublin, to cater for catholics. Both new institutions would be on an equal footing in all ways with the existing protestant dominated Trinity College. The senate of the university would oversee academical standards; each college would have its own governing body, while a visiting committee would ensure that no interference took place with the religious or moral beliefs of students of any of the three colleges. A point worth noting is that, while the demand of the majority in Ireland was for a catholic university, the idea of a catholic college within an existing university was calculated to ameliorate the opposition of the religious minority and, at the same time, satisfy the aspirations of the majority. Realistically, then, Dunraven's proposals offered the best chance of acceptance not only in Ireland but also, as importantly, among the vocal non-conformist element in Britain. He was conscious of the grave responsibility his scheme would lay on the protestants of Ireland, whose views would, to a large extent, colour public opinion across the water but he pleaded with his fellow

¹³ Dunraven to *IDI*, 17 December 1903.

¹⁴ *IT*, 4 January 1904.

religionists for a generous consideration of catholic disabilities and their desire for a fair settlement of the university crux. The *Irish Times* was the first to editorialise on the contents of Dunraven's scheme. It began by eulogising the earl as 'one who has done so much for his country in the past and has entered this new field of activity with his customary courage and address'¹⁵ thereby putting a certain imprimatur on its contents. Stating that the scheme had much to recommend it, the writer was of the opinion that a solution of the university question on the lines laid down by Dunraven would require extraordinary hardihood on the part of Trinity College, the protestant population and, in particular, the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

Returning to the university topic four days later, the *Irish Times*¹⁶ weighed up the reaction to that point. It noted that both the ultra nationalist *Freeman's Journal* ('the plan of a settlement now advocated by Dunraven is undoubtedly best after a separate university'), and the more moderate *Irish Daily Independent* ('we heartily welcome a pronouncement which makes for peace and goodwill amongst brother Irishmen'), were broadly in favour. John Redmond, chairman of the Irish Party, was not so sanguine and regarded the scheme as a mere outline or skeleton which could have been accepted by the people and hierarchy in Ireland within the past twenty years and he then proceeded to throw the cat among the pigeons by asking, 'if it is the scheme of the government, why do they shelter behind the name of Lord Dunraven?'¹⁷ Taking up Redmond's query the *Irish Times*,¹⁸ by now wholeheartedly in favour of the scheme, thought that the government, assuming that Dunraven was its mouthpiece, was quite right in testing public opinion before committing itself because, in the past, the Irish university question had always generated more heat than light.

Dunraven's scheme, if it did nothing else, once again brought the alleged inequality regarding higher education to the forefront of public discussion. For instance, at a meeting of Limerick County Council, the chairman, Robert Coll, proposed a motion urging the government to find a remedy, and pressing the Irish Party to push for a solution in the upcoming session. Dunraven, who was present, in seconding the motion deplored the lack of opportunity afforded to the young men of Ireland and hoped that the contents of his letter

15 *IT*, 4 January 1904.

16 *IT*, 8 January 1904.

17 Speaking in Waterford, 5 January 1904, reported in the *Irish Times* of the following day.

18 *IT*, 8 January 1904.

would soon be fully ventilated in parliament.¹⁹ Public meetings, either inspired by or due to the fresh impetus given to the matter by the publication of the letter, were held in Galway²⁰ and Limerick.²¹ Bishop E. T. O'Dwyer, the earl's old sparring partner of the inaugural county council election of 1899, said at the Limerick meeting that the key to success or failure lay with the authorities of Trinity College and until their intentions were known all discussions on the matter were hypothetical. Lauding the contribution to the debate by one [Dunraven] whom he called his distinguished fellow-countyman,²² O'Dwyer said that, if asked, his individual view was that he would be prepared to accept a solution on the lines of such a federal university, or on any lines, if a fair and reasonable settlement was offered.²³ The reasoned words of O'Dwyer, long an influential voice in promoting educational equality for the majority, must have given heart to the many interested spectators observing the play on the field of Irish university education. The pressure on the government was further increased when the lord mayor of Dublin, T. M. Harrington, MP, announced²⁴ that, in response to a requisition presented to him on behalf of a number of influential citizens and signed by Archbishop Walsh, John Redmond and twenty three MPs, he had decided to summon a meeting in the Mansion House on 29 January on the university question. Three days later, a memorial from Roman Catholic laymen, and signed by most of the influential noblemen, professional persons and business people in Ireland asked for a settlement on the lines indicated by Dunraven.²⁵ Two points may be noted here. Firstly, the current agitation, initiated by a layman, Dunraven, admittedly a non-catholic, was taken up and carried forward by the catholic laity of Ireland, who now took over from the Roman Catholic hierarchy as the front runners in this latest attempt to settle an old problem. This alone should have given food for thought to the protestant population of Ireland and quelled any fear of clerical or episcopal domination of any new college of higher education. Secondly, the depth of feeling among catholic laymen, largely unspoken but very visible, made it clear to the government

19 CCM, 9 January 1904.

20 *IDI*, 7 January 1904.

21 *LC*, 14 January 1904; *IT*, 14 January 1904.

22 Bishop O'Dwyer, in fact, was born in Holy Cross, Co. Tipperary (John Begley, *The Diocese of Limerick from 1691 to the present day*, p. 564).

23 O'Dwyer's personal attitude to the Dunraven scheme was that it was thoroughly bad, John Rushe, 'Bishop O'Dwyer of Limerick and the education issues of his time' (unpublished M.A. thesis, UCG, 1980), pp 7. 145-6. For the sake of episcopal unity and not to jeopardise a possible settlement, he was prevailed upon not to voice his own opinions.

24 *IT*, 18 January 1904.

25 Bishop O'Dwyer was not impressed by the credentials of the laymen, labelling them as 'of the class that hang about Dublin Castle'. O'Dwyer to the *FJ*, 24 February 1904.

that a solution to this problem was vital in the short term in order to contain the anger of a rising generation.

While many sections of Irish opinion had entered the fray, one important body had remained largely silent. The *Irish Times* adverted to the silence of the RC hierarchy:

Though the Roman Catholic laity are the persons principally concerned in the solution of the question, it is the RC hierarchy whose opinions must be definitely ascertained before Dunraven's or any other scheme can be regarded as a matter of practical politics.²⁶

Approval of the Dunraven scheme by the Irish hierarchy would make it mandatory for the government to refer to the measure in the king's speech. The attitude of the RC hierarchy is difficult to fathom. Polemicists, instead of facing the reality of the situation and striving, in the first instance, to accept an adequate solution, and then reform or modify it, were content, either in letters or public declarations of that time, to dwell on past broken promises.²⁷ An exception was O'Dwyer of Limerick, but he was only giving his 'public' opinion. O'Dwyer put the case for acceptance of any reasonable solution quite succinctly at the Limerick meeting:

A man that has long resided in the open air is not likely to object to a house that is offered to him on the grounds of its architecture.²⁸

On 21 January, the *Irish Daily Independent* reported that the bishops had submitted a resolution to the lord lieutenant for referral to the government. The principal points of the document were acceptance of Dunraven's proposals or:

if for any reason they [the cabinet] refuse to adopt Dunraven's proposals, the catholics of this country will be quite willing to accept a scheme of settlement on the lines adumbrated by the recent Royal Commission on the subject of the present state of

²⁶ *IT*, 8 January 1904.

²⁷ See open letter from Archbishop Walsh of Dublin to John Redmond, MP, *IT*, 14 Jan. 1904.

²⁸ *LC*, 14 January 1904.

university education in Ireland.²⁹

Up to now many disparate sections of national life had come out in favour of the Dunraven scheme – the *Irish Times* representing moderate protestant opinion; the *Irish Daily Independent* representing moderate catholic thinking, as well as the RC hierarchy. Ominously, TCD had not yet commented publicly. Just as it seemed that the tide of public opinion in Ireland, wafted on by Dunraven's letter, would finally bring the craft of university equality safely to shore, the first shots across the bow came from an expected but hitherto silent source. Speaking at a unionist rally in Belfast, the marquis of Londonderry, a member of the cabinet, made two important and relevant pronouncements.³⁰ Firstly, he defied anyone to point out to him where *any responsible minister of the crown*³¹ had intimated any intention on the part of the government to introduce a measure for the foundation or creation of a catholic college or university. Secondly, he wished to declare, once and for all that, during the lifetime of the present government, there would be no question whatever of the foundation of any such college or institution. The *London Times*,³² the unofficial mouthpiece of Toryism, had, earlier in that week, taken the Irish Executive to task for encouraging false hopes in the field of university education and warned that only a degree of agreement as was witnessed after the Land Conference could justify the government giving consent to a measure for settlement. Londonderry certainly shattered that illusion of agreement that had stemmed, up to that point, from the silence of both TCD and extreme unionist opinion. John Redmond, in a letter of non-attendance to the Mansion House meeting of 29 January, wrote that the best information in London was that the government intended to postpone any attempt to settle the question but he assured the meeting that the Irish Party would be satisfied with nothing short of a bill during the coming session.³³ Notwithstanding the uncertainty, the meeting agreed to a resolution, moved by Archbishop Walsh, that the university question be settled as a matter of urgency in the best interests of Ireland.³⁴ In a belated last minute attempt to influence the government and secure a favourable mention in the king's speech at

29 *IDI*, 21 January 1904.

30 *IT*, 23 January 1904.

31 The italics are mine. Wyndham was probably the targeted minister.

32 *Times*, 19 January 1904.

33 *IT*, 30 January 1904.

34 *Ibid.*

the opening of the new parliamentary session, a further list [an earlier³⁵ one appeared on 22 January recommending a settlement on the lines of Dunraven's letter] of influential RC laymen, peers, barristers, and business people appeared in the press on 3 February urging a university bill.³⁶ Catholic laymen were certainly playing their part.

Disappointingly, as it was still widely anticipated³⁷ in Ireland, no reference to the Irish university question was made in the king's speech. Later, speaking to the speech, John Redmond³⁸ made some telling points which added to the sense of intrigue now beginning to surround the whole matter but which had the effect of diverting attention away from the point at issue – the disability under which the Catholics of Ireland laboured in the field of higher education. He asserted that the scheme as outlined by Dunraven was represented to the Irish party as being the government scheme; that it would receive the support of Ulster Presbyterians, and that the prime minister and the entire Irish administration as well as a large section of the cabinet broadly supported the measure. Later, in reply, Wyndham, the chief secretary, said³⁹ that he considered it correct and proper for the government not to bring in any proposal as the issue was primarily an educational one and hinted that, while he was personally in favour of greater opportunities for equality in higher education in Ireland, no progress could be made unless there was general agreement on a scheme among the disparate opinions in Ireland. Wyndham further categorically denied that he had ever given any undertaking, in public or in private, on behalf of the government, in connection with this matter – words chosen very carefully. For the second time an oblique reference was made publicly, by government ministers, to the opportunity lost by the failure of Shawe-Taylor's conference notion. It appeared to many listeners that the door to any progress was not closed. Austin Taylor, MP for East Toxteth, Liverpool, verbalised what many inferred from Wyndham's rambling and, at times, incoherent reply:

If action was taken by a private member that action would receive the benevolent neutrality and possibly the benevolent interest of the government.⁴⁰

35 *LL*, 22 January 1904.

36 *IT*, 3 February 1904.

37 *LL*, 3 February 1904.

38 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 129, col. 209, 3 February 1904.

39 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 129, cols. 233-5, 3 February 1904.

40 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 129, col. 254, 3 February 1904.

Further observations by MPs showed that any semblance of agreement, as desired by Wyndham, was far from a reality. Thomas H. Sloan, Belfast South, absolutely repudiated any assertion that Presbyterians looked favourably on the notion of a catholic university;⁴¹ while Joseph Devlin, Kilkenny North, suggested that Dunraven, as the leading unionist landlord and spokesman for the Irish Unionist Party, was not only expressing a personal point of view but one which proved acceptable to everyone who was just and tolerant in Ireland.⁴² No opportunity was lost on the nationalist side to attempt to prise information out of Wyndham. On 22 February, Charles Devlin, MP for Galway, asked the Irish secretary in a parliamentary question whether, in view of the promise made by the chancellor of the exchequer to double the grant to university colleges in England in receipt of parliamentary grants, he was prepared to submit a proposal to establish in Ireland a university acceptable to the majority of that country and to which grants by parliament could be given. Wyndham, who was clearly under the constriction of a vow of silence, gave a peculiarly guarded reply, yet one on which more than one construction could be put, 'I cannot at the present moment usefully supplement my recent statement on the subject of Irish university education.'⁴³

While the university question subsided on the parliamentary front the mystery and intrigue surrounding the authorship of the Dunraven Scheme never died down. On 28 February, the *Rev T. T.*, writing to the *Irish Times*, referred to the plan as the Mahaffy-Wynne-Dunraven scheme.⁴⁴ It is not possible, at this point in time, to make any positive connection between Dunraven and John Pentland Mahaffy, then senior lecturer and later provost of Trinity College. Mahaffy kept a notebook in which he jotted down happenings at TCD board meetings from 1900 to 1907, but no mention is recorded of the Dunraven Scheme before or after the letter first appeared in the public press.⁴⁵ A fortnight after the king's speech, further efforts were made in the house of commons to probe any possible links between the Irish administration (or anybody on their behalf) and Dunraven in the compilation of the letter of 4 January. In mid-February, Sloan asked Wyndham, in a

41 *Hansard*, vol. 129, col. 267, 3 February 1904.

42 *Hansard*, vol. 129, cols. 268-9, 270-03, 3 February 1904.

43 *Hansard*, vol. 130, cols. 570-01, 22 Feb. 1904.

44 *IT*, 28 February 1904. The identity of Wynne is unknown. He may have been the Cork born Henry Arthur Wynne, crown solicitor for Dublin 1905 to 1916; chief crown solicitor from 1916 to 1922; knighted in 1919, and who died in England in 1943 (*IT*, 23 August 1943; *Times*, 24, 26 August 1943). It is not possible to make any connection between Wynne and the two others.

45 TCD, Mahaffy papers, 1988, Q7. 27.

parliamentary question,⁴⁶ to relate under what circumstances the commissioner of the Dublin Metropolitan Police was permitted to give evidence in support of a RC university before a recent university commission. Wyndham, in reply, said that the commissioner, Sir John Ross of Bladensburg, was a member of the senate of the Royal University and gave evidence in that capacity. Sloan again questioned⁴⁷ Wyndham a few days later in an effort to establish any connection between Dunraven and Ross. He asked whether Ross took part in the negotiations between Dublin Castle and Dunraven on Irish university education. The Irish Secretary, in typical parliamentary parlance, gave no information, merely stating that the answer was in the negative. It could be construed from the reply that negotiations had taken place but that Ross, a leading catholic laymen, was not involved.

The Dunraven Scheme was next aired in the house of commons in August 1904 when discussion was permitted as departmental estimates were being considered. J.J. Clancy, member for Dublin County North, suggested that when the *Irish Times* approved of the Dunraven Scheme it did so on the tacit approval of the Irish administration and, in addition, he entered on the record of the house the contents of a telegram he had received from Archbishop Walsh of Dublin:

You may state on my authority that the bishops would have accepted either the settlement known as the Dunraven Scheme or that recommended by the Royal Commission.⁴⁸

That telegram indicates that, prior to January 1904, the Catholic bishops had been consulted, directly or indirectly, and had agreed to some form of settlement. John Redmond later took up the debate indicating that Wyndham still had serious issues to address. He accused Wyndham of neglecting to tell the house of negotiations on the university question which had allegedly taken place in Dublin during the previous Autumn when it was put about that any settlement agreed upon (an oblique reference to the attempt of Shawe-Taylor to convene a conference) would have the approval of the government. Redmond then went to make a most astonishing revelation:

46 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 130, col. 256, 18 February 1904.

47 *Hansard*, vol. 131, col. 1214, 24 February 1904.

48 *Hansard*, vol. 139, col. 790, 3 August 1904.

That it was a mere matter of chance that Dunraven's name was put to that letter at all and that it was doubtful that Wyndham's name would not be appended.⁴⁹

In reply Wyndham emphatically denied⁵⁰ the last suggestion and said that while he did meet with a number of presbyterians, and persons from TCD, and two RC bishops on the university controversy, he made no agreements or gave no pledges to anyone. Wyndham, though seeming to be helpful and open by divulging some little information, remained tight lipped as to what really happened prior to the publication of Dunraven's letter.

Some time passed before the matter again reached the floor of the house. Despite numerous vehement denials by Wyndham he never succeeded in putting the whole business to rest. Sloan, who had made it his *raison d'être* to unravel the mystery, when speaking to the king's speech in February 1905 explained how Sir Antony MacDonnell had gone to Belfast and discussed the question of a catholic university with a number of presbyterians under the guise of what he [MacDonnell] called 'the educational spirit of the prime minister's views.'⁵¹ Later in the same speech, Sloan indirectly implicated the commissioner of the Dublin police in the negotiations that had taken place in Dublin in late 1903. Addressing himself also to the king's speech, T. W. Russell purported to blow the lid off the whole intrigue by giving a detailed expose of what really happened. Russell said that on the failure of the recommendation of the Royal Commission of 1902 the government sent MacDonnell to Belfast to consult people who, Russell said, represented nobody but themselves. Then the letter, which Russell said was foolishly called the Dunraven Scheme, was presented to the country. He then went on to indite Dunraven:

Dunraven seemed to be the handy man of the government. It was no more Dunraven's Scheme than his [Russell's] own. The author of the scheme was sitting on the Treasury Bench.⁵²

This was the clearest assertion yet of Wyndham's alleged authorship. Russell then continued

49 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 139, col. 807, 3 August 1904.

50 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 139, cols. 802-04, 804-05, 807, 3 August 1904.

51 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 141, col. 683, 20 February 1905.

52 *Hansard*, vol. 141, cols. 691-2, 20 February 1905.

with his revelations. On being assured that the government was in earnest, the RC bishops agreed to accept either what was represented as the Dunraven Scheme or the recommendations of the late Royal Commission. The last piece of the jigsaw, as set out by Russell, would seem to raise an issue of credibility on his hypothesis. It was only then, *a la* Russell, that it struck the government to consult TCD and, on so doing, the college authorities rejected any overture and so the matter came to an end. Whether TCD was ever consulted or not on the Dunraven Scheme, it is clear that no favourable response was likely to emerge from that source. Among the Mahaffy papers is a document, undated and marked confidential. It was signed by both Mahaffy and the provost, Anthony Traill, and stated in the preamble that the time had come for TCD to express a definite opinion upon the solution of the university question and suggested that the same treatment as at TCD be freely granted to all others in a manner acceptable to them.⁵³ Since Traill did not become provost until 26 March 1904 that document post-dated the Dunraven Scheme or any negotiations carried on beforehand in connection with it and indicated that no serious consideration had previously been given to what part TCD might play in any solution of the Irish university problem.

One month after Russell's salvo the catholic university controversy was once again mentioned⁵⁴ in parliament under the Civil Service and Revenue Departments' estimates. On this occasion the Dunraven Scheme was not referred to. The so-called Dunraven Scheme had become a dead letter and consigned to the scrap heap of unfulfilled Irish dreams.

In endeavouring to make sense of the myriad of accusations, denials and rumours in this case one comes up with the same blank wall encountered by Sloan.⁵⁵ With regard to the possible authorship of Dunraven there is no doubt that he had the literary skill, interest in his fellow RC countrymen, detailed knowledge of the subject, and access to government thinking to have penned that letter on his own accord. Dunraven first began to take a closer interest in Irish affairs in the years prior to his first seeking election to Limerick County Council in

53 TCD, Mahaffy papers, 1988, Q7.27.

54 *Hansard*, vol. 145, cols. 91-150, 13 April 1905.

55 Patrick Maume points out that although Sloan and Russell failed in their quest to uncover any direct link between Dunraven's university letter and MacDonnell, in the first instance, and between the letter and Wyndham, later, they, perhaps inadvertently, by aggressive rhetoric and sharp incisive criticism of the Dublin administration, set in train a series of events that led to the revamping of the whole unionist organisation in Ulster. Maume goes on to say that 'the significance of these developments passed unnoticed by the Dunravenites and their aristocratic intrigues and by William O'Brien, who – like most nationalists - failed to realise that mass politicisation that gave nationalists near-monopoly in most of Ireland [following the Local Government Act of 1898] produced among Ulster protestants mass unionism as determined as its counterpart' (Patrick Maume, *The long gestation, Irish nationalist life 1891-1918* (Dublin, 1999), p. 71).

1899. It will be recalled that the Bishop O'Dwyer-Dean Flanagan-Dunraven imbroglio of February 1899 arose from concern, on the part of O'Dwyer, that candidates for the county council election should first declare their support for the ongoing campaign to secure suitable higher educational facilities for the catholic majority. The bitter rift between the two clergymen from that event was not settled⁵⁶ until December 1900. A letter exists, though dated only 31 December, which can be taken as a reply to Flanagan when he informed Dunraven that the stand off between himself and his diocesan superior had been resolved and would therefore indicate that it was written in 1900:

I was not at all surprised at your letter. *Under these circumstances* could you not ascertain for me the bishop's views as to a subject, which interests me – higher education in Ireland? I am really anxious to know what it is exactly you Roman Catholics desire and what it is that you require. To put it shortly and vulgarly what is the least you ask for and what is the least you will take. You might help me.⁵⁷

The 'message' in 1899 from O'Dwyer to Dunraven through Flanagan may have had a more subtle and not so obvious connotation than the usually accepted one of castigating Dunraven for not putting pressure on the government to bring about a settlement. It may have been a covert call to Dunraven to do something, on his own bat, to attempt a solution.⁵⁸ If so then Dunraven began the quest of a university settlement in early 1901 interrupted of necessity by his participation in the land conference and the subsequent land act. In his letter of 4 January 1904 Dunraven, assuming that he was the author, showed that he had an understanding of the problems and views of the RC hierarchy. He wrote at that time that if he did not condone the attitude of the bishops he would still plead for a generous consideration of their views.⁵⁹

There was a widespread feeling in Ireland in the autumn of 1903 that the chief secretary, Wyndham, following the apparent resolution of the land problem, was willing and anxious to bring about a settlement in the area of higher education which was part of the programme of reform arrived at between Wyndham and MacDonnell on the latter assuming

56 Flanagan to Monsignor Hallinan, 7 December 1900 (LDA, O'Dwyer papers).

57 Dunraven to Flanagan, 31 December [1900] (LDA, O'Dwyer papers, no. 47). The italics are mine.

58 This was also the interpretation of Rushe, who wrote 'O'Dwyer had severely warned him[Dunraven], through Flanagan, to work for university education for Irish catholics.' Rushe, 'Bishop O'Dwyer of Limerick and the education issues of his time' (unpublished M.A. thesis, UCG, 1980), pp 7. 142-3.

59 *IT*, 4 January 1904.

office. Dunraven was a party to a university settlement and, apparently, minimised his part in the affair when he wrote ‘I did what I could to assist them [Wyndham and MacDonnell], and addressed a long letter to leading Irish newspapers, pleading for a settlement and setting forth the lines on which I thought a settlement might be arrived at.’⁶⁰ As part of that assistance Dunraven canvassed⁶¹ the views of Bishop O’Dwyer, the unofficial mouthpiece of the RC hierarchy in this area, who was a long time agitator for university equality. O’Dwyer, for his part, offered the chief secretary and Dunraven encouragement and advice ‘if Wyndham grappled with the Irish university question he would have the sympathy of all sections in the country.’⁶² To cement any consensus for a settlement it was necessary to bring Ulster presbyterians on board. It was a recognised fact, alluded to by Dunraven in his letter, that the Queen’s Colleges, in particular that of Belfast, suffered badly, in the area of government investment, in comparison with TCD. If Dunraven’s part in the settlement scheme was to act as kite-flyer and public persona then it was MacDonnell’s task to travel north and convince the northerners of the advantages of an equitable settlement which would also bring benefits to them in its wake. MacDonnell on returning seemed satisfied with the success of his mission. One further element had to be put in place. Despite Russell’s assertion to the contrary it is most unlikely that any scheme was initiated without at least the tacit approval of someone in a position of importance in TCD. When the disparate strands of opinion were seemingly in place it was time for Dunraven to go public. Why then did the measure fail despite the expectation of broad support from the various elements canvassed? The speech of Londonderry was the catalyst when it hinted that the presbyterians consulted by MacDonnell were not representative of their class and were only speaking for themselves. MacDonnell and Wyndham had therefore failed to take into account any unionist resistance, largely dormant but not dead since the defeat of Gladstone’s last home rule bill of 1893. Caught in the middle between the unionists on the one hand and extreme nationalists, as epitomised by Davitt [‘the only settlement was to make Trinity College an Irish and national university with equal rights for catholics and all others’⁶³] the government lost its nerve and was either unwilling or unable to press ahead.

Wyndham’s own stance in the debacle does little to enhance his reputation as an Irish

60 Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, p. 41.

61 Dunraven in evidence to the Fry Commission, minutes of evidence (13 November 1906), p. 390.

62 *IT*, 12 November 1903. It is impossible to say if this preceded or followed the exchange of views between Dunraven and O’Dwyer. See also lenten pastoral of O’Dwyer on RC neglect in the field of higher education (*LL*, 15 February 1904).

63 Davitt to the *Irish Times*, 18 January 1904.

reformer. He undoubtedly wished for a settlement; discussed the details with Dunraven, and perhaps finally persuaded the latter to test public opinion by way of an open letter to the press following the failure of all attempts to secure some form of consensus through the medium of a conference. It is also possible that Wyndham had not got prior cabinet approval for his plan but was hoping that an agreed solution, backed by popular support, would force the hands of the government. In many ways the university entanglement was a mirror image of the later devolution imbroglio when the chief inspirer became the chief denier. MacDonnell, on this occasion, came lightly out of the affair but his nemesis was yet in the future.

William O'Brien, who seems to have been a keen observer of the university goings-on but not a participant, was sure where the responsibility for the failure lay. O'Brien wrote⁶⁴ to Archbishop Healy of Tuam, one of his few episcopal supporters, in October 1905 to tell that evidence, which he was not free to make public, had reached him that in 1903 Wyndham was anxious to introduce a university bill and wished to have the hands of the government strengthened by a conference but that John Dillon made his second foray into Swinford⁶⁵ and broke up the entente with Wyndham by roundly denouncing the new policy of conciliation, whereupon the chief secretary abandoned his scheme. Healy was certainly impressed by this information:

It is certainly very significant and throws a flood of light on the whole situation . . . I believed that the profession of certain persons with reference to the settlement was a mere cover and now I am sure of it.⁶⁶

That exchange indicates some of the reasons why Wyndham did not carry on – want of a consensus and the failure of the Irish party, particularly Redmond, to back Dunraven's proposals instead of attempting to cast doubts on its authorship. Dunraven also felt that what he called organised nationalism was to blame. Writing later of events in 1902-03 he said:

Ireland rode on the crest of opportunity . . . a spirit of conciliation was evoked capable of solving all the social questions in dispute, capable of healing all sectarian and sectional wounds. . . A violent agitation was set on foot against the whole spirit of

64 O'Brien to Healy, 2 October 1905 (UCC, O'Brien papers, Box AO, 5/94).

65 *FJ*, 20 October 1903.

66 Healy to O'Brien, 31 October 1905 (UCC, O'Brien papers, Box AO, 5/95).

unity with the consequence . . . that we have not moved one step towards the settlement of the university question.⁶⁷

Dunraven also felt that the collapse of the settlement plan was a blow⁶⁸ to his hopes but did not elaborate.

When the dust finally settled on the Dunraven scheme the one whose name was appended to the letter came out of the fiasco virtually unscathed. The letter was a brilliant expose of all the arguments pro and anti a solution at that time with a pleasing and realistic plan of settlement. Wyndham, the chief secretary, came badly out of the whole affair, failing in the end to please anybody. He was accused of speaking out of the two sides of his mouth, the still sweet voice of reason while addressing himself to the nationalists while, on the other hand, allowing his pronouncements to find expression in the beat of orange drums. His conduct in the whole affair, together with his constant denials and unwillingness to come clean on any aspect of the business, helped to hasten his departure from office. When the real pressure was upon him at the time of the devolution proposals the watch-cry of the Ulster unionists might well have been ‘remember the Dunraven scheme’.

⁶⁷ Dunraven to a friend and colleague, n.d., cited in Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, p. 40.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

TOWARDS A SETTLEMENT

The appointment of James Bryce, in December 1905, as chief secretary for Ireland in the new Liberal government seemed to many in this country a hopeful sign that the threads of higher education for Catholics might again be grasped. Writing to Dunraven towards the end of that month William O'Brien again saw the benefits of a conference as an aid to a solution:

[I am] certain that if Bryce desires the aid of a conference either as to the university question (which he is announced to be thinking of) or as to the land question he has only to make the intimation to have one.⁶⁹

It is interesting that O'Brien coupled the university and land problems together and later sought to use the university settlement as a cover for what he considered the final settlement of the land question. He attempted to bring Dunraven around to his way of thinking and O'Brien, who always considered that Dunraven was close enough to officialdom to know what government thinking was at any particular time and, on this occasion, was prepared to use it to further his own particular agenda, put it to Dunraven, 'I don't know how far you may have got an inkling of any future programme.'⁷⁰

Dunraven, whose interest in the ongoing university saga appeared to be peripheral since his letter of January 1904, was nonetheless hovering on the sideline and was to play an important, though not a key role, in the final settlement. He wrote to Bryce in mid-January 1906 commending him on the exposition of Irish policy in a speech in Aberdeen on 12 January and then proceeded to suggest a programme of reform that might be undertaken by the government. Contrary to O'Brien's expectations, Dunraven was not privy to government thinking. Among the items on Dunraven's list was a settlement of the university question, but with a characteristic proviso:

If, in addition, a solution of the complicated problem of higher education could be found I believe the government could take their time to consider the extension of self-government powers.⁷¹

69 O'Brien to Dunraven, 20 December 1905 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/6).

70 Ibid.

71 Dunraven to Bryce, 17 January 1906 (NLI, Bryce papers, 11,012 (1)).

Dunraven could be as machiavellian as Wyndham or O'Brien when it suited his purpose. His interest in the university problem had been somewhat superseded by his desire to settle the equally thorny question of home rule along the lines of his devolution plan. Nothing came of that direct appeal to Bryce, though the Liberal Government was anxious to reach some equitable settlement of the university problem and the chief secretary was already considering his best approach. MacDonnell, who was given the responsibility for drawing up the measure, consulted his old ally Dunraven. Dunraven was a house guest of the under secretary in early February, while the roles were reversed the following month when the education question was high on the agenda. In order to buy some time the government decided to set up a commission of inquiry into the affairs of TCD in order to highlight the disabilities suffered by catholics and so prepare the way for the introduction of a remedial education bill, the success of which needed at least the tacit approval of that college. All aspects of the inquiry were discussed⁷² in Adare even down to the names of appointees to the inquiry. Part of the failure of Dunraven's letter of 1904 was the relative silence or implied opposition of TCD that encouraged, if not caused, widespread unionist and protestant opposition to the proposals. In his meetings with Dunraven, MacDonnell had the full support of Bryce who, in turn, was kept abreast of happenings. Dunraven learned from MacDonnell that the government contemplated a labourers' bill. Dunraven, like O'Brien, was also thinking of making use of this measure to further the university question. Writing to O'Brien he suggested:

If Bryce could suggest that an expression of opinion as to what those terms [of the labourers' bill] should be and would be of assistance to the government, a conference, even if Redmond and Dillon refused to join, might be very useful and possibly having dealt with the labourers, it might by addition, develop itself into a conference of education . . . the education question seems to me to be maturing rapidly.⁷³

O'Brien himself was under pressure from his supporters to call publicly for a conference on the university question. One of his few clerical supporters, Rev J. J. Clancy, CC, Kilrush, alerted O'Brien to this:

72 MacDonnell to Bryce, 31 March 1906 (NLI, Bryce papers, 11,012 (3)). Blunt, *My diaries*, p. 541, 19 February 1906, confirms that, at a meeting between Dunraven and MacDonnell on 18 February 1906, the latter showed determination to take a bold line on Ireland, beginning with a university settlement.

73 Dunraven to O'Brien, 7 April 1906 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/7).

The education debate [at the national convention of the UIL] was an eye-opener as to the necessity of a national conference between T. W. Russell, Dunraven and the nationalists . . . the country must be hopelessly dense if the futility of the present attitude of the Irish party is not perceived.⁷⁴

As with the land settlement, the Irish Party considered that first place must always be given to a resolution of the home rule crux though there were some in the party who considered that the education question was in dire need of settlement. Clancy was alerting O'Brien to the danger that the Irish Party might steal the conference thunder of himself and Dunraven.

With the possibility of the government introducing a university bill, apprehension rose in Cork over the future status of the Queen's College there. When Dunraven made his proposals in January 1904 he made no mention of or provision for the colleges in Cork or Galway. The Royal Commission of 1901-03, under the chairmanship of Lord Robertson, did envisage⁷⁵ reducing the Cork college to that of a technical institution thereby inviting any subsequent university bill to do likewise. Under the guidance of Sir Bertram Windle, president since 1904, moves were afoot in the southern capital to protect the status of the Cork college. O'Brien, in conformity with his policy of allowing the Irish Party, without hindrance or criticism, to promote the cause of Ireland in the sure expectation that, sooner or later, their bluff would be called and their lack of policy seen at home, did not pay much attention to the university conundrum up to this. Lately however, willingly or unwillingly, he was drawn into the defence of Queen's College, Cork (QCC). The urgency of the Cork defence was highlighted in March 1906 as the government pondered⁷⁶ the holding of a commission of inquiry into the work and organisation of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction. In light of what the Robertson Commission had recommended there was a distinct possibility that QCC would soon be sucked into the technical system of education. Urgency of action or at least more high-powered agitation was required. Windle, impatient of responses to date, outlined a certain course of action to O'Brien:

74 Clancy to O'Brien, 3 April 1906 (UCC, O'Brien papers, Box AO, 10/184). O'Brien had always hoped that when the people of Ireland eventually came to realise that the Irish Party had not realistic policies they would turn to him. This perceived lacuna also encouraged O'Brien to embrace policies other than settlement of the land crux in order to further embarrass the party.

75 Royal Commission on University Education in Ireland, Final Report, 1903, p. 3.

76 Plunkett to Bryce, 2 March 1906; MacDonnell to Bryce, 4 March 1906 (NLI, Bryce papers, 11,012 (3)).

I wish you would get in touch with Dunraven. He is now in London and I had a most interesting series of comments from him on our scheme . . . Dunraven is really interested in this matter; he is a Munster man; he is very broadminded. Why don't you get in touch with him over it? Remember he has a lot of influence with MacDonnell who is a factor in the case.⁷⁷

O'Brien may not have received Windle's call⁷⁸ to action when he wrote to him the following day. Now O'Brien was most anxious to demonstrate to Windle that he was not asleep on the Cork case and did not need to use Dunraven as a go-between. He had met both Bryce and MacDonnell the previous week. Obviously O'Brien, smarting under the gentle criticism of Windle, was determined that there would be no kudos for Dunraven in the Cork business.

By August the outline of a university settlement was almost in place. The RC hierarchy had been consulted and wished it to be known that, while not expressing any preference for Dunraven's scheme, they considered that it outlined the basis for a satisfactory settlement. If the government was not prepared to give legislative effect to his proposals then the proposals of the Royal Commission would be acceptable to them.⁷⁹ The government was now assured that the RC bishops would place no unnecessary obstacle in their path as they grappled with attempts to finalise a settlement.

Once the government had worked out the bones of a settlement satisfactory to all interested parties, a major difficulty had to be surmounted – how to inform the public in order to gauge their reaction and yet not implicate either the government or the Irish administration. MacDonnell outlined the nature of the problem to Dunraven. While Dunraven was unwilling to put pen to paper again, he agreed to facilitate the dissemination of the government's plan. MacDonnell was quite pleased when he wrote to Bryce:

The Irish Reform Association offers a way. I could get them to adopt, submit and publish it [the university proposals] without any alteration seeing that in 1904 Dunraven published the outline of *our plan* which was the delayed Dublin university

77 Windle to O'Brien, 10 May 1906 (UCC, O'Brien papers, Box AO, 10/196).

78 O'Brien to Windle, 11 May 1906 (UCC, O'Brien papers, Box AO, 10/197).

79 Irish Party Memorandum, 16 August 1906 (NLI, Bryce Papers, 11,013 (4)).

plan. We will I presume stick to that . . . I can get Dunraven to remain silent.⁸⁰

In the event this avenue was not used. MacDonnell now seemed to confirm what was generally understood but incapable of being proved – that Dunraven was indeed ‘the handy man of the government’, as Russell had alleged in the house of commons on 20 February 1905. It would be an injustice to Dunraven to suggest that he merely appended his name to the government university plan of 1903-04. An outline of a completed plan, into which Dunraven, too, had an input, according to MacDonnell’s account, was given to him to prepare it for presentation to the public.⁸¹ If that were so then MacDonnell and his superior, Wyndham, placed extraordinary trust and confidence in Dunraven and it is to the credit of the latter that he never did divulge any of the machinations that preceded the publication of the letter of 4 January 1904.

FINAL ATTEMPT AT A SETTLEMENT

The new Liberal government, under pressure from the Irish Party, appointed a royal commission, in June 1906, under the chairmanship of Sir Edward Fry, to inquire into the state of Trinity College and the University of Dublin and to report upon the steps that needed to be taken in order to increase their usefulness to the country. Dunraven, as one who had taken a prominent part in the question of a university settlement in the past, was invited to make a submission to the Fry Commission. He replied⁸² that he did not think he had any observations to place before the commission, a rather surprising response. Yet, he later appeared as an oral witness,⁸³ on 7 November 1906, at the Old Palace Yard in Westminster. With the permission of the chairman, Dunraven began by making a long statement from notes. He took as a starting point that it was universally conceded that the disabilities under which RCs suffered in the area of higher education needed to be removed so that no barriers

80 MacDonnell to Bryce, 21 August 1906 (NLI, Bryce papers, 11,013 (4)). The italics are mine.

81 In the MacDonnell papers there is a document entitled ‘draft of letter for Dunraven’ containing what appears to be the proposed university plan of 1903-04 (Bodleian library, MacDonnell papers, eng. hist. c. 367 ff 15-9). By comparing this with the letter that appeared in the newspapers, it is clear that Dunraven put his own slant on the information supplied. Two other relevant documents also appear in this folder, ‘heads of a scheme to establish a new university for Ireland’, 21 November 1903 and ‘corrected copy of MacDonnell’s scheme’, 10 October 1903 (Bodleian library, MacDonnell papers, eng. hist. c. 367 ff 1-7, ff 8-14).

82 Fry Commission, Reports of Commissioners, TCD, 56, p. 754.

83 Fry Commission, Minutes of Evidence, 13 November, pp 387-96.

confronted the majority population. Speaking then from the viewpoint of practical politics rather than that of an educationalist, Dunraven said that he had devised a scheme [in 1904], which would have a reasonable chance of passing through parliament; of being acceptable to the people of Ireland, and of proving beneficial to them. Various plans for university reform in Ireland had been placed before the public but because they were not in conformity with certain conditions that Dunraven felt were necessary, they failed to remedy the situation. These were, firstly, any scheme must be generally acceptable to the RC hierarchy. Secondly, it would have to be generally acceptable to the protestant people of the UK. Thirdly, any scheme would have to be of such a character and of such dimensions as would enable any government to carry the measure through parliament. Coupled with the necessity for reform was the need for only one national university for Ireland. Trinity College could not take on this role, because, if reforms were enacted to suit the majority population, it would soon be catholic-dominated and the present problem, in reverse, would be the result. The Royal University, likewise, would not prove suitable because state endowment for this largely catholic institution would not be tolerated by protestant opinion. Dunraven rejected any plan calling for a multiplicity of universities as neither the population of the country nor the expense involved in equipping them could be warranted and, in any event, opportunities for graduates in Ireland were small. Having rejected all other plans or suggestions, Dunraven proceeded to reveal his own idea, which conformed to the criteria he had already delineated. Dublin University which was, as Dunraven pointed out, a going concern with deep historical roots would become the national university for Ireland and within it would be established three additional colleges, namely Queen's College, Belfast; Queen's College, Cork and a new college, mainly catering for catholics, to be established and suitably equipped in Dublin. These three colleges, together with the existing Trinity College, would create a four-college structure, an entity which became known as the four-college scheme. In addition the Cecilia Street School of Medicine, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Magee College, Londonderry, and the College of Science in Dublin would all become affiliate colleges, while the Queen's College in Galway could be converted into an agricultural college and technical institute. When Dunraven had finished and was questioned by members of the commission he stoutly defended his plan, despite it being pointed out to him that all the existing colleges in Ireland were opposed to the idea of a single university. Regarding the opposition of Trinity College, Dunraven made a point which, while it was bold and imaginative at that time, was to be more pertinent less than a decade later when he observed, 'the question should be whether, if

Trinity was recalcitrant, it should be allowed to stand in the way.⁸⁴ Dunraven was hinting that the intransigence of TCD, and, by inference, the protestant population either here or in the UK, could not permanently stand in the way of a settlement that suited the majority in Ireland.

The taking of evidence was completed on 14 November 1906 and it would appear from it that the consensus was opposed to a one-university or federal scheme. Other powerful interests were also opposed to it. These included the senate of the Royal University and the RC hierarchy, save Archbishop Walsh of Dublin. The Fry Commission issued its final report on 12 March 1907. As with the Robertson Commission the members were divided. Of the nine commissioners five were in favour of the federal scheme as propounded by Dunraven, a remarkable happening since the bulk of evidence was strongly opposed to that avenue of settlement, but then it was said⁸⁵ to be the favoured option of the chief secretary, Bryce. A delay in the publication of the oral evidence caused some disquiet. Suspicion fell on MacDonnell, the under secretary. The rumour-mill gained further grist when it was spread about,⁸⁶ in quasi-official circles, that MacDonnell, despite the evidence, had drafted a bill to give effect to a settlement on federal lines. This proved to be true as, on 5 January 1907,⁸⁷ just two days before his successor, Augustine Birrell, was sworn into office, Bryce announced that Dublin University was to be reorganised to include four constituent colleges (a new college for RCs in Dublin, TCD, and the Queen's colleges in Belfast and Cork) and four affiliated colleges, as Dunraven had laid out in his statement to the late commission. The evidence was finally published on 1 February but by then the focus of attention had turned to the acceptability or otherwise, especially by RC interests, of Bryce's bill, as well as whether the timing of the announcement made the measure binding on his successor.

It is clear that Dunraven had become the stalking horse of this new scheme of settlement that might now be more properly called the Dunraven-MacDonnell-Bryce scheme, just as he had performed a similar function in January 1904 for the Dunraven-MacDonnell-Wyndham plan. While Dunraven was in a perpetual state of ill-health, mainly due to the

84 *Ibid.*, Minutes of Evidence, p. 389.

85 Thomas J. Morrissey, *Towards a national university* (Dublin, 1983), pp 230-3.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 231.

87 *IT*, 26 January 1907. Bryce was addressing delegations, received together, from RCs and Presbyterians who were seeking information on the university proposals of the government.

effects of military service in the South African or Boer War, it was coincidental that in times of potential crisis his condition deteriorated to such an extent that it necessitated going abroad for treatment. It had happened following the publication of the land conference report and now in January 1907 he again felt so unwell that he informed O'Brien 'I am off abroad and will be back before the opening of parliament.'⁸⁸ Dunraven, in the light of his evidence and MacDonnell's compilation of a draft education bill, would have been a prime target for public notice if he had remained at large. On the other hand, MacDonnell need never have been in doubt regarding Dunraven's circumspection and silence on the matter.

Opponents of Bryce's bill, that is those mainly on the nationalist or catholic side, concentrated their opposition on the attitude of those members of the hierarchy who either supported the bill or were passively in favour of it. Amongst the latter group was Bishop O'Dwyer of Limerick, a long time polemicist and relentless supporter of catholic claims who had become, according to Dr Thomas Morrissey,⁸⁹ a victim of war-weariness and was therefore amenable to the latest scheme as the best that could be obtained. Dunraven had consulted⁹⁰ O'Dwyer prior to his letter of January 1904 and was as satisfied now of the latter's approval of his present proposals as he was in 1904. A prominent anti-bill campaigner now was Sir John Ross of Bladensburg, whose name had been linked with Dunraven as Ulster Unionist MPs strove to disentangle the connection between Dunraven, MacDonnell and Wyndham prior to January 1904.

It is pertinent at this stage to compare the two schemes as outlined by Dunraven. The first attempt, in 1904, was lumbered with too many generalities and contained few specifics. It dealt with the disabilities suffered by catholics; made a direct appeal to TCD and to the protestant population of Ireland to look kindly on the catholic claims, and opined that the 'highest attainable measure of academical efficiency with perfect equality of treatment for all section of the community'⁹¹ could best be attained by the establishment within the University of Dublin of two additional colleges – the Queen's College, Belfast and a new college, the King's College to be established in Dublin. In his evidence to the Fry Commission the earlier ideal was fleshed out in greater detail; more attention was given to the need to address catholic disabilities and less heed was taken of protestant or nonconformist opposition. The

88 Dunraven to O'Brien, 14 January 1907 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/9).

89 Morrissey, *Towards a national university*, p. 234.

90 Fry Commission, *Minutes of Evidence*, p.390.

91 Dunraven to *IT*, 4 January 1904.

agitation mounted by Windle was taken into account by Dunraven as Cork, as well as Trinity College, was to be included within the new National University of Ireland.

As if to ensure maximum confusion in the minds of the Irish people the government, also in January 1907, announced that it envisaged bringing in an Irish Council Bill that was intended to give control over a number of departments in the Irish administration to a new Dublin-based body. Irish interest then was concentrated on political matters and the educational question receded into the background. In any event the new chief secretary, Augustine Birrell, was not pleased with either the content of Bryce's bill or the manner in which it was introduced. He made no secret of his intention to bring forward plans of his own that would not impinge in any way on Trinity College. When the Irish Council Bill, which had been introduced in the house of commons on 7 May 1907, failed to gain the support of a convention of the UIL, Birrell was more than happy to abandon that measure and drop the proposed university bill as well.

Dunraven and O'Brien, the proponents of conference and conciliation, once again stepped into the vacuum created by the disappearance of the university bill. O'Brien wrote⁹² to Dunraven on 8 July telling him that he saw in Birrell's recent announcements on the land and university questions a very clear appeal for some new land conference type agreement but considered it best that he [O'Brien] not become involved in any agitation. Dunraven, in reply, must have expressed misgivings as to the possibility of resurrecting the land conference personnel. O'Brien, however, was prepared to go to any length to promote his conference idea. If the bishops could not be drawn into conference mode then he was prepared to muster the county councils to organise deputations to the prime minister and the chief secretary on the university question. He was further prepared to gamble on getting a consensus between the government and opposition parties to form a united front to solve this intractable Irish problem. A problem for O'Brien was that he did not have the influence or entrée to penetrate officialdom but, as he told Dunraven, if a hint came from 'a certain quarter' then his latest plans could be activated. If Dunraven did not represent that 'certain quarter' then he still had a vital role to play:

You [Dunraven] know much better than I whether all that friendly intervention is feasible. I am absolutely convinced that even the most cautious intimation of a wish from that quarter would be conclusive and that the results upon the future affairs of

92 O'Brien to Dunraven, 8 July 1907 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/9).

Ireland would be immeasurably great.⁹³

Dunraven must have again replied in less than enthusiastic terms as now O'Brien made a more direct appeal to Dunraven, 'could you at all see your way to approaching Birrell himself on the subject?'⁹⁴ O'Brien was sure, from remarks made by Birrell in the house of commons, that the chief secretary had now adopted the same attitude as Wyndham had taken prior to the land conference when he let it be known that no settlement was possible unless there was first an agreement among the parties themselves. Dunraven was then handed⁹⁵ the task of impressing upon Birrell that he should now take upon himself the responsibility of inviting, even privately, a conference of the principal representatives on both sides. In order to add weight to Dunraven's case, on his meeting Birrell, O'Brien had already sketched out the names of suitable invitees. Birrell and MacDonnell would be the consulters. Invited to attend would be Redmond and Dillon from the Irish party; T. M. Healy and O'Brien himself, independent MPs, for the purpose of looking after the interests of Cork; Long and Sloan, representing official and unofficial unionist interests; Professor Butcher; Dunraven as chairman of the Irish Reform Association, and Wyndham, who would have the opportunity to advance his suggestions of October 1903. To add further to Dunraven's discomfiture, O'Brien impressed upon him the necessity of speaking with Birrell before the chief secretary left for Ireland so that government colleagues could, if necessary, be consulted. Dunraven, more realistic than his exuberant colleague, saw the futility of what was proposed. O'Brien wrote again to Dunraven on 28 August. It showed that he too was becoming weary by his lack of success and the apparent uninterest of one of his closest allies:

I have already hinted the way in which their [British party leaders] co-operation could be assuredly obtained – if you exert yourself in that direction all else would follow from a successful compromise on the university question.⁹⁶

But the days of conference and compromise on the university question were long over.

93 O'Brien to Dunraven, 14 July 1907 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/9).

94 O'Brien to Dunraven, 20 August 1907 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/9).

95 O'Brien to Dunraven, 20 August 1907 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/9).

96 O'Brien to Dunraven, 28 August 1907 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/9).

With the withdrawal of Bryce's higher education bill in June 1907 the all-pervasive influence of MacDonnell, that master manipulator, was on the wane. Birrell, on assuming office, contrived to steer clear of all notions of conference to settle such a convoluted question as the university problem. Disliking the proposals of the Dunraven-Bryce-MacDonnell scheme he isolated the under secretary and kept aloof from Dunraven. It becomes clear then why Dunraven could not accede to O'Brien's requests to speak directly to the chief secretary. Even before Bryce's bill was killed off, Birrell, always his own man, was already⁹⁷ in negotiations with the Rev William Delany, SJ, president of the Jesuit run University College in St. Stephen's Green, who then became his confidante and adviser on catholic needs and requirements. The essence of Birrell's thinking, as his plan evolved, was the non-interference in any shape or form with TCD. That being so, the establishment of at least one new university in Ireland was necessary. Birrell introduced his university bill in the House of Commons on 31 March 1908. The plan envisaged the establishment of two new universities. The Queen's College in Belfast was to become the Queen's University, serving the northern and particularly the unionist population. The Queen's Colleges in Cork and Galway would join with a new college in Dublin to become constituent colleges of the new National University of Ireland, catering for the majority population.

When the Irish Universities bill was going through the house of lords in 1908 Dunraven's input was so minimal that a casual onlooker would be forgiven for thinking that the measure concerned him but little. On 30 July he was present for the committee stage when the earl of Donoughmore moved an amendment to decrease the element on the governing body that was not chosen by the colleges themselves, i.e. to minimise any input by county councils or local authorities. Dunraven hoped that the amendment would not be pressed and, if not withdrawn, he would feel compelled to vote with the government. It was of vital importance, he continued, to associate local opinion with the scheme and the real apprehension contained in the amendment seemed to him to be that county councils could not be trusted to fulfil the duties which this bill would place upon them. Dunraven rejected this utterly from his own experience:

He could only speak personally of one county council, on which he sat for nine years, and he did not think the political opinions of the majority, who were home rulers, ever

97 Morrissey, *Towards a national university*, pp 288-96. Lyons, *John Dillon* (London 1968), p. 305, says that there was a school of thought which held that Birrell had been deeply influenced by Dillon in the framing of his scheme.

interfered in the slightest degree with the way they conducted public business.⁹⁸

Dunraven involved himself just once more. Later that day an amendment was moved by Lord Killanin, to permit the erection of any church, chapel or place of religious worship or observance by means of private benefaction within or without the precincts of the university or college. Dunraven did not speak to the amendment but when it was put to a vote he sided with the contents (those in favour) who won by thirty two votes to thirty one.

Dunraven played a more than useful though minor role in the finalisation of the university imbroglio and, even though he acted the part of the 'handy man' on two occasions, it did not diminish his usefulness nor the sustained interest he took in a final solution. Like many of his ventures to solve Ireland's ills there was no compulsion on him to get involved and it might have been more beneficial to him, from a political viewpoint, to have remained aloof as his sustained interest in a just settlement gave the impression to unionists that he favoured concessions to catholics [unnecessary in their view] to the detriment of his protestant heritage. To Dunraven it was another manifestation of his continued concern to improve the life of the majority of his fellow countrymen. Like all his endeavours it earned him little thanks.

⁹⁸ *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 193, cols. 1654-5, 30 July 1908.

PUTTING THE LAND CONFERENCE INTO PRACTICE

In 1878, the first year in which Dunraven took his seat in the house of lords, he was an archetypal landlord,¹ averse to any change in the system of land tenure in his native land. He revealed his thoughts when he addressed his fellow peers, in April of that year, on the subject of discontent in Ireland. If the system of land tenure, he held, was the root cause of malcontent, then transfer of ownership to the occupiers would seem, on the surface, to be a very simple solution, especially as the occupiers contended that they were the descendants of the original owners of the soil and therefore entitled, in any alteration in the system, to possession, or in their eyes, to re-possession. Dunraven however, argued that, in ancient times, the land was held by the law of tanistry and gavelkind.² Due to shifts in population the present occupiers or tenants had no entitlements, while the landlords, at least, had acquired their demesnes by either grant or purchase. Continuing, Dunraven felt that even if transfer of ownership were feasible, it would be of no advantage to the country, as the unhealthy insatiable desire for land among the peasant population would inevitably result in more competition for the relatively small amount of land available.³ In summary, Dunraven feared the social upheaval that would result from a clash between the occupiers, who claimed the soil of Ireland on sentimental grounds, and the landlords, who had some legal claim to the land. His superior attitude, noticeable in the earlier part of his public life, is evident in his allusion to peasants squabbling and fighting over patches of land, not even caring or realising

1 It is suggested that Dunraven was one of the founders and promoters of the Property Defence Association (PDA), a counterpoise to the newly formed Land League and designed to aid landlords, tenant farmers, shopkeepers, labourers or tradespeople who found themselves under siege (Doherty and Hickey, *A dictionary of Irish history*, p. 491) but there is no evidence to support that theory. He was not present at the Leinster Hall in Dublin, on 2 December 1880, when, at a meeting of the Irish Land Committee, resolutions were passed condemning land agitation and professional agitators and inviting all persons interested in the rights of property to join its ranks (*IT*, 2 December 1880). Later that month a new organisation, the PDA, was formally launched (NLI, minutes of the PDA). By the following August, it was placed on a permanent basis for three years (*LC*, 3 September 1881) and had already begun to come to the assistance of boycotted persons, the first to be succoured being Col O'Callaghan in County Clare on 11 January 1881 (reports read at a meeting of the committee, 7 November 1882, PDA minutes). Dunraven was undoubtedly an initial supporter subscribing £75 during the year 1881. This sum, large but by no means the largest, was a once off contribution and at no time during the first decade of its existence did Dunraven appear as a committee member. The PDA seems to have become the anti-Plan of Campaign Association and later still was resuscitated as the Irish Landowners' Convention (ILC) which came to the fore during the lead up to the land conference of 1902. Dunraven was never a member of the ILC.

2 Tanistry was an ancient Celtic mode of tenure, according to which the right of succession lay not with the individual, but with the family in which it was hereditary. Gavelkind was a tenure by which lands descended from the father to all sons in equal portions.

3 *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 239, cols. 1200-07, 12 April 1878. Dunraven identified other causes of discontent among the Irish as bitterness between opposing faiths, the evil treatment meted out to the country over many generations, the government of the country badly administered, a large population with no outlet save agriculture, and the influence of professional agitators who, by their speeches and writings, worked upon the susceptibilities of a down-trodden race.

that, by their actions, they were out-pricing one another.

Some two years later, he again spoke in the house of lords on a debate on the state of Ireland. His reference to the soil of Ireland as confiscated land might have caused some eyebrows to raise, but when he stated that Irish people considered that rent on land was nothing but an arbitrary tax upon a conquered people, some of his listeners must have felt uneasy. But then, to the dismay of fellow Irish landlords, he appeared to soften his views on dual ownership. If owner occupancy was desirable, he went on, then the government should interest itself in the matter by either granting or loaning sums of money to prospective tenant-purchasers who would otherwise be suitable.⁴ This represented a considerable *volte-face*, the catalyst for which is unknown. Dunraven was now embarking on a campaign to actively abolish the dual system of land in Ireland.

Whatever other criticism one might level at Dunraven he was a steadfast man and once he put his hand to the plough, or more appropriately in his case, to the tiller, he never flinched. Accordingly, in January 1881, responding to the queen's speech, he castigated the government for not making any definite proposals to alter Irish land laws, though he did commend the executive for the limited 'experiment of a peasant proprietary'⁵ they were contemplating. Two years later, in March, he seconded a motion put forward by the earl of Lansdowne asking that a royal commission be set up to report on the best means of giving a larger portion of the people of Ireland a permanent proprietary interest in the soil of their native land. As the government was unwilling to accept the motion, it was withdrawn.⁶ Gladstone's modest beginnings of the process of purchase, his land act of 1881, turned out to be neither attractive enough nor sufficiently enticing to encourage an extensive take up. Dunraven was disappointed by what he called the purchase part of the Land Law (Ireland) Bill in 1896, when he argued that the sooner the government 'got to real ownership the better and that could only be done through the medium of purchase.'⁷ Later, he laid down two conditions that he considered indispensable in any future Irish land legislation. Firstly, the provision of means by which a considerable number of tenants would be enabled to purchase their holdings, and secondly, the maintenance of a good number of the present land-owning

⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 250, cols. 1545-59, 27 February 1880.

⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 257, cols. 64-6, 6 January 1881.

⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 276, cols. 1386-94, 5 March 1883.

⁷ *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 43, cols. 1180-02, 31 July 1896.

class.⁸ These were later to form the bedrock upon which the land conference of 1902 was established. As early as 1896 what Dunraven envisaged was an Ireland where much of the land, though not all, would be farmed by the owners, while former landlords, now landowners or large-scale farmers, would be content to remain and utilise their capital, from the sale of portions of their estates, and their much needed farming and management expertise, for the good of the country.

Land purchase in Ireland had virtually come to a standstill by 1900, as both sides were unhappy. Tenants were cautious to enter negotiations, as the amount of their annuity was not determined until all processes had been gone through. Landlords, on the other hand, were now paid in government stock, a fluctuating commodity, that fell below parity after 1896. The result was that neither side had much stomach for either purchase or sale.

When the land conference met in December in 1902 the most important task facing it was to gain the confidence and goodwill of the landlord class so that the process of purchase and sale could recommence. The report⁹ of the land conference took for granted that landlords would receive cash, not government stock, as payment. In article 11 the report noted that as indirect sale and purchase (sale initially to the state for resale) was both tedious and unsatisfactory it recommended direct sale between owner and occupier. The land bill of 1903¹⁰ allowed for both classes of sales, direct and indirect, but as the latter involved necessary delays, it was considered that it was less likely to be used.

By October 1903, after the land bill received the royal assent, the process of purchase began in earnest. Towards the end of that month some 200 tenants from opposite ends of the Adare estate, the townland of Ballinvoher, near Beagh Castle, Ballysteen, and Dohera, near Banogue, met in Adare courthouse to discuss terms of purchase.¹¹ Finding that no progress was being made the meeting summoned Peter Fitzgerald, the estate agent or manager, and when he came he suggested that a deputation wait on Dunraven at the Manor. Dunraven was sympathetic but said that, in calculating the annuities, he could not sell at a price that would give more than 25% reduction on first term rents¹² and 15% on second term and that, even

8 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 44, cols. 364-2, 10 August 1896.

9 Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, appendix 11, pp 179-80.

10 Fottrell & Fottrell, *Irish land act, 1903 explained*, pp 27-8

11 *LC*, 28 October 1903.

12 First term rents were those judicially fixed (by the land court) before 1896. Second term rents, generally lower than first term rents, were those judicially

selling on this basis, he would incur some loss of income. Despite Dunraven's chairmanship of the land conference and his known support for purchase he was putting down a marker that he was going to be no soft touch, while it can be assumed that the tenants were 'chancing their arm' by initially seeking reductions of 40% and 25% on first and second term rents, respectively. A further meeting was planned when the tenants had reached a decision on what they were prepared to offer. As Dunraven was regarded as the father of the land conference the nationalist *Limerick Leader* interpreted the encounter as a message to potential buyers everywhere that landlords were likely to be extremely combatant in the matter of sales to tenants.¹³ Dunraven was horrified at the initial offer made by the deputation that day blaming the advice given to tenants by their pastors. Writing to O'Brien he observed, 'I cannot understand the motive of the priests in persuading tenants to offer prices which they must know cannot be accepted.'¹⁴ Just ten days beforehand he had warned O'Brien that priests were undermining the effectiveness of the land act, 'I fear their spiritual pastors are not giving wise advise to the people on the land act.'¹⁵

As was to be expected, the *Freeman's Journal*¹⁶ capitalised on the account of the Adare meeting in the *Limerick Leader*. Using a hypothetical situation and employing devices like mortgages and loans as best suited his purpose, the writer purported to show that selling under the 1903 act would benefit a landlord to the tune of 11% compared to what he would have received had he sold prior to that year. When this generalisation, which may not have been relevant in the case of Dunraven and many other landlords, was converted to the Adare case, Dunraven, who was expected to be an example to others of his class, was thereby exposed as a grabbing rapacious landlord whose tenants would find it impossible to deal with. A knock-on effect of this alleged exposure was that it would encourage both landlords and tenants to deal with each other only on their own terms. Reaction of tenants on the Adare estate to the prognostication of the *Limerick Leader* was not long in coming. Tenants from Castleroberts, Mountearl and neighbouring townlands wrote to Dunraven indicating that they expected to be exceptionally dealt with, as they had been in the past, due to the inferior quality of their holdings, and hinted that 'if not equally dealt with as to purchase, they would

fixed after 1896.

13 *LL*, 30 October 1903.

14 Dunraven to O'Brien, 31 October 1903 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8854/ 2).

15 Dunraven to O'Brien, 20 October 1903 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/2).

16 *FJ*, 2 November 1903.

prefer to remain tenants to Dunraven and to his successors.’¹⁷ Dunraven and his actions were certainly under close scrutiny. Never slow to defend himself, Dunraven wrote to the *Freeman’s Journal*¹⁸ from his yacht, Cariad, moored at Castlehaven, Co. Cork. He denied that any offer of sale was made to any tenants and so the article of 2 November did him an injustice. In reply the editor wrote that what was at issue was whether an offer was made or did Dunraven merely tell his tenants of a possible loss of income? The editorial then went on to justify the offending article by saying that if a man says he would lose by selling at a certain figure, does it not mean that he will refuse less than that figure and may ask for more. That imbroglio, minor and all as it was, came to the attention of O’Brien. Writing to Dunraven he alleged that landlords, by now demanding excessive prices, were fuelling those in the Irish party, who wished the land act to fail. Dunraven, for his part, should be the first to give the lead:

If you could have seen your way to offering them [your tenants] the medium of what we, on our side, at all events regard as the conference terms, it would have given us an irresistible strength in pulling down the mischief-makers.¹⁹

The Dohera tenants again sent²⁰ a deputation, this time led by the parish priest, to the estate office towards the end of November, where they met with the agent. The tenants now offered twenty years purchase with the annuity based on a reduction of 15% of current rent. Fitzgerald promised to submit the offer to Dunraven if the number of years was increased to twenty one and a half. The offer was increased to twenty one years provided that the hanging gale (arrears of rent) was wiped out. The unionist *Limerick Chronicle* saw the outcome as an indication of Dunraven’s beneficence as the subheading to the report read, ‘Proposed sale – landlord’s generosity.’²¹ Despite the optimism displayed after the November meeting the Dohera sale was not completed. In mid-February 1904 a deputation again met with the agent. Fitzgerald said that any delay in replying to their offer was due to uncertainty as to the bonus to be paid to the landlords under the act and apportionment of a large board of works charge on the estate but that he was in a position to say that an offer of twenty one and a half year’s

17 *LL*, 9 November 1903.

18 *FJ*, 10 November 1903; *LL*, 11 November; *LC*, 12 November. The matter was given widespread coverage in Limerick.

19 O’Brien to Dunraven, 12 November 1903 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/2).

20 *LL*, 23 November 1903.

21 *LC*, 21 November 1903.

purchase would be acceptable to Dunraven. The tenants however made no final offer that day, owing to the absence of some of their members. The Dohera sale was regarded by many as a test case and set the tone for similar negotiations within the entire estate. These came to a close, with the greater portion of the tenants, in mid-April 1904. For the purpose of the sale the estate was divided into four districts and two terms were agreed with the tenants, twenty one and a half years purchase for first term rents and twenty three years on the abated second term rents on which three shillings in the pound reduction had been given. In addition the hanging gale and half year's rent, due on November 1903, were wiped out while Dunraven reserved the game rights during his lifetime, after which they would revert to the tenants.²²

Dunraven felt that tenants generally were not willing to offer realistic prices for their farms. O'Brien took Dunraven to task for allegedly saying at a meeting of Limerick County Council, on 28 May 1904, 'that the whole experience of the land conference was that the tenants should be able to afford to pay the landlords more than under the former acts.'²³ This, O'Brien maintained, was not the intention of the tenant representatives at the land conference. In reply Dunraven stoutly asserted that the report of the meeting in the *Freeman's Journal* was full of inaccuracies, which that newspaper took full advantage of. The gist of his argument that day was that sales under the act had languished; that absentee landlords were driven by fanatical pressure and had sold out and that it was accepted at the land conference that in order to ensure a peaceful transfer of land it was necessary that landlords get more than just strict terms. Once that misunderstanding was cleared up Dunraven went on to refer to the impending sale of his estate:

I am in hope of settling with my tenants on the basis of 21½ and 23 year's purchase including one years' arrears – that is to say 20½ and 22 years. Proportion is all wrong but was approved by tenants. I would give them easier terms for they have always been prompt and more than honest. Though there is no conspiracy [to inflate prices] on the part of the landlords I am sure that the action of the *Freeman* has made many more afraid.²⁴

²² LL, 15 April 1904.

²³ O'Brien to Dunraven, 31 May 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/3).

²⁴ Dunraven to O'Brien, 4 June 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/4). Dunraven was not the final arbiter in the case of sales as any figures agreed by him with his tenants would have to satisfy the trustees of the estate. He held his estate only as a tenant for life.

During 1904 for some unexplained reason, but probably due to the failure of a hard-core of tenants to offer the kind of figures required, Dunraven was contemplating selling to the estates commissioners for subsequent resale to the tenants. This was causing him difficulties on a number of fronts as he explained to O'Brien:

(1) I have practically settled terms with my tenants direct and if I were to sell to the commissioners it is quite possible tenants might be able to say that I was breaking faith with them.

(2) The commissioners have given no idea of their idea of security . . . As my terms are 25% off second term rents, a larger margin surely, but neither is it large enough for the commissioners.

(3) The commission is undermanned and I don't think they are anxious for work. A landlord is at their mercy. If they refused his offer he could never again get tenants to accept it however reasonable it might be and tenants are very anxious to get hold of untenanted land. They think it ought to be used for the benefit of tenants. Nevertheless I will certainly do what I can to sell to them.²⁵

Despite the above aspiration, Dunraven did not succeed in selling to his tenants. One month later, despite severe reservations, he had made up his mind:

Since I returned from Kiel I have been endeavouring to arrange a sale direct to the commissioners but I am doubtful of success. One difficulty exists on my part. I don't think any would arise on the part of the commissioners, but though I have no direct proposition I think objections would come from my tenants. I fancy they fear lest the commissioners, in some cases, demand more onerous terms and would deal with untenanted land, but not evicted land, over their heads. Also they [the tenants] do not like the appearance of a failure between us to come to a mutually satisfactory agreement. The great majority have signed agreements. I cannot go back on a bargain or appear to break faith with them. You will understand my difficulty if I do not succeed.²⁶

²⁵ Dunraven to O'Brien, 21 June 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/4).

²⁶ Dunraven to O'Brien, 21 July 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/4).

O'Brien replied two days later. He understood Dunraven's dilemma but agreed that any agreement made should be adhered to. Furthermore it would strengthen Dunraven's position if he gave his tenants the option of buying directly or through the commissioners. O'Brien pointed out that whatever way the sale of the estate turned out it was likely to be the most significant transaction of its kind in the country:

Our people (and all people) largely argue from illustrations rather than abstract principles and the whole question between the conference and its critics will be largely decided by the figures in this particular case. The first term figures, especially, are the vital ones and I am sure you would be the last to be daunted by mere money loss of a year's purchase here and there in a matter that may involve the whole future of the country.²⁷

The rebuke of O'Brien, who was alluding to the generous terms offered by Lindsey Talbot-Crosbie to his tenants at Ardfert, obviously stung Dunraven. He explained that he could not match those, 'I don't know but I am under the impression that he made a considerable loss of income. He could afford the loss, others cannot'.²⁸

It is possible that at this stage the tenants on the estate did not know what was happening. A question in the house of commons, tabled by P. J. O'Shaughnessy, West Limerick, asked if Dunraven had sold or had arranged to sell his estate in County Limerick to the commissioners and, if so, at what price. The answer by Wyndham, the Irish secretary, was that no application had been made.²⁹ Dunraven was not included in a list of estates sold by late August. Both Talbot-Crosbie and Lord Monteagle were on the list.³⁰ During September O'Brien made a number of appeals,³¹ in general terms, to Dunraven that landlords, especially those connected with the Irish Reform Association, should be more sympathetic in dealing with tenants who wished to purchase, if for no other reason but to foster the spirit of conciliation amongst them. Despite O'Brien's effort to persuade Dunraven to act otherwise,

27 O'Brien to Dunraven, 23 July 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/4).

28 Dunraven to O'Brien, 24 July 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/4).

29 *Hansard*, vol. 139, col. 729, 3 August 1904.

30 *LL*, 29 August 1904.

31 O'Brien to Dunraven, 2, 6 September 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/5).

he went ahead with the sale to the commissioners,³² and a firm announcement to that effect was made in mid October,³³ followed later by a notice in the *Dublin Gazette* in which the commissioners gave notice of their intention to acquire the lands of Dunraven in the baronies of Coshma, Connello Upper, Kenry and Pubblebrien.³⁴ Any lingering hopes of a direct sale had now vanished.

Writing to O'Brien Dunraven referred to what was to cause a long delay in completing the sale to the commissioners - shortage of money on their part:

If sales are blocked for want of money I fear the consequences may be serious and I confess at the present I see no way out of the difficulty unless loss is put upon the rates and sufficient money is raised to satisfy agreements.³⁵

Although Dunraven wrote to O'Brien on 4 and 11 December it was not until the 18th that he informed O'Brien of his agreement with the commissioners. At the end of a long letter Dunraven again gave his opinion on the slowdown in land sales and told O'Brien of his position in the matter:

I have never hesitated to say that as far as I could judge owners were, in most cases, asking too much and occupiers, in most cases, offering too little . . . As far as I am concerned I have sold to the commissioners and I have no further responsibility in the matter.³⁶

One can infer that Dunraven was suggesting to O'Brien that in his case the breakdown, in the direct sale, was not his fault and also that he did not intend to bring pressure to bear on his fellow landlords to seek reduced prices for their land. Dunraven and O'Brien did not correspond during the first half of 1905. The sale took a further turn in the second part of the year. Some tenants, partly due to the tardiness in completing the sale or for other reasons, now unknown, decided to withhold rent as a protest. This resulted in the estate office serving

32 See Dunraven to John Cronin, an evicted tenant, 5 October 1904, cited in *LC*, 8 October 1904.

33 *LL*, 17 October 1904; *LC*, 18 October 1904.

34 *Dublin Gazette*, 22 November 1904.

35 Dunraven to O'Brien, 30 November 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/5).

36 Dunraven to O'Brien, 18 December 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/5).

writs.³⁷ Dunraven informed O'Brien:

I think that the sale of my estate will, after much [discussion] be soon completed. They [the commissioners] have made an offer slightly reducing my terms but which of course I accept and the only hitch remaining is whether my trustees and Judge Meredith will agree to £6,000 being taken from the corpus of the estate and lodged with the commissioners to provide for maintenance of river banks.³⁸

Dunraven then confessed that he would be glad when the whole business was successfully concluded because 'attempts to frustrate a friendly settlement are now mounting.'³⁹ The causes of Dunraven's anxiety were two fold. Earlier in the year there was unrest in Croom over the future of the Carrigeen ploughlands⁴⁰ while Dunraven had become aware, in early October, that the sale of his estate (and presumably others) was the subject of discussions at monthly meetings of the joint executives of the County Limerick United Irish League. In September a resolution was passed condemning the practice of allowing hunting to continue when what were described as 'obnoxious hunters'⁴¹ were present. The following month a certain course of action, much stronger, which naturally was not disclosed to the press, was agreed, specifically referring to what was happening at Adare. In the course of an editorial on that new item the *Limerick Leader* opined:

Though Dunraven was one of the originators of the conference that led to the passing of the land act in 1903 and though his sentiments were, on the surface, in favour of a policy of conciliation, yet his later actions are not consistent with his public pronouncements and do not give grounds for the hope that the co-operation and agreement so ardently wished for will be brought about by the lord of Adare Manor . . . Writs are a menace to the tenant farmer and a blow at their peace and happiness.⁴²

37 LL, 29 September 1905; LC, 30 September 1905. For further information on the background to the service of the writs and the names of those on whom writs were served see *FJ*, 28 September 1905. The writs were issued on 21 September.

38 Dunraven to O'Brien, 6 October 1905 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/6).

39 Ibid.

40 This matter is dealt with in the sale of the town of Croom.

41 LL, 22 September 1905.

42 LL, 20 October 1905.

On receiving Dunraven's letter of anxiety O'Brien made enquiries and was able to confirm that 'Dunraven was right in thinking that there is a disposition to organise trouble on his estate.'⁴³ It was important, he pointed out, that the commissioners expedite and complete the sale. O'Brien once again harped back to advice he had given in the past:

I am sure you fully realise how all important it is, in your case especially, that even at the risk of some sacrifices of feeling, nothing in the management of the estate should give dishonest opponents the material for any outcry that would have even the semblance of justification.⁴⁴

Whatever trouble was planned by the UIL did not materialise and the disaffected fell back on more usual methods of both putting pressure on Dunraven and eliciting information. In a parliamentary question⁴⁵ William Lundon, East Limerick, asked whether the Adare and Croom estates, containing 11,694 acres had been sold directly to the tenants or through the estates commissioners; the number of years purchase involved, and whether the sale was based on first or second rents. The answer gave little comfort to anyone. It merely stated that the commissioners were negotiating with Dunraven and no information was available until the sale was completed. The sale to the commissioners had, in fact, been completed on 2 June 1906 when the statutory requirement of giving notice⁴⁶ to claimants and encumbrances was complied with, allowing them one month to lodge claims or objections not already made.

Dunraven, again anxious to justify his decision to sell to the commissioners, later

43 O'Brien to Dunraven, 20 October 1905 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/6). At the time of the sale two tenants were in dispute with Dunraven. The matter was raised in the house of commons by way of parliamentary questions, *Hansard*, vol. 162, col. 416, 30 July 1906; vol. 167, col. 376, 12 December 1906; vol. 171, cols. 1667-8, 26 March 1907; vol. 178, col. 545, 16 July 1907 in the case of one, and vol. 179, cols. 1222-3, 1 August 1907 in the case of the other. There is no suggestion that either tenant was connected with the trouble on the estate.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 161, cols. 684-5, 23 July 1906.

46 *LC*, 2 June 1906. Since Dunraven's lands at Knocknasna, Abbeyfeale, were not included in the schedule of sale it was to be assumed that they had been sold under earlier land acts. This may not have been the case. In Dunraven papers, UL, D 3196/G/16/3 there is an entry, dated 22 November 1905, of £5 received from John Thomas McCarthy, Knocknasna, presumably for annual rent, while an entry for 13 December 1905 mentions sale to O'Sullivan, Knocknasna. See also the same papers, 1904 to 1906, for further details leading to the sale of the estate to the estates commissioners; the advice given to the estate office by Barrington and Son [the Dublin firm of solicitors dealing with the negotiations between the estate office and the estates commissioners] that it was proper to issue writs to tenants who had not agreed to purchase and who refused to pay rent (1 March 1905), and a sum of £20,000, mentioned on 14 April 1905 in connection with the sale. It is not clear whether it represented a down payment or the total amount to be paid for the estate [this is least likely of the two options]. Dunraven signed acceptance of the final offer of the estates commissioners on 9 January 1906.

explained⁴⁷ to O'Brien how he himself had changed his thinking on that point. When the land conference commenced, Dunraven felt that all sales should be to the commissioners. This found no favour then and the final report laid down that, except in exceptional cases, sales should be directly between landlord and tenant. Dunraven said that he often regretted that decision. While he does not explain what caused the breakdown in the proposed sale to his tenants, he reverted to his original theory when negotiations failed at local level. A further reason why Dunraven may have opted to proceed as he did was the long drawn out process underway, on the Glin demesne, in respect of direct sales.⁴⁸ Negotiations had commenced there in 1903, were broken off in 1907, only to re commence later. Since the knight of Glin was a son-in-law of Dunraven and the agent at Adare, Peter Fitzgerald, was also agent for the Glin estate, it soon became an acute embarrassment for Dunraven. Once negotiations at Adare became deadlocked, he wisely decided to sell to the commissioners rather than go down the same road as the knight. The Carrigeen lands, consisting of about 130 acres and not sold with the rest of the estate, were acquired by the commissioners in 1910. To the disappointment of locals it was mostly given to people living outside the parish of Croom. This was decided upon by an inspector of the commissioners and not by Dunraven who by now had fully disposed of his vast estate.⁴⁹

A number of points can be made concerning the treatment of tenants on the estate prior to the sale. Firstly, during the county council election of 1899 it was alleged by the nationalist side, in a number of circulars specifically aimed at the tenants on the Dunraven estate, that they were the most rack rented in Munster. Yet the agent was able to say, in February 1904,⁵⁰ that most of the tenancies in Dohera, Banogue (which were typical of tenancies on the estate) were held under first term rents. If the rents were exorbitant, as alleged, it is remarkable that none or few tenants there resorted to the land courts after 1896, as it was common knowledge that second term rents were generally reduced by as much as 20%. In addition, in Dohera when rents were increased in the early 1880s, after a comprehensive valuation had been carried out, they were reduced by 15% afterwards when it came to light that the tenants were unable to meet the new charges.⁵¹ There is no better endorsement of Dunraven's benign attitude to his tenants than that contained in a letter written by James

47 Dunraven to O'Brien, 14 January 1907 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/9).

48 LL, 25 October 1903; LC, 7 March 1907, 6 February 1909.

49 LL, 8 August 1910.

50 LC, 20 February 1904.

51 LL, 23 November 1903.

Moran, Ballinvoher, Ballysteen, to the *Limerick Chronicle* during the election campaign of 1899. Moran, a tenant himself and principal teacher (1885 to 1903) of the local national school listed four ways in which Dunraven had succoured distressed tenants in that townland. In one case materials were sent from Adare and £10 was given to Moran to oversee the erection of a dwelling house; a rent reduction and arrears cancelled (as many as five or six years in some cases) about twenty years before that; money was provided for drainage at about the same time, and, in 1896, Moran was again given £33 to oversee the construction of a roadway for five tenants, whose total rents fell short of that figure.⁵² It has already been seen how the Castleroberts, Mountearl and other tenants observed that they had been exceptionally treated in the past.⁵³ These examples support the view that the tenants were not rack rented but far from it. Secondly, it was popular in nationalist circles to promote the idea that Dunraven, the father of land purchase, was himself dilatory in furthering and closing his own sale. When a decision was made to sell to the commissioners any temporising occurred at that end due to the vastness of the Adare estate and the delay in examining titles⁵⁴ there, coupled with the sheer volume of sales going through in the early years that rapidly used up the capital sum allocated for that purpose. Thirdly, Dunraven was first and foremost a hard-nosed businessman.⁵⁵ He had advocated long before and during the land conference

52 Moran to LL, 17 March 1899. For more on Ballinvoher and James Moran see John Fehene, *Ballysteen, The people and the place* (Cork, 1998), pp 183-4, 72-3. Curiously enough that same letter was used to discredit Dunraven during the election campaign. Tenantry document number 3 (my numbering) asked 'where is there a poorer or more oppressed tenantry in this country than his? . . . the letter speaks for itself ... the state of affairs disclosed as existing there should never have been tolerated by a civilised people ... the sooner landlordism that produces such a state of things is ended the better' (Dunraven papers, Adare, D 3196/G/24). To Coleman and his followers defeat for Dunraven at the polls would bring about an end to landlordism. It was a common nationalist perception that all the ills of Ireland, political, social and economic, were due to British misrule or English influences. Once liberation or freedom was achieved then all of Ireland's disabilities would somehow disappear.

53 LL, 9 November 1903.

54 In a summary of the Dunraven papers, compiled by PRONI, when the papers were held there, reference is made to the complicated title to Adare and the County Limerick estates. 'The title to most of the County Limerick estate, in and around Adare and elsewhere in the county, is piecemeal and exceedingly complicated and no doubt had to be made deliberately obscure after the passing of the Act to Prevent Popery, with its swingeing restrictions on Catholic ownership, in 1704' (Dunraven papers, D 3196, summary, p.7). These papers are now in the University of Limerick. When negotiations to purchase were underway between Barrington and Son and the estates commissioners a total of 275 forms of undertaking by tenants to purchase their holdings were sent to the estate office in Adare by the solicitors. This gives some idea of the number of holdings on the estate (UL, D 3196/G/16/3, 28 January 1905).

55 Whatever about Dunraven's management of the affairs of the Finance Committee of the first Limerick County Council, he certainly kept a close eye on the management of the estate at Adare, despite his frequent absences from home. When Mr Charles Curling resigned (said to have been of his own accord) the agency (or joint-agency, with Mr G. M. Fitzgerald of Limerick) of the estate at Adare, in December 1880, the earl then appointed the well-known firm of estate agents, Messrs Hussey and Townsend, Cork, to succeed. This appointment was, apparently, viewed with extreme disfavour by the tenants who lost no time in organising a kind of revolt against the new agents. Dunraven, however, stood firm and Mr Peter Fitzgerald was selected by the new agents to act on their

discussions that treating the landlords fairly and recompensing them adequately, if not generously, was the best method of persuading them to sell. He can hardly be expected to have acted otherwise in the case of his own estate.

behalf at Adare (see *Cork Examiner*, 16 December 1880; *Limerick Chronicle*, 18 December 1880 (when Dunraven's refusal to comply with a memorial of the tenants to accept Griffith's valuation as the basis for rents seems to have sparked off the resignations and subsequent trouble), 14 December 1880, 6, 11, January, 1 February 1881. Other examples of Dunraven's close attention to estate matters can be seen in the chapters on the county council election of 1899, the sale of the estate and of the town of Croom, and the tobacco enterprise.

TOWN HOUSES FOR SALE

Town tenants were not specifically adverted to either in the report of the land conference, January 1903, or in the Irish land act of the same year. In the latter, a tenant was defined¹ as one who occupied land under a contract of tenancy. This was in keeping with the historical definition as used in the various land acts, which had preceded 1903. The 1903 act did, however, enlarge the classes of persons who could purchase land by defining a tenant, amongst other definitions, as a person being the tenant of a holding on an estate. In this case a holding was defined as a parcel of land, with no stricture as to its size. On the one hand this would seem to exclude town tenants and would particularly affect, for instance, residents of the town of Croom where three-quarters of the houses were part of the vast Adare or Dunraven estate and were held mostly on yearly tenancies. On the other hand many town tenants throughout the country were aggrieved, as rented houses often included a plot of land at the rear, which might then entitle them to inclusion in the terms of the 1903 act.

The United Irish League, acceding to inquiries, issued a letter to the press in February 1904, encouraging town tenants to actively seek the purchase of their houses under similar terms and conditions as pertained, in the land act, to land purchase.² In the following months, meetings of town tenants were held in Glin, Listowel and Abbeyfeale.³ Yet Croom seemed slow to follow suit. The most active local organisation set up was in Abbeyfeale, where the inspiration was the parish priest, the redoubtable Fr William Casey, who having been credited with breaking the stranglehold of landlordism in that area, now set about freeing the town tenants. Nation-wide, the campaign began to blossom, and when, in August, 1904, a conference on the topic of town purchase was arranged in Dublin, Croom RDC, agreed⁴ to send two delegates there. By the following month, September, 1904, the Croom tenants, and sub-tenants, were sufficiently organised to send a signed requisition to Dunraven, testing the water as it were, to enquire about purchase, as it now transpired that landlords were empowered to include sales to town tenants when disposing of their properties.⁵ The reply, through the earl's secretary, was to the effect that Dunraven was then indisposed but would consider the request presently. This was regarded as satisfactory and gave hope that the town

1 Fottrell and Fottrell, *Irish land act, 1903 explained* (Dublin, 1903), p.77.

2 *LL*, 24 February 1904.

3 *LL*, various dates, March, July 1904.

4 *LL*, 5 August 1904.

5 *LC*, 13 September 1904.

of Croom would be included in the imminent sale of Dunraven's extensive properties.⁶ This move by the Croom tenants was not known to 'A Leaguer' the pseudonym of a letter-writer to the *Limerick Leader*, when he castigated the townspeople on two fronts:

It seems incredible that the house tenants on the Dunraven and Lyons property are making no move to improve the condition, not only of themselves but of their little town by all accounts the rents are as high in Croom for the class of houses we see there as they are in the most rack-rented city in Ireland. Imagine paying close on £20 a year and rates for any house in such a village as Croom.⁷

As had happened at the time of the 1899 election Dunraven was here again accused of rack-renting.

The agent of the Dunraven estate, Peter Fitzgerald met with the Croom tenants in February 1905 and told them that Dunraven was willing to sell for ready cash or, to those who had no land attached to their homes, he would give them a few acres to bring them under the land purchase act. Fitzgerald suggested that twenty years' purchase would be a fair price.⁸ As the sale to tenants in Croom was a prototype of what could be achieved in that connection the negotiations there were being watched with interest. The following month the matter came before the executive committee of the Town Tenants' Association in Dublin:

A number of letters were read dealing with the sale of Croom and satisfaction was expressed at the action which Dunraven has taken in assisting the town tenants to purchase their holdings.⁹

The Irish Party introduced a town tenants' bill in 1904 but because it contained a clause to establish town tenants' fair rent courts the measure created much opposition and was

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *LL*, 18 January 1905.

⁸ *LL*, 24 February 1905. That newspaper later alleged that the offer that day had to do with the forthcoming county council election when it was expected that Coleman would again oppose Dunraven, but following the withdrawal of the former, the number of years purchase was raised to twenty three years. The *Limerick Leader* was incensed and used the article to send a message to the estate agent (and presumably Dunraven) that he was not dealing with simple people (*LL*, 15 May 1905).

⁹ *LL*, 17 March 1905.

dropped. In 1906 the party again promoted a town tenants bill which passed all stages and came into operation on 1 January 1907.¹⁰

Believing that Fitzgerald's twenty year purchase offer was merely an opening gambit, it was decided at the Croom end to advance the cause by sending a deputation to Adare and contacting the local MP, P. J. O'Shaughnessy with a view to raising the matter on the floor of the house of commons. The deputation, led by the parish priest, Fr Thomas Lee, met with Fitzgerald in May 1905 where both sides expressed willingness to do business on terms to be agreed.¹¹ Before the question of the number of years required for purchase was discussed, reference was made to untenanted land at Carrigeen, Croom, which had lately come back into the possession of the estate, and which had been excluded from the other lands sold to the Estates Commissioners. The former tenant, John Christy, had surrendered this land about seven years previously, as the rent was too high. It was then worked by the Landlords' Corporation but was also found to be unprofitable. After that it was turned into a sheep ranch and grazed on the eleven months' system. Local small farmers and labourers had recently applied to the estates commissioners requesting a division of the land.¹² The Carrigeen ploughlands posed severe problems for Dunraven. Not only was then application made to the estates commissioners over the head of the estate office, but also Dunraven was seen to acquiesce in the notorious eleven months' grazing system that was causing so much restlessness among the small farmers of the west and midlands of Ireland. Fitzgerald stated his unwillingness to break up this land as he said that it would make an excellent racecourse, but, after pressure was put on him, he conceded that there was a possibility that it could be divided up among the town tenants so as to bring them under the 1903 act as agricultural tenants, that is, holders of a parcel of land on an estate. He was adamant, however, that with or without the Carrigeen land, the length of the purchase would have to be on the basis of twenty three years. Eventually a compromise was reached. Fitzgerald promised to submit to Dunraven the possibility of appointing two arbiters, one from each side, with a view to arriving at a price and settlement that would be agreeable to both the estate office and

¹⁰ The act dealt in the main with the rights of landlords and tenants, compensation, disturbance etc. (Clery, Kennedy and Dawson, *Town tenants (Ireland) act* (Dublin 1907). As there was no stipulation in the act for the provision of loans or credit facilities, it had little relevance for many tenants, in places such as Croom, who were contemplating the purchase of their rented houses.

¹¹ *LC*, 20 May 1905. The attitude of Fitzgerald was that Dunraven had no real desire to sell Croom but if he did so it would be on the basis of dealing fairly with the tenants rather than giving them a present (*LL*, 15 May 1905).

¹² *LL*, 10 February 1905.

interested town tenants in Croom.¹³ Dunraven was anxious, despite the hard line adopted by his agent, to expedite the sale of Croom lest the trouble that was brewing in Adare might manifest itself and, in any event, the manner in which the tenancies had evolved in Croom over the years had brought their own complications. Dunraven confided in O'Brien:

There may also be difficulties about my property in Croom. I am very willing to sell and reserved 100 acres of land in hand with the purpose of assisting a sale. But the commissioners will not make advances on house property and the difficulties in a property consisting of long and short leases and weekly tenancies and yearly tenancies are enormous.¹⁴

By the time the parliamentary questions¹⁵ were asked by O'Shaughnessy, in May 1905, there was general acceptance in Croom that the sale process was to be initiated through the commissioners. The questions, which were originated more to bring moral pressure on Dunraven and to highlight the position than to elicit information, asked whether the estate commissioners would take steps to purchase the town of Croom for resale to the town tenants at the same terms as related to the agricultural tenants. In reply, the chief secretary, Long, stated that the question as to whether the commissioners had power to buy and then sell town property had been referred by them to Mr Justice Meredith. As nothing concrete had transpired more than one year later, William Lundon asked a further parliamentary question regarding the Croom sale. The chief secretary was asked whether, seeing as Dunraven had sold his estate to his occupying farming tenants [which was not quite accurate], he had sold to town tenants in Adare and Croom and whether the Carrigeen lands were still available? The answer elicited no information as Bryce merely stated that no sale had yet been instituted before the Estate Commissioners¹⁶

By early 1907 it became obvious to Dunraven that the commissioners were not

13 The *Limerick Leader*, never losing an opportunity to portray Dunraven (or in this case the estate office) in an unfavourable light, reported that when Fitzgerald suggested an outside arbiter, the Croom spokesman, Fr Lee, requested that his side also appoint one. As this was not acceptable to Fitzgerald, the Croom delegation had no option but to go along with what was suggested (*LL*, 15 May 1905).

14 Dunraven to O'Brien, 6 October 1905 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/6).

15 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 146, col. 767-8, 18 May 1905; cols. 864, 934, 19 May 1905.

16 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 161, cols. 684-5, 23 July 1906. The tenants in Adare village did not begin purchasing their holdings until the 1970s.

empowered to acquire his Croom village property under the terms of the 1903 land act but was aware that MacDonnell was working on a scheme to enable purchase to be made under the terms of the Labourers' Act of 1906. Since the rest of his estate was already sold to the commissioners he was reluctant to hold on to the town of Croom. Accordingly the agent, Fitzgerald wrote¹⁷ to Croom RDC to say that Dunraven would accept sixteen years purchase, but warned that the Labourers' Act only provided for sale of the land on which the houses stood. It so happened that, pursuant to a rumour that the houses were to be put up for sale, Croom RDC, mindful that many tenants were not in a position to purchase their houses, decided to act. Approaches were made to the estate office and, on the basis of the reply,¹⁸ a decision was taken in principle, at a meeting of Croom RDC on 25 April 1907, to purchase, under the labourers' act, and on acceptable terms, a certain number of houses in Croom.¹⁹ Then began a period of protracted negotiation to enable the council, firstly, to satisfy the demands of the LGB and, secondly, to secure the funding required. This decision was noted by the LGB on examining the minutes of the relevant rural council meeting whereupon, the following month, it issued²⁰ guidelines to be observed before they would sanction the actual purchase of any houses. Firstly, an inspector of the board would have to be satisfied that necessary improvements had been carried out to bring the houses up to a certain standard. Then permission for purchase could be given under section 6 of the 1906 labourers' act. Secondly, any loan sanctioned for carrying out any improvement scheme would issue on land purchase terms.

No speedy resolution was in sight as matters dragged on. As the business now seemed to have been taken over by the district council, the townspeople were very much in

17 Minutes, Croom RDC, 11 April 1907.

18 Dunraven, through the estate office, reiterated that he was prepared to sell on the basis of sixteen years purchase and would be glad if the council would

consider buying the houses. If so, he was prepared to enter into negotiations (Minutes of Croom RDC, 25 April 1907). This showed a change of attitude

compared with earlier statements from the estate office.

19 LL, 27 May 1907; Minutes, Croom RDC, 25 April 1907. The facility by which town tenants could avail of purchase had, for some time, occupied the mind of the under-secretary, MacDonnell, who looked at the problem more from the landlord point of view than that of the tenant, 'landlords must be desirous of facilitating the sale of town holdings, otherwise they would be left with them on their hands. If the estates commissioners could not sell them they will exclude them from the estate sales before buying the latter.' MacDonnell to Bryce, 11 February 1906 (NLI, Bryce papers, 11,012 (2)). At that time he was working on a scheme that would provide both loans and collateral. As a result, on 13 November 1906, the lord lieutenant made the necessary regulation empowering the treasury to loan money, under the Labourers' Act of 1906, to town house dwellers (LC, 25 April 1907).

20 LL, 27 May 1907.

the dark as to what was happening. A deputation from the town tenants attended a meeting of Croom RDC, in August 1908, with a view to having negotiations opened urgently. Rumours were again rife in Croom that the ground rent of the town was about to be purchased by a syndicate to the detriment of all occupiers, including those who were in a position to buy their rented properties. The collective nerves of the town were settled when the chairman of the RDC, John Coleman, assured the delegation that negotiations to purchase the freehold of about thirty houses, where the tenants were not in a position to do so themselves, were already underway, and that in the case of other potential purchasers the rumours were groundless.²¹ By October, negotiations had been completed,²² save for the question of price, something that proved very troublesome and delayed an early settlement. The district council was standing by its offer of £2,000 for the thirty or so houses, while Ballingal, the new estate agent, held out for £2,200. Having no other alternative, Croom RDC was forced to add the additional £200, but requested that the estate office repair the houses before the council took them over. As this was not acceptable to the estate office, further negotiations had to take place on this issue.

In December 1908 the council prepared a scheme of local and town improvement necessitating a loan of £8,205 from the exchequer under the labourers' act, the funds to be used for the building of new cottages and the proposed acquisition of thirty-four houses in the town from Dunraven. Following the adoption of the scheme by the council on 11 February 1909 the LGB held an enquiry,²³ in August, into the application for funds.

Once the application for funding was successful the district council pressed ahead and decided²⁴ to purchase, on the same terms as the adjoining houses, the much larger dispensary building in High Street, which had not been included in the proposed sale. In an effort to expedite a settlement, the solicitor to the RDC, P. E. O'Donnell, brought the correspondence file between his office and Barrington and Son, the estate legal adviser, to the February, 1910 meeting²⁵ of Croom RDC. He produced a draft agreement and advised the council to accept it as it stood, as no better terms could be procured. The council adjourned the matter to the March meeting. At that meeting also, an engineer, B. F. Sheehy, produced his report on the

²¹ LC, 15 August 1908.

²² LC, 24 October 1908.

²³ LC, 24 August 1909.

²⁴ LL, 17 January 1910.

²⁵ LL, 28 February 1910.

condition of the houses to be taken into the ownership of the council. He was of the opinion that various repairs and renewals, the materials for which would cost £30, needed to be carried out, but he also said that R.R.Ballingal, the newly appointed agent, was willing to pay that sum provided the council agreed to carry out the repair work.²⁶ Negotiations on this latter point must have been successfully concluded because the advertisement announcing the sale of the Croom town houses, excluding those sold to the council and the Carrigeen lands, appeared in the public press on 9 July 1910.²⁷ The auction took place in Dublin on 12 July where, we are told:

The tenants were present in great numbers . . . and in nearly every instance succeeded in purchasing their holdings . . . buying them with great spirit.²⁸

As a gesture of munificence, misguided, as it appeared later, and designed as a belated lesson to Dunraven for alleged inordinate high rents exacted in the past, Croom RDC decided at a meeting in September, 1910,²⁹ on the suggestion of the parish priest, Fr Tim Curtin, to reduce the rents by 40% on the newly acquired houses. A Croom hotelier and no doubt, a concerned ratepayer, Charles Quaid, in a letter³⁰ to the *Limerick Leader*, complaining of extravagance on the part of the district council, gave some information on the recent sale of the so-called new houses. He wrote that twenty-eight houses had been purchased at £70 each and that, at the instigation of Curtin, a further house (the dispensary) had been bought for £160, which cost £35 in repairs later.

Trouble was looming, however, for the district council. In a report to the March meeting³¹ of 1912, the chairman, still John Coleman, said that the tenants in the rented houses were now being summoned for non-payment of rates. He explained that in the Dunraven days, some 27 or 28 tenants had collectively paid £165..10..8 per annum, out of which Dunraven paid £18..4..6 [eighteen pounds, four shillings and six pence] in rates, giving a net figure for tenant payment of £147..6..2. Under the new arrangements, the same numbers of tenants paid £99..10 shillings, to the council, in rent, and were expected to additionally pay

²⁶ LL, 28 March 1910.

²⁷ LC, 9 July 1910.

²⁸ LC, 14 July 1910.

²⁹ Minutes of Croom RDC, 22 September 1910 (LL, 26 Sept. 1910).

³⁰ LL, 2 June 1911.

³¹ Minutes of Croom RDC, 7 March 1912.

£17..6..7 to cover rates, making a total of £116..6..7. This resulted in a saving of £30..9..2, overall, or a little more than one pound to each householder. As Dunraven had not charged directly for rates, the new tenants apparently had assumed that the same system of payment would pertain under the new rubric. Coleman, however, was of the opinion that, based on those figures, the tenants had nothing to complain about, and in any event, when the representatives of the tenants first approached him to see whether the district council would buy the houses, as there was a danger of their being bought over the heads of the occupiers, no mention was then made of any form of rent or rate reduction. He added, rather ruefully, that if he had taken the advice offered to him at the time, he would not have pushed the council to buy the houses. A decree³² for poor law rates was granted to the district council, at the petty sessions in Croom, in April 1912, against twenty seven tenants. From the figures given by Coleman it can be seen that, in the case of the houses purchased by the council, the average rent figure, including rates, payable in the past to the estate office was something over five pounds per house. This was a far cry from the figure of twenty pounds per house so conveniently enunciated by '*A Leaguer*', in January 1905, as being the rent demanded by Dunraven and which had to be paid. Assuming that the rent payers mentioned in the letter were those least able to pay, then the charge of rack renting against Dunraven does not stand up to scrutiny. On the other hand, another interesting point is that, on the figures quoted by the hotelier, Quaid, then it would seem that the council paid about fourteen years purchase per house, not the twenty years below which Dunraven was not prepared to even consider when negotiations first commenced and before the council stepped in.

Epilogue

The matter must have ended after that, as neither the tenants nor the council are mentioned subsequently in newspapers reports. One interesting conclusion can be drawn from that court decree. One can recall that the financial problems experienced in the early years of Limerick County Council largely stemmed from either non-collection or non-payment of rates. Lessons had been learned, no doubt the hard way, and Coleman, still a member of the county council, now knew that monies due, whether to the grand juries of old or to the bodies set up under the local government act of 1898, had to be collected, one way or another.

³² LL, 8 April 1912.

Despite many trials and setbacks, the town tenants of Croom achieved ownership of their homes quite early, some by direct purchase from the estate, others as tenants of the district council. No doubt that could not have been achieved without the cooperation and benevolence of Dunraven. On the other hand it could be argued that Dunraven was more than anxious to finally rid himself of Croom and so was happy to facilitate the sale. Abbeyfeale town tenants, who had been in the field before Croom, did not finally manage to complete purchase from the Ellis estate until 1921,³³ the loss in momentum there, resulting perhaps from the death of the parish priest, William Casey, on 29 December 1907, while in Hospital, County Limerick, it was 1925³⁴ before terms were arrived at between the town tenants there and the Castlerosse estate.

33 *LL*, 15 April 1921.

34 *LL*, 22 August 1925.

RIGHTING A GRIEVOUS WRONG

Agrarian evictions in Ireland were as old as the landlord system itself. The practice was much exacerbated by the consolidation and clearances during and following the great famine of the late 1840s. With the founding of the land league and the adoption of agrarian injustices as the main plank of the Home Rule and later nationalist parties, the vulnerable tenant was promoted to the front line of this phony war between imperialism and nationalism. By rigidly adhering to principles, largely not of their own choosing, increasing numbers of tenants were ejected or evicted from their holdings, often accompanied by a show of force, and accomplished with much brutality. Thus was created a distinct entity in Irish rural life, the evicted tenant, a title, which is itself a contradiction. Little was done to alleviate his distress and misery in successive land acts, so when the report of the land conference was issued in January 1903, in which article XV stated ‘that any project for the solution of the Irish Land Question should be accompanied by a settlement of the evicted tenants’ question upon an equitable basis’¹ the end of the plight of the so called ‘walking wounded of the land war’ appeared to be in sight. It was confidently felt that the land act, promised by the government to implement the terms of the conference, would bring to an end a sorry chapter in Irish agrarian history.

At their first meeting in late November 1902, the subject of the reinstatement of evicted tenants was discussed between Dunraven and John Redmond. Dunraven was, as Redmond subsequently reported to William O’Brien:

personally in favour of any satisfactory scheme for evicted tenants and would agree that a conference would urge on the government that some such scheme, if possible, be devised and included in the [subsequent] bill.²

During further pre-conference discussions Dunraven and Redmond, while not departing from the desire to effect a settlement, were not as specific as before on how the hoped-for outcome could be achieved. For instance, at their third meeting when they agreed that the conference should confine itself to five principal points, number four stated that the conference should ‘recommend settlement of the evicted tenants’ question.’³ At the actual conference not much

1 Land conference report in Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, Appendix II, pp 179-85.

2 Redmond to O’Brien, 22 November 1902 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 10,496 (1)).

3 Redmond to O’Brien, 7 December 1902 (NLI, O’Brien 10,496(6)).

time was needed on this topic as both sides agreed in principle to reinstatement and the recommendation contained in article XV of the report, while not specific, showed sufficient intent on the part of the landlord side, whose goodwill would, in the final analysis, be necessary to achieve the desired resolution. The thorny questions arising from reinstatement were successfully glossed over but were to return later to haunt both Dunraven and O'Brien, the chief architects of the conference.

Following the publication of the land conference report, much interest centred on possible reinstatement of evicted tenants and the manner in which this could be achieved without disturbing the rights of those who had replaced them in land tenancy. It was no wonder then that locally based influential interests kept a watching brief on their behalf. At a meeting of Limerick County Council on 17 January, the chairman, Robert Coll, suspended standing orders to give members a chance to voice opinions on the report of the land conference. He proposed a broad resolution, one item of which was that special attention be paid to the claims of evicted tenants. As the resolution included elements of congratulation to both sides of the conference participants, Coleman dissented as the resolution was adopted.⁴ Dunraven was absent from that council meeting but it was a call to him to progress the interests of the evicted tenants.

The land act of 1903⁵ made provision for assistance to be made available to any person who was not a tenant at the time of sale of the estate but who had been in occupation within twenty five years before the passing of the act. In the case of an evicted tenant who had died during the time of his exclusion, the Land Commission could make an advance of money to a personal representative of the deceased person. A further concession was proposed for the above two classes whereby grants, for the purchase of machinery and stock and for the erection of farm buildings, would be freely advanced to enable them to become owners of equipped holdings. The Land Commission would specifically reserve untenanted lands for evicted tenants whose former holdings were occupied by *bona-fide* tenants. The above provisions set down the good intent of the government and augured well for the resolution of this seemingly insurmountable dilemma. On becoming acquainted with these, Dunraven expressed himself pleased with the likely outcome for those who had been evicted, calling the decision to make untenanted lands available both wise and liberal. A source of

⁴ CCM, 17 January 1903.

⁵ Fottrell and Fottrell, *Irish land act, 1903 explained*, pp 60-1.

later embarrassment and irritation for Dunraven was the onset⁶ of conflict, over terms of reinstatement, between his son-in-law, the knight of Glin, and evicted tenants on the Glin estate. The *Limerick Leader* was of the opinion that the action of the knight was to be regretted as one would expect from him ‘practical sympathy with the object for which the land conference met’⁷ and it saw his action as one that Dunraven could and should put to right. Writing to the chairman of the county council, Dunraven explained that the portion of the land act dealing with evicted tenants was left vague in order to give the estates commissioners huge discretionary powers in that area.⁸ By the end of 1903 the evicted tenants of County Limerick were becoming increasingly exasperated by the general reluctance of landlords to initiate any measures to alleviate their distress. They called a meeting in Limerick City, prior to Christmas, at which, while noting the contents of his letter to Chairman Coll and the county council, a long resolution was passed asking Dunraven (as a popularly elected member of the county council and the father of the land conference) to use his influence to have the spirit of the Dunraven treaty carried out. This involved encouraging his fellow landlords to reactivate the spirit of conciliation, so evident in the compilation of the conference report, which would lead to the reinstatement of evicted tenants and thereby expedite the working of the land act. The chairman of the meeting, William H. Ievers, himself from the landlord class, was pleased with this course of action as he felt that Dunraven ‘meant well by evicted tenants.’⁹ It was further decided that a copy of the resolution be sent to the earl and that the chairman and the secretary, John Moloney, Knocklong, be deputed to consult with Dunraven on the matter. The *Limerick Leader*, in editorial comment on the meeting, advised evicted tenants to form associations of their own if their interests were to be served adequately, and, surprisingly, expressed agreement with the decision of evicted tenants to enlist the aid of Dunraven on their behalf.¹⁰ The outcome of the above resolution is not known.

The position of the evicted tenants had not advanced a whole lot when, in April 1904,¹¹ Patrick Vaughan placed a motion before the county council criticising the working of the land act. Coleman, in seconding the motion on that day, suggested that the matter was so

6 *LL*, 21 October 1903.

7 *LL*, 28 October 1903.

8 Dunraven to Coll, *LL*, 9 December 1903; *LC*, 10 December 1903.

9 *LL*, 21 December 1903.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *CCM*, 13 April 1904.

important that it should be dealt with at a special meeting. Dunraven, while dissenting from the terms of the motion, expressed himself in favour of such a meeting, which was held on 28 May when Coleman immediately moved an amendment whereupon Vaughan withdrew his proposal. Point number three of Coleman's five point amendment had ominous undertones for landlords, including Dunraven, who were contemplating selling their estates:

That the Land Commissioners be also instructed to advance no money to vendors, upon whose property tenants have been evicted and who have applied for reinstatement, until those tenants are provided for.¹²

Dunraven, who was again present, felt obliged to stoutly defend the working¹³ in general, of the land act but with regard to evicted tenants he had little to offer. In referring to them he divided them into two categories, those who were evicted for non-payment of rent and those who were evicted during the infamous plan of campaign. He said that the zone system¹⁴ was working very slowly with regard to the former category while the landlord side had real difficulty with the so-called plan tenants. Dunraven pointedly remarked that it was the action of the Irish party, with its obstructionist policy towards the land act that was proving to be the greatest difficulty in the reinstatement of evicted tenants.

In September 1904, O'Brien wrote to Dunraven in an attempt to keep his interest alive in the plight of the evicted tenants. There was a feeling abroad at that time that the best way to solve the impasse between an evicted tenant seeking reinstatement and his former landlord was to introduce a third party as a mediator. O'Brien suggested that Dunraven would be admirably suitable as an arbitrator but first he should show his bona fides by agreeing to sell to his tenants on exemplary terms.¹⁵ Dunraven seems to have been stung by O'Brien's implied criticism that the impasse in the case of evicted tenants was due to tardiness on the

¹² *LL*, 30 May 1904.

¹³ *CCM*, 28 May 1904; *LC*, 31 May 1904.

¹⁴ These were price zones. If the annuity agreed between the landlord and the purchasing tenants was not less than 10% and not more than 30% below the existing annual rent, in the case of 1st term rents (or figures of 20% and 40% respectively in the case of 2nd term rents) then the sale would be automatically approved by the estates commissioners. Otherwise the commissioners would have to satisfy themselves as to the security for the advance and the fairness of the price, leading to delays for both landlord and tenant. The zone system was adumbrated in article 12 of the land conference report but was given life in the land bill. Tenants were wary that it would militate against their interests. The opposite was in fact the case.

¹⁵ O'Brien to Dunraven, 2 September 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/5).

landlord side as he replied the following day, though laid up with gout at his island retreat at Garinish, Sneem. He began by defending the landlords saying that, at the time of the land conference, his side advocated reinstatement or assistance, if they wanted to make a fresh start elsewhere, to evicted tenants but only on the predication that an amnesty or cessation of hostilities was put in place on both sides. Since the conference, a number of factors had occurred to upset that expectation. Firstly, as a section of the nationalist party had not honestly fulfilled the terms of that implied treaty, it had encouraged extremists on the landlord side to feel themselves relieved of any obligations under that same tacit agreement. Secondly, the number and expectations of evicted tenants or their representatives had greatly increased. Was it right, he asked, that all tenants who had been evicted for good and sound reasons should be collected from all quarters of the globe and given a fresh start in life by the state? Thirdly, doubts as to the continuation and size of the bonus to be paid to selling landlords had impeded progress. Under these circumstances Dunraven acquitted the landlords of the entire blame for the slowdown of reinstatement. On the other hand Dunraven always took the side of the landlord. He then went on to tell O'Brien that he had made inquiries among his own class and found no reluctance on their part to reinstate, even those who had been involved in the plan of campaign, which contradicted his view on that subject when he addressed Limerick County Council in May. In conclusion Dunraven felt that the matter of evicted tenants ought to be settled as a matter of urgency and he offered to assist in any way he could towards a resolution but he was 'by no means sure that delay is attributable to any preventable remediable defect or, if it is, what steps could be taken?'¹⁶

Concerning an interview in the *Irish Daily Independent* (6 September 1904) in which Dunraven again divided the tenants into two classes, O'Brien felt¹⁷ that Dunraven was wrong and was acting contrary to what had been agreed at the land conference when it was decided not to draw distinctions between one category and another. The difficulty about classification, O'Brien said, was that some sort of tribunal would have to be set up to consider the merits of each case. O'Brien then mentioned a couple of things, none of which related directly to the tenant side, that might help to ease the situation – landlords in general should be more willing to reinstate on friendly terms; certain powers of arbitration should be given by legislation to the estates commissioners, and members of the IRA should exert themselves more, in conjunction with certain leaders on the nationalist side, in some

¹⁶ Dunraven to O'Brien, 3 September 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/5).

¹⁷ O'Brien to Dunraven, 6 September 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/5).

prominent cases in order to show evidence of intent and goodwill on their part. The intractability of the problem can best be seen when one considers that Dunraven and O'Brien, who both desired a settlement and who worked well together during and after the land conference, could not even agree on the best method of finding a solution, never mind putting it into effect. If that was the effect the impasse had on such profound thinkers and strategists then the chance of any settlement, at a practical level, was surely remote. The attitude of both Dunraven and O'Brien to the impasse is both interesting and revealing. The former defended the landlord side from what he considered to be unwarranted attacks, yet was loathe to heap blame on the tenant side. O'Brien, on the other hand, laid the blame entirely on the landlord side, thereby depicting the tenants as pitifully wronged men, innocent victims of rapacious landlordism. While one cannot deny O'Brien's abiding interest in the settlement of the evicted tenants' question, he also had an eye on his rivals, the so-called irreconcilables, in the Irish Party. Since the party had failed to persuade successive governments to come to the aid of those unfortunate people, it behoved O'Brien to be seen to be advancing their cause, though it was some time later before he supported them publicly.

In reply¹⁸ Dunraven commented on the exhortations of O'Brien with respect to prominent members of the IRA. Dunraven himself would have wished that members of the IRA might have taken more definite steps to put the notion of conciliation into practice by setting up a committee of conciliation to advise and settle, alone or in conjunction with others, on matters in dispute in connection with purchase prices of land or reinstatement of evicted tenants. Dunraven did concede that this could remain a mere council of perfection, unable to satisfy either side and likely to die of ineffectiveness. Dunraven, at least, was making an effort to advance some form of settlement. O'Brien pondered on the idea of this committee of conciliation but once Dunraven said¹⁹ that it would not take any initiatives on its own, the matter was quietly dropped.

At a meeting of the County Limerick Evicted Tenants' Association in September 1904, dissatisfaction with the service rendered to their cause by both the National Directory and United Irish League was evident.²⁰ It was then agreed to proceed along another route by seeking an arbitration committee, composed of what were described as influential, practical and representative persons, to engineer a settlement between such tenants and their former

18 Dunraven to O'Brien, 29 September 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/5).

19 Dunraven to O'Brien, 20 December 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/5).

20 *LL*, 19 September 1904.

landlords. Suggested as suitable and advantageous were Bishop O'Dwyer, Messrs. Coll and Hurley, chairman and vice-chairman of the county council, Dunraven and J. B. Barrington, both landlords and members of the county council, as well as a number of MPs. The editorial writer in the *Limerick Leader* was again pleased by the initiative shown and was satisfied with the choice of the two landlords, who were described as:

influential men who hold opposite opinions to the generality of the evicted. Dunraven and Barrington are thus given an opportunity to do good and show themselves Irishmen who are really in sympathy with a body of suffering fellow-countrymen.²¹

A week later, Moloney, an evicted tenant who was founder as well as secretary of the evicted tenants' association, gave some information as to Dunraven's record with respect to evictions. Only two cases²² had come to his knowledge and as he regarded Dunraven as a man of honour, he felt sure that the two would be reinstated without delay in order to set a good example to all other landlords.²³ One of these men, John Cronin [the other was John Ryan, evicted in Beabus], who had been evicted from his holding at Lisavara, Ballingarry, wrote, probably in the month of September 1904, to the estate office at Adare seeking reinstatement. The earl replied on 5 October, through the agent, Peter Fitzgerald, by a letter that subsequently appeared in the *Limerick Chronicle*.²⁴ In it the earl stated that he had made arrangements to sell the estate to the Estate Commissioners, and that he had no doubt

²¹ Ibid.

²² Other cases of eviction on the estate have been noted, some later than 1904. The case of J. Ryan, *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 152, cols. 1137-8, 28 February 1906; vol. 161, cols. 684-5, 23 July 1906; case of T. Drew, Ardshanbally, *Hansard*, vol. 164, col. 755, 8 November 1906; vol. 166, cols. 1194-5, 6 December 1906; Dunraven papers, UL, D 3196/G/16/3, Estate papers, 1906; vol. 169, col. 1146, 24 February 1907; vol. 171, cols. 1667-8, 26 March 1907; case of J. Normoyle, *Hansard*, vol. 177, col. 1593, 10 July 1907; case of J. Power, *Hansard*, vol. 188, col. 1106, 13 May 1908; vol. 192, col. 869, 15 July 1908. There is at least one incident recorded of evictions on Dunraven property in Knocknasna, Abbeyfeale. Commenting on Dunraven's latest exhortation to Irishmen to join the army, the secretary of the Sinn Fein club in Mountcollins, Michael Kerins, wrote 'does he [Dunraven] remember the time when, with his crowbar brigade, bailiffs and policemen, he evicted his Abbeyfeale tenants and did not care, whether they helped the Empire or not, so long as he had his rent' (*Weekly Observer* (Newcastle West), 4 August 1917). The date of the evictions is not given. In T. J. Morrissey, *Bishop Edward Thomas O'Dwyer of Limerick* (Dublin, 2003), p. 37, reference is made to a letter from William Casey, PP, Abbeyfeale to O'Dwyer, 22 August 1882, in which the former tells of thirty two evictions having taken place in the locality that day. No mention of the evictions can be found in either the *Limerick Chronicle*, *Munster News* or the *Cork Examiner* of that time [the more widely read nationalist *Limerick Leader* did not first publish until 1893]. It is therefore not known if the evictions referred to Dunraven's tenantry in the townland of Knocknasna, Abbeyfeale.

²³ LL, 26 September 1904.

²⁴ LC, 8 October 1904.

but that Cronin's case would be considered by them. He further stated that he was unwilling to say anything definite on what might happen nor did he shed any light as to why Cronin's case was not dealt with by him before this. If one is to take it that Dunraven was the author and theorist of the process by which ownership of the land was to be transferred to peasant proprietorship, then he was declaring an important principle here. He was stating clearly and unequivocally that it was neither proper for landlords nor were they obligated to deal with or make any agreement whatsoever with evicted tenants on their own estates if they were in the process of negotiating a sale to the estates commissioners. That was the duty of the estate commissioners once they acquired possession of such amounts as the landlord had contracted to sell. So much for the plan of the evicted tenants' association and their idea of an arbitration committee. Dunraven communicated with Moloney soon afterwards saying that, in his opinion, arbitration was not possible in eviction cases and he enclosed a copy of the letter from the estate office to Cronin. Moloney caused the latter to be published later in the more widely read *Limerick Leader*.²⁵

The beginning of 1906 heralded renewed interest from many quarters in the still stubborn problem of resettlement of evicted tenants. Dunraven wrote to the newly appointed Irish secretary, James Bryce, suggesting a number of proposals that would both placate the Irish people and encourage them in their loyalty to the crown. Amongst these was the reinstatement of evicted tenants, which could be accomplished by bringing in appropriate regulations rather than the less effective method of legislation.²⁶

In May 1906 Fredrick Wrench, an estates commissioner, prepared a briefing-memorandum for the chief secretary setting out the official view of reinstatement. In many respects that position-paper differed little from Dunraven's thinking on the matter and touched on some of the causes of delay as had been pointed out to O'Brien some short time before. Delays in reinstatement were due to difficulties in settling plan of campaign tenants; a regulation that stated that cases could not be considered until arrangements for sale to the commissioners had been arrived at; the inordinate number of claimants (5,700 cases), as well as the practice of seeking judicial decisions on legal points that were constantly arising.²⁷ Dunraven too always felt that the figure for claimants was much exaggerated and, that, in any event, there was not sufficient land available in the country to fully cater for their demands.

²⁵ *LL*, 12 October 1904.

²⁶ Dunraven to Bryce, 17 January 1906 (NLI, Bryce Papers, 11,012(1)).

²⁷ Memorandum, Wrench to Bryce, 1 May 1906 (NLI, Bryce Papers, 11,013(1)).

The plight of the evicted tenants and measures to alleviate the distress took on a new impetus in the second half of 1906 as the government was put under pressure from an unexpected source. Associations of evicted tenants in the counties of Cork, Limerick, Kerry and Tipperary had come together under the direction and guidance of O'Brien and were organising²⁸ a deputation to appeal to the government to introduce a short bill in the Autumn session to give effect to the report which the estates commissioners were about to introduce. In reply²⁹ to O'Brien, Bryce said that he was unwilling to introduce any legislation and declined to receive a deputation, preferring to consult the estates commissioners. Bryce later got a full briefing when W.F. Bailey, an estates commissioner, outlined³⁰ the difficulties regarding evicted tenants but then decided to wait for the report of the evicted tenants' inspectors that was due towards the end of September.

Following his failure to persuade Bryce to receive a deputation, O'Brien considered that the reconvening of the land conference seemed to be the answer. He communicated his thoughts to Dunraven and must have been somewhat taken back at the response. In a long letter Dunraven stated that he felt that the members of the land conference had not changed their opinions as to the necessity for the reinstatement but he was of the opinion that a reassembling of the conference was futile unless it could lay down a practical path to pursue. Dunraven then professed not to know the causes of stagnation but was sure that it did not emanate from the landlord side. He contrasted the present impasse with the late land conference when, before it convened, all the participants agreed that purchase was the only solution and all the conference had to do was agree how best to bring that about. The evicted tenants question was more complex. Therefore it was vitally important that each participant in any conference would fully understand and agree the causes beforehand but that alone might not be enough to suggest a remedy. Dunraven professed to be ignorant of the causes and begged O'Brien to enlighten him 'what is the disease? And what is the remedy?'³¹ Dunraven was not against the notion of holding a conference at that time – his caveat was that unless adequate preparation was made, and that centred around a clear understanding in the mind of each participant as to the causes, then any conference would inevitably end up in failure and ridicule and so retard and delay the very solution they were striving to achieve.

28 O'Brien to Bryce, 22 August 1906 (NLI, Bryce Papers, 11, 013 (4)).

29 Bryce to O'Brien, 27 August 1906 (NLI, Bryce Papers, 11, 013 (4)).

30 Bailey's briefing memorandum to Bryce, 31 August 1906 (NLI, Bryce papers, 11,103 (4)).

31 Dunraven to O'Brien, 14 September 1906 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/7).

After considering the matter for a day or two, and despite his misgivings, Dunraven informed O'Brien that he was willing to advance the notion of a conference and would notify the landlord side – Mayo, and Cols Poe and Everard. He further explained his apparent reluctance to O'Brien. They could not, he said, constitute themselves a commission of enquiry and take evidence from the CDB or the estates commissioners. Lest O'Brien might be of the opinion that Dunraven was reluctantly being dragged into a conference, with subsequent loss of effectiveness, Dunraven made clear his position:

My difficulty is not in want of sympathy or in lack of appreciation of the gravity of the case but in doubt whether a conference can deal with it or whether it is not rather a matter for enquiry by a royal or vice-regal commission.³²

O'Brien, for his part, established that Russell and Harrington would co-operate and awaited Redmond's response. In the meantime O'Brien replied to Dunraven's difficulty as to the cause of stagnation regarding reinstatement. He quickly outlined the cause and the remedy, as he saw them:

The cause of the breakdown is mainly money with a certain amount of unreasonableness on the part of the landlords. The remedy is of course a more difficult matter and I should hope that many suggestions might be made, but I am confident we could arrive at an agreement upon one or two main principles of settlement.³³

O'Brien then proceeded to outline his own views on the remedy for Dunraven's 'disease', which could also serve as an agenda for the conference.

1. Regarding money. One of the chief difficulties encountered by the estates commissioners in dealing with planters³⁴ was that the sum of £250,000 allocated for the purpose of inducing them to quit the farms, was only disbursed by the Treasury officials on the basis that it would last for twenty years. The first recommendation of any conference should be that this money be at once and without restriction placed at

³² Dunraven to O'Brien, 17 September 1906 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/7).

³³ O'Brien to Dunraven, 19 September 1906 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/8).

³⁴ Planters were occupiers of farms from which tenants had been evicted.

the sole disposal of the estates commissioners.

2. There should be no departure from the principle that planters should be dealt with by voluntary agreement and not compulsion.
3. It should at least be open to discussion that the conference might recommend that landlords be compensated by a sum, not to exceed a year's rent, for rent due but that receipt of such a payment would *ipso facto* involve reinstatement despite whatever personal reservations the landlord might hold.
4. This new bonus to landlords would apply where an estate was not sold.

Since O'Brien felt that the landlord element was the main cause of the blockage it is interesting that he was willing to concede so much to induce a settlement. Dunraven was informed that Russell and Harrington were willing to attend. It was most important to both O'Brien and Dunraven that as many as possible of the old land conference members should attend as it would give a semblance of continuity to the proceedings, a feature, as we shall see, on which much emphasis was laid. It was in that context that O'Brien presented his set of preliminary proposals to Dunraven, proposals that the landlord representatives could not quarrel with. But O'Brien, as on other occasions, had another agenda. He confided to Dunraven that 'a success on this field would enable us easily to extend operations hereafter.'³⁵ As with the land conference, O'Brien was anxious to meet with Dunraven beforehand to iron out any remaining stumbling blocks. A few days later it was learned that John Redmond had declined the invitation. Dunraven was surprised and explained why to O'Brien:

If it were a question of considering the 1903 act with a view to suggesting amendments on all points I can understand that members of the land conference would wish to obtain the sanction of those who sent them to the conference. But reinstatement of tenants is a subsidiary question. About it no differences of opinion exist and it does not lead into general questions about which differences of opinion may exist.³⁶

35 O'Brien to Dunraven, 19 September 1906 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/8). O'Brien was hoping that success in the area of evicted tenants would lead to a final settlement of the land question.

36 Dunraven to O'Brien, 22 September 1906 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/8).

This setback did not however deter Dunraven, who informed O'Brien that, due to a personal and semi-official commitment, he would not be available to attend any gathering until the middle of October. Mayo announced, soon afterwards, that since Redmond had opted out he too would not attend. That left three on the landlord side, Dunraven, Poe and Everard. Despite this further setback Dunraven pressed ahead. He drafted a rough memorandum to be circulated to each participant, including O'Brien, and asked all to annotate, assent, disagree with or add to and then return them to himself.³⁷ Then he would condense the returns into a document suitable for discussion at the conference. As well as keeping the lesser participants informed, it would also serve the purpose of narrowing, beforehand, the topics to be discussed by disposing of points of disagreement, something that Dunraven had regarded as almost a pre-condition to the holding of any conference. On the other hand the risk of failure to convene the conference was exercising the mind of O'Brien. He proposed two alternatives to Dunraven. The first was that the conference members could seek an interview with Bryce and present an agreed programme to him.³⁸ Later, in the same letter, O'Brien suggested that if the treasury granted permission to the estates commissioners to spend the whole £250,000 (the sum mentioned by O'Brien in his letter of 19 September) at their own discretion and gave them a few additional inspectors it would, without fresh legislation, go a long way to solve the difficulty. Dunraven did not comment on either of O'Brien's two alternative proposals, 'I am not up on this evicted tenants question,'³⁹ he wrote. Neither, it would appear, was he up on O'Brien's vacillations. O'Brien replied two days later making no reference to his alternatives. Dunraven's memo, he said, was adequate for preliminary discussion and the only real objection from the tenant side was Dunraven's notion of treating evicted tenants as if they belonged to or were part of a distinct group or class.⁴⁰ By now a climate of uncertainty was taking hold of those already committed to attending a conference, Dunraven also becoming infected. In the certain absence of Redmond and Mayo, any conference was, as he put it to O'Brien, out.⁴¹ None the less he suggested that those of the late land conference who were willing to come to the aid of the evicted tenants should press ahead, if only in an unofficial capacity. To that end, Dunraven now tended to favour O'Brien's notion of a deputation to Bryce if the chief secretary gave his approval for such a move. Dunraven

37 Dunraven to O'Brien, 24 September 1906 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/8).

38 O'Brien to Dunraven, 22 September 1906 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/8).

39 Dunraven to O'Brien, 24 September 1906 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/8).

40 O'Brien to Dunraven, 26 September 1906 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/8).

41 Dunraven to O'Brien, 27 September 1906 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/8).

went on to explore further the problem surrounding the whole crux of resettlement. His suggestion or notion of dividing the evicted tenants into classes had occurred to him as he jotted down, more for his own edification than anything else, all the difficulties he could think of. Certainly the difference in the status of evicted tenants was one of them.⁴²

Dunraven made some interesting points in concluding his letter. The foundation stone of any future conference should be a clear knowledge of the cause of the deadlock since 1903. Was it due to (1) faulty legalisation, (2) faulty administration, (3) want of money? He himself believed that the cause was to be found in the first two points. Any difference of approach that existed or appeared to exist between Dunraven and O'Brien resulted from the fact that views had to be exchanged by way of letter since face-to-face meetings were not advisable. Dunraven adverted to the difficulty of meeting personally with O'Brien, either in Limerick City or in Adare, to iron out misunderstandings as it might give 'silly and ignorant people an opportunity of saying you are a landlord's man.'⁴³ In the meantime Dunraven would endeavour to find out how Bryce might view the reassembly of the conference with its inevitable list of recommendations but felt that the chief secretary, like all other ministers and governments, would prefer to be seen as not being dictated to. Lastly, as he, Dunraven, was personally concerned with the plight of the evicted tenants, he urged that something be done from which practical suggestions beneficial to that group would emanate, which could not realistically be opposed by the Irish Party, nor contain a demand for more money which might disconcert the government.

By early October the notion of a conference was back on track as rough drafts, containing the items to be discussed and the shape of the final report, had been exchanged between Dunraven and O'Brien. Around this time Dunraven learned⁴⁴ from Poe that Harrington might not be available. Fears were expressed that Russell might also be 'got at' by Redmond. As it was a matter of prime importance that as many as possible, especially on the nationalist side, be willing to attend, Dunraven asked O'Brien to explain the situation to Harrington. A further difficulty now became apparent. Somebody, probably O'Brien, had invited Shawe-Taylor to attend without Dunraven's knowledge or consent. Dunraven remonstrated forcefully with O'Brien:

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Fragment of letter, Dunraven to O'Brien, n. d., 8554/8. Date must be after 27 September but prior to 5 October as Dunraven encloses a copy of his draft, short and concise as possible, and awaits O'Brien's.

He cannot possibly attend. He is not a member of the land conference. His inclusion would destroy all our connection with the land conference and could put a complexion on our meeting that I certainly did not contemplate. We can of course, if we think fit, at the first meeting, ask him to attend as honorary secretary in which capacity he sat with the land conference.⁴⁵

Harrington agreed to attend following an appeal by O'Brien. This was a huge relief to both O'Brien and Dunraven as it enabled them to keep the land conference virtually intact and therefore suitable for issuing recommendations with some degree of credibility. O'Brien and Dunraven exchanged draft copies but Dunraven perceived no difference whatever in principle and scarcely any in detail between them. He did feel it necessary to point out that the purpose of the conference was not for the sole purpose of demanding a bill but rather to make recommendations and then leave it to the government to introduce a bill or amend the 1903 act or take any other efficacious measures, as they considered necessary. In his usual clinical fashion Dunraven also outlined to O'Brien the course the conference would adopt at the first meeting on Monday, 15 October 1906. A few hours would suffice to come to a general conclusion. It would then be sufficient for two or three to come together on Tuesday to prepare a final draft, and the full gathering could examine the document, paragraph by paragraph, on the Wednesday and definitively settle the final report. The conference, with six of the old land conference present, did indeed meet as outlined by Dunraven.

Even before the conference members issued their report, trouble loomed ahead. John Dillon, MP, who had spoken to the chief secretary on the matter the day beforehand, now put his views, on what he derisively called the Shelbourne Hotel conference, in writing and put Bryce on notice as to what the party expected of him by way of response:

[The conference] is nominally in favour of evicted tenants, but is in reality a meeting having for its object to injure and if possible wreck the Irish party and if they ask to see you or address any document to you, I would strongly urge you not to give any reply except that you have received notice of a question⁴⁶ from the chairman of the Irish party

⁴⁵ Dunraven to O'Brien, 6 October 1906 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/8).

⁴⁶ The question, in three parts, was submitted to Bryce in late September 1906 (ostensibly to allow ample time to collect the relevant information, but in reality to give the chief secretary an excuse for not giving any response to the Dublin conference) (NLI, Redmond to Bryce, 27 September 1906, 11,014 (2)).

[Redmond] and that whatever you have to say on the subject must be said in reply to that question in the house of commons.⁴⁷

The report of the Shelbourne Hotel conference, published on Saturday 20 October, pointed out that little progress had been made in the restoration of evicted tenants since the land act of 1903 and, in twenty paragraphs, set out what was seen as the solution to the problem.⁴⁸ These dealt with strengthening the powers of the estates commissioners; reinstatement, with a view to purchase, should proceed as part and parcel of land purchase as a whole and not be confined to estates either sold or in the process of sale, as then pertained; and the commissioners should be permitted to settle disputes between landowners and evicted tenants where such intervention would be beneficial to both parties. The landlord representatives saw the last point, paragraph 14 of the report, as compulsion by stealth and appended a rebuttal, a minority report in a sense, signed by Dunraven, Everard and Poe. The report was received in a rather muted manner by the principal newspapers. The *Irish Times*⁴⁹ went to some length to point out that the members of the conference were not representative of the leaders of the tenants' movement or of the official organisation of the Irish landlords, thereby inferring that the recommendations were binding on neither side. The *Cork Examiner*⁵⁰ said that 'although it affords no assurance of speedy adjustment of the radical difficulty, yet serves to clear up some matters as to which there may have been differences of opinion.' The *Freeman's Journal*,⁵¹ as could be expected, saw only one clause of practical value, and that was supported by only half of those who attended.

The following week Dunraven wrote to Bryce asking him to read the report and suggesting that two valuable lessons were inherent in it:

47 Dillon to Bryce, 17 October 1906 (NLI, Bryce papers, 11,014 (2)).

48 *CE*, 20 October 1906.

49 *IT*, 20 October 1906. The membership was delineated as follows – official nationalists were represented by Harrington, who is so much of a free lance that his signature cannot be taken as binding on the Irish Party; Dunraven, Everard and Poe represented the Irish Reform Association; O'Brien represented certain important constituencies in Munster, while Russell represented Russell.

50 *CE*, 20 October 1906.

51 *FJ*, 20 October 1906. Two days later that paper carried a five column manifesto from Dillon to dissuade Redmond and Bryce from giving heed to the report of the Shelbourne Hotel conference. See J. V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien and the course of Irish politics*, pp 171-2, for a brief account of the conference. For William O'Brien's own account see *An olive Branch*, pp 384-8.

Firstly, the extreme importance of getting this evicted tenants' question settled on a fair way to settlement, as speedily as possible and, secondly, that it was highly desirable that the meeting and the report of the conference should not be ignored.⁵²

Continuing, and in a last attempt to counter the destructive propaganda of Dillon, Dunraven outlined the future Ireland as he saw it unless the advances of Dillon and the Irish Party were curbed by the government – unending violence ('the old medicine' of land agitation) coupled with the extreme demand (independence), both activated by Dillon, or conciliation (the new method) and a moderate demand for parliamentary reform under O'Brien. To achieve the latter course it was important that moderate opinion [conciliation] be backed up and the best backing was to be found in practical support when requested. The following week O'Brien wrote⁵³ to Bryce seeking action on the report, but that, too, fell on deaf ears.

While the difficulty of assembling it and the actual conference itself appeared to be in vain, it affected some good. At long last the Irish Party took seriously the hardships associated with evictions and assisted the government in the passing of the Evicted Tenants (Ireland) Act, 1907, which began the process of bringing to an end the sufferings of the 'walking wounded' of the land war.

52 Dunraven to Bryce, 27 October 1906 (NLI, Bryce papers, 11,014 (2)).

53 O'Brien to Bryce, 3 November 1906 (NLI, Bryce papers, 11,014 (3)). O'Brien's request for movement on the report was based on the importance of assuaging Irish feeling on the evicted tenant question by some political action.

A SCHEME OF SCHOLARSHIPS

Technical instruction in Limerick may be said to have commenced with the establishment of the Athenaeum in 1853.¹ The work prospered so that by 1906, activities, now under the control of Limerick Technical Education Committee, were carried on in seven different locations in the city, a far from satisfactory situation. That body set up a sub-committee² to identify a suitable site for a central edifice and then to prepare a building scheme.

Dunraven, whose range of interests, even then, was breath-taking, was moved, coincidental with the development of the new technical institute, to do something towards the development of this type of education in the county and city of Limerick. He saw the benefit of small industries in centres of population but these were predicated on the availability of adequate technical skill, something the people could not provide for themselves. Accordingly, he argued that they should insist that public bodies provide suitable technical education for those interested.³ Due to the tardiness of local authorities in the matter Dunraven decided to take the initiative. He wrote⁴ from London, in February 1908, to his old adversary, Bishop O'Dwyer of Limerick, explaining that it was his intention to endow two scholarships for boys, tenable for a number of years, to enable them to pursue higher education. Advice was sought on a number of pertinent points. Should the subjects be art or science; how best to confine the scholarships to Limerick city and county, and finally how to ensure that awards would be confined to poor or comparatively poor children? Dunraven asked the bishop to give him ideas on the above points or on any others that might occur to him. O'Dwyer seems to have replied almost by return, for Dunraven wrote⁵ again, thanking O'Dwyer for his interest and suggestions, and indicating that as he (Dunraven) was going abroad for six weeks, accompanied by his secretary, Crichton, and as he wanted to accumulate the required advice during his absence, he begged O'Dwyer to allow a third party, Archibald Hurd, to communicate with him if clarification was needed on any point. At the same time, Dunraven wrote⁶ to the protestant bishop, Dr Orpen, seeking similar advice. Orpen consulted with the Rev Mr Dowd, the well-known Limerick antiquarian and historian,

1 *Journal of DATI*, vol. XII, no. 3, April 1912, pp 532-3; J. O'Donnell, 'Technical education in Limerick' in *Our Catholic Life*, iii, no. 1, (Spring, 1961), p. 23; M. V. Spillane, 'Two centuries of popular education : an historical survey of the educational institutions of Limerick, 1700-1900' (unpublished M.Ed. thesis, UCC, 1973), p. 2.37-8.

2 *Jn. DATI*, vol. XII, no. 3, p. 537.

3 *LC*, 28 November 1907. Dunraven was addressing the third Irish Industrial Conference in Limerick where he was the inaugural speaker.

4 Dunraven to O'Dwyer, 11 February 1908 (LDA, O'Dwyer papers, no. 47).

5 Dunraven to O'Dwyer, 15 February 1908 (LDA, O'Dwyer papers, no. 47).

6 *LC*, 26 February 1910.

and the sum of their advice was forwarded to the earl.

Having digested the tendered advice, Dunraven was soon in a position to initiate his scheme. In July 1908, freely and unasked, he contributed £500 towards the establishment of the educational facilities necessary to promote trade and commerce in Limerick.⁷ The Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction contributed a like amount and promised, in a rare show of generosity, a sum of £1,000, payable over five years, to supplement the local effort. In order to make his proposals more widely known Dunraven wrote to the county council in late July to inform the councillors. The suggestion was well received, so much so that Coleman, unusually for him, proposed:

That the best thanks of the county be accorded to Dunraven for his large-minded and generous action in establishing a scholarship fund for the benefit of the city and county; that we assure Dunraven of our hearty co-operation in his philanthropic movement, and look forward to an actual co-operation from others for the purpose of directly stimulating and bringing the industrial movement to a successful issue.⁸

Dunraven's munificence, furthermore, had a knock-on effect.⁹ Mrs. O'Brien, South Hill, donated £100; Limerick Technical Education Committee gave £50; Limerick Chamber of Commerce guaranteed a contribution of £70 per annum for five years, and a number of smaller donations were received. The outcome¹⁰ was that the committee had, after twelve months, £2,700, given or pledged, at its disposal in the scholarship fund, all at the initiative of Dunraven. The immediate result was, firstly, the foundation of two scholarships, worth £50 per annum, with free tuition, for three years at any approved institution in the United Kingdom, the only proviso being that the recipients had to be residents of Limerick, and, secondly, the establishment of a school of commerce in the city. A further off shoot¹¹ of the activity inaugurated by Dunraven was that a fund was set up, financed by local contributions, for the provision of prizes, in money or in books, to encourage young men and women to persevere in technical or commercial training up to scholarship eligibility level. These were

⁷ *LC*, 1 March 1910.

⁸ Meeting of 1 August 1908, *CCM*, book 4, p. 227.

⁹ *Jn., DATI*, vol. XII, no. 3, p. 549; *LC*, 26 January 1909.

¹⁰ *LC*, 1 March 1910.

¹¹ *LC*, 4 March 1909.

known as junior scholarships. The school of commerce was started in the autumn of 1909, in temporary premises, acquired at 68 George's Street, while awaiting the building and opening of the central institute.

In order to exact full benefit from the scholarship scheme a suitable premises was required urgently. The commencement of that building enterprise was, however, fraught with delay. The dilemma facing the Technical Education Committee was how to raise the necessary finance, estimated to be in the region of £15,000.¹² Various attempts were made to raise the funds needed. Limerick Town Council was precluded by LGB regulations from making direct grants to outside bodies; a bid through the commissioners of public works to wheedle funds from the treasury failed, while, as a last resort, the town council was persuaded, in October, to send a deputation to the chief secretary, which also failed to produce the desired result. This failure was considered at a technical committee meeting¹³ in December. Some members suggested an appeal to Andrew Carnegie, the American philanthropist, but the mayor announced that he had explored another avenue. He had already met with Dunraven with a view to the earl using his influence with the government to further consider the request from the town council.

It so happened that Birrell, the chief secretary, was a guest of Dunraven in Adare the following month. Accordingly, on 15 January 1909, a deputation,¹⁴ on the invitation of Dunraven, travelled there. The main argument to Birrell, enunciated by Dunraven, was that the refusal, based on the grounds that the city rates of eleven shillings and sixpence in the pound were excessive, was not sustainable as per capita of population it was lower than most towns and cities in the kingdom. Dunraven, at the conclusion of the meeting, heartily endorsed the views and appeals of the deputation. The end result¹⁵ was the same as before. The treasury, having carefully considered the fresh representation, could not see its way to alter its decision. Eventually, by pledging the corporation rates as security¹⁶ the committee was able to borrow £10,000 from the National Bank. This necessitated the removal of the trade wing from the original plans. The first sod was turned¹⁷ on 20 January 1910 and the Municipal Technical Institute was completed by the end of the following year.

¹² *Jn. DATI*, vol. XII., no. 3, pp 537-8.

¹³ *LC*, 22 December 1908.

¹⁴ *LC*, 16 January 1909.

¹⁵ *LC*, 6 April 1909.

¹⁶ *Jn. DATI*, vol. XII, no. 3, p. 539.

¹⁷ *LC*, 1 March 1910.

Following the phenomenal success of the Dunraven scholarship initiative in terms of monies either handed over or pledged, Mr Comerton, the principal-designate of the new institute, submitted¹⁸ a draft scheme of the proposed Dunraven scholarships to a meeting of the technical committee, for acceptance or amendment, before submission to the department in Dublin for final approval. A copy was also submitted to Dunraven for his consideration. The Limerick County Technical Education Committee also considered¹⁹ the contents of the proposed scholarship scheme. Opinion was unanimous that, as it was then constituted, it militated against county boys, as they were required to attend a city technical school for two years in order to be eligible to compete under the scheme. As the meeting felt that this was not in accord with Dunraven's original intentions, a sub-committee was set up to draft a recommendation to the department seeking an emendation of the proposed scheme so as to meet the requirements of students living in country areas who were required to pass a qualifying examination in lieu of the two years attendance at city schools. A reply was considered at the following month's meeting.²⁰ The department was adamant that the provisions could not be altered. The secretary said that he had forwarded a copy of the correspondence to Dunraven who intimated that he was going to see somebody in the department on the matter. Fr Dwane, administrator, Murroe, with the naiveté of a countryman spurning red tape, said that as Dunraven had provided the money, he should have a hand in the conditions attaching thereto. Another speaker was somewhat less complimentary to the earl. Speaking at a meeting of the city technical committee²¹ regarding a circular to be sent to the public inviting subscriptions to the local prize fund, Fr Andrew Murphy,²² was concerned that Dunraven was receiving too much credit therein. He went on to say that Dunraven had envisaged that the scholarships and also the local prize fund were not to be confined to the commercial department, but should be open to art, science or technology students.

Dunraven communicated the result²³ of his inquiry to the county technical committee. The department's hands were tied in the matter as the scheme was adopted to enable the

18 LC, 26 January 1909.

19 LC, 28 January 1909.

20 LC, 25 February 1909; LL, 24 February 1909.

21 LC, 4 March 1909.

22 Murphy's view of Dunraven may have been coloured somewhat as he was Bishop O'Dwyer's secretary during the county council election imbroglio of 1899.

23 LC, 25 March 1909.

department to add a sum, equal to Dunraven's £500, to the fund. Regulations governing the bestowal of such a grant stipulated that attendance by students, at an approved technical or similar school for at least two years, was mandatory. As that issue was insoluble, Dunraven suggested a way out of the impasse. He recommended that, as it was in their power to do so, the county committee might consider making funds available to send country students to the technical school in the city. John Coleman, a member of the county committee, with his accustomed acerbity, coloured by his antipathy to the earl, remarked that a motion of thanks, which had been passed to Dunraven some time previously, seemed to have been premature. It is not known if Dunraven's suggestion was acceded to.

At the beginning of the following year, 1910, the city technical committee was anxious that Dunraven would present²⁴ the prizes to students who had been successful at the last examinations. Following a delay due to the indisposition of Dunraven, the presentation went ahead,²⁵ in his absence, at the end of February. The recipient of the inaugural Dunraven scholarship was James A. McNulty, who had already commenced study at the Royal College of Science in Dublin. Various prizes and awards, under the auspices of the local or so-called junior scholarship fund, were also distributed. Tributes were paid to the absent earl, whose concept of a scholarship scheme had resulted in such unforeseen but propitious results. None was more eloquent than that of the city high sheriff, Mr Stokes, who said 'that Lord Dunraven's action with regard to those scholarships was one of the greatest boons conferred on the city by any individual.'²⁶

24 LC, 1 February 1910.

25 LL, 28 February 1910.

26 LC, 26 February 1910.

A KIND OF TOBACCONIST

The most modern phase of intensive tobacco growing in Ireland may be said to have commenced in 1898 when Col Nugent T. Everard, a Co. Meath landlord, initiated a series of small tobacco growing trials. Everard was moved by the decay of tillage farming in that county, and was drawn towards tobacco growing as a means of solving the problem of increasing unemployment and resulting emigration. He had already studied the history and methodology of tobacco cultivation when he began the experiments on his estate at Randlestown, near Navan. The results were satisfactory enough to warrant an approach, in the following year, through the medium of the Donaghpatrick Agricultural Organisation Society, to the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS), to seek such help as might be available to allow the experiments to continue. The work of organising and supervising the 1900 crop was undertaken by IAOS despite its limited knowledge of the subject. Thereafter, that body made an appeal to the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) for technical assistance. The department was interested enough in the subject to contact continental tobacco experts and soon afterwards appointed M. Lecornet, of the Agriculture College, Grignon, France, who had already received special training as a tobacco grower and curer, to take charge of the Irish experiments. DATI was then in a position, in co-operation with local growers, to undertake the entire responsibility for the experiments in 1901. Accordingly field experiments continued, in ten centres throughout the country, including Randlestown,¹ the main purpose of which was to test how the Irish climate would affect the quality of tobacco produced.

By 1903 no conclusive results were discernible. Willie Redmond, MP, East Clare, now emerged as the parliamentary champion of the fledgling tobacco industry when he appealed² for aid in supporting the experiments in Ireland. Redmond also complained to the chancellor of the exchequer, Richie, that the tax on cheaper tobacco, including Irish roll tobacco, then coming on the market, was much higher than that pertaining to more expensive blends. The chancellor was non-committal as to his future intentions as he was inhibited by a legal ban on

¹ For an account of tobacco cultivation in Ireland prior to its suppression in 1830 and its revival by Nugent Everard in the late 1890s and later, see Sylvia P. Everard, *Tobacco Growing in Ireland, 1584-1929* (Dublin, 1934); *Journal of DATI*, vol. I, no. 2, Nov. 1900, p. 302, no. 3, Feb. 1901, p. 406, pp 414-6; *Irish Tobacco Trade Journal*, vol. 5, 15 Jan. 1904, pp 5, 38, 15 Feb. 1904 (involvement of Horace Plunkett, vice-president of DATI), pp 25, 36, 15 March 1904, p. 21 (hereafter *ITTJ*); *LC*, 13 June 1903; speech of Lord Harris, *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 304, cols. 63-7, 29 March 1886; Tobacco growing in Eire, Historical Survey (1565-1904), NAI, AGI, Box 1, reports etc. For periodic reports on the progress of the industry in the early years see *The Leader*, 6, 13, May, 15 July, 9 September 1905, 28 January 1911.

² *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 124, col. 798, 29 June 1903; vol. 129, col. 580, 8 February 1904.

the growing of tobacco in Ireland. Through the exertions of Redmond in the house of commons, DATI was encouraged to set up an advisory committee,³ made up of manufacturers, importers, growers, retail traders and others, including two from DATI, Horace Plunkett, vice-president and T. P. Gill, secretary, as well as Redmond. The first meeting was held on 16 December 1903 from which the principal recommendations were that the experiments should be allowed to continue and the area of permitted cultivation increased to twenty acres in accordance with the long-term aim of making the venture commercially viable. To show favour to the infant industry, the chancellor of the exchequer, the following year, agreed⁴ to extend the facilities previously granted for experimental purposes, and, in addition, authorised the payment by the Board of Inland Revenue of a refund of one third the existing duty for a period of five years. On foot of this preferment DATI tried but were unable to procure an expert from America in time to superintend the planting and after-cultivation of the 1904 crop on methods of American practice, but did succeed in persuading J. N. Harper, professor of Agronomy at the State Agricultural College of Kentucky, to superintend the curing of the crop and, on doing so, he considered the results highly satisfactory. On the other hand the government laid down strict rules. The experiments were strictly confined to twenty growers, each of whom had to be licensed by DATI, and they were to be spread throughout the country so as to test the suitability of different types of soil and climate, while the Board of Inland Revenue issued regulations and instructions with reference to the liability for duty of those involved in the growing and curing of tobacco in Ireland so as not to subvert the legal ban, then in existence, and yet allow production on an experimental basis as heretofore. The results achieved and government concessions to date encouraged DATI to continue experimentation and Everard to send⁵ his son, Richard, to America to study all aspects of growing and, more importantly, the curing of tobacco.

Encouraged by the results up to then, and bowing to parliamentary pressure, Asquith, the chancellor, sanctioned the extension of the experimental scheme for another five years, to 1908. He was at pains to point out that the purpose was not the establishment of a protected tobacco industry in Ireland, but rather to give DATI further time to demonstrate that the crop could be grown as a commercial proposition. Therefore the restrictions as to place and growers would have to continue. In order to legalise the growth of tobacco in Ireland,

³ *Jn. DATI*, vol. IV, no. 3, March 1904, pp 541-2; NAI, AGI, Box A 6-1908, folder A 19.

⁴ *LC*, 27 August 1904.

⁵ Sylvia Everard, *Tobacco Growing in Ireland*, p. 6.

William Redmond, MP, East Clare, took up the cause of the tobacco industry with great determination and, by dint of pressure on the government and with the help of a memorial signed, peculiarly enough, by all 103 Irish MPs,⁶ succeeded in getting his Irish tobacco bill⁷ through parliament in June 1907. A new dawn now appeared on the horizon for the infant industry.

The earliest reference to tobacco culture in Adare is found in the *Limerick Leader* of 29 November 1907, when, in editorial comment on the revived industry, it noted that ‘results of experiments being carried out by Dunraven and others will be awaited with much interest.’ Dunraven already had considerable knowledge of the subject of tobacco culture in Ireland when he spoke in the house of lords, in 1886, on a debate to call attention to the penalties imposed by acts of parliament on cultivation of tobacco in the United Kingdom and to ask the government if they would give facilities for experiments. Replying directly to Lord Sudeley, who had stated that tobacco cultivation in Ireland was not successful in the past, Dunraven asserted that the industry there never got a proper start, as the manufacture of native tobacco was not allowed. Irish leaf had to be sent to England and an import duty was required when the finished article was returned for sale, making its price prohibitive. He contended that evidence before a royal commission in 1830 conclusively proved that tobacco was a very valuable crop in Ireland and that tobacco of fair quality could be grown there. He further indicated that since agriculture in Ireland was in a depressed state, tobacco cultivation would be a godsend and would benefit, not only the agricultural community, but the whole population of the country at large and, furthermore, it was a crop that required very little capital and employed a great deal of labour. If only a small amount was allowed to be grown then Dunraven failed to see how any reliable market was to be found and maintained. The government, therefore, should allow cultivation on a large scale as the excise duty payable on such could be collected as easily as on small amounts.⁸

In June 1908, Dunraven wrote⁹ to William Redmond on the future of the industry. He

6 *IT*, 13 November 1906.

7 *LC*, 8 June 1907.

8 *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.304, cols.72-4, 75, 29 March 1886.

9 *LC*, 4 June 1908. Two years previously Dunraven had intimated his desire to participate in the tobacco experiments when he wrote to Horace Plunkett (this letter has not survived). Plunkett’s reply fills in the details. ‘Thanks for yours of the 27th. I have to ask the Treasury for permission to grow tobacco and as you do not wish to put your name forward for next year’s crop, you will have to pull other than departmental wires. I hope you will succeed in forcing the chancellor of the exchequer to allow a sufficient area to be grown to enable this department to hand over an expenditure it can ill afford to enterprising capitalists,’ Plunkett to Dunraven, 29

began by saying that tobacco could prove to be a most valuable industry to Ireland on account of its labour intensive nature, but to make it a success two things needed to happen. Firstly, a generous injection of capital should be made available to experimenters to bridge the gap between expenses and receipts, and secondly, further exhaustive tests were necessary to find the strains best suited to Irish soils and climate. He encouraged Redmond to seek out that additional aid. A deputation from the Irish Tobacco Growers' Association waited on the Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George, in mid June 1908. Willie Redmond led the group and it also included Dunraven, Everard, and a number of interested Irish MPs. Dunraven said that he hoped that the replacement of the rebate of duty to growers by an annual grant of £6,000 to DATI would be so allocated as to place growers in as good a position as before.¹⁰ Lloyd George, aware that the harvesting and curing of the crop was as important as the growing, promised assistance in those areas.

In November the *Times*¹¹ devoted an article to the industry in Ireland, outlining its recent revival and possibilities and mentioning that Dunraven was devoting special attention to the Sumatra leaf, a Turkish variety, suitable for cigarette manufacture. However, an examination of that part of the 1908 crop yielded no profit to Dunraven apart from what accrued to him by way of departmental grants. Two and a quarter acres yielded 930 lbs. of cured tobacco. Total expenses came to eighty eight pounds and ten shillings while receipts for sale amounted to seventy-four pounds twelve shillings, leaving a loss of seven pounds per acre or, broken down further, a pound weight cost one shilling and ten pence to produce and was sold for three pence less.¹² However it must be remembered that tobacco culture was still at the experimental stage so losses were inevitable if the process was to be successfully carried out. Nearly all the crop of that year was sold at the barn door or by growers' samples.

Despite the optimism of those closely associated with the industry, its future was still in doubt. Dunraven referred to his experiments at a meeting, in December 1908, under the

September 1906 (NAI, AGI, Box 4, A 23337-1901 to A 18800-1911, folder A 13563-1906). From the probable wording of the letter to Plunkett, in September 1906, coupled with the item in the *Limerick Leader* of 29 November 1907, it could be construed that Dunraven had already begun experiments, unofficially, or first began in 1907, but did not wish to put his name forward as an official experimenter until 1908. Clearly Plunkett saw the advent of Dunraven and his range of influence as important to the development of the fledgling industry. By December 1908 Dunraven had reached such a position within the industry that he was present (with his estate agent, R. R. Ballingal) at a conference between the tobacco growers and the department to hammer out a scheme whereby the appropriation of £6,000 from the treasury could best be used to further the tobacco experiments.

¹⁰ LC, 23 July 1908.

¹¹ *Times*, 2 November 1908.

¹² *Jn. DATI*, vol. X, no. 2, January 1910, pp 276-7.

auspices of the Limerick Industrial Association, where he said that since he ceased to be a landlord, he had become a kind of tobacconist and was engaged in the growth of tobacco but could not be sure if it would turn out a success as there were too many factors over which he had no control. Its continuance would, in his opinion, contribute handsomely to the recently awakened interest in the developments furthered by the Irish industrial movement.¹³ To further this policy of supporting local industries Dunraven sent¹⁴ some leaf from the 1908 crop to the Limerick city manufactory of Messrs. R. Raleigh and Sons, Patrick Street, where it was hoped that the finished product, in cigarette form, would soon appear on the streets to give the smokers of the city an opportunity to sample the result.

It was inevitable that, following the disappointing results up to 1908, the government would seek to widen the scale of the experiments to date. For the 1910 season the Small Growers Scheme¹⁵ was introduced. This gave grants to existing experimenters, including Dunraven, who had the necessary equipment and experience, to assist neighbouring small holders in the production of tobacco by instructing and financing them and by providing them with a market as soon as the crop was cured. Experimenters, such as Dunraven and Everard, also continued as growers in their own right. The 1910 crop, country wide, under the new scheme, covered a total of ninety nine acres. In Adare, seven smallholders grew four and three quarter acres.¹⁶ In succeeding years that scheme, which seemed likely to be of such benefit to countless small farmers, went into rapid decline. In Adare in 1911 three farmers cultivated only two and a half acres,¹⁷ while in the following year this had fallen to one farmer who grew one acre. Some other inducement was needed if the undoubted benefits of tobacco growing were to be made attractive to small growers.

The experiments engaged in by Dunraven himself were mainly directed towards the production of a suitable leaf for cigarette and cigar manufacture. By 1912, DATI had come to the conclusion that a Turkish hybrid, a mixture of Prior and Burley, to be named Irish Gold, was best suited to Irish conditions. Encouraged by such trials as he had carried out, Dunraven, by 1910, was ready to follow the example of Everard and establish his own cigarette factory. By early 1911, the factory was in the planning stage. Building work was

¹³ *LC*, 8 December 1908.

¹⁴ *LC*, 26 June 1909. A consignment of tobacco, grown in county Meath, had previously been sent to the Limerick firm (*LC*, 25 May 1905).

¹⁵ *Jn. DATI*, vol. XI, no. 2, January 1911, p. 228.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Jn. DATI*, vol. XII, no. 2, January 1912, p. 361.

completed that year and production commenced.¹⁸ By the start of 1912, shops in Limerick were already carrying stocks of cigarettes marketed by the Adare Tobacco Co. and guaranteed to be Irish grown.¹⁹ The Limerick Industry Association, which took a keen interest in developments there, again visited Adare in 1912 and, while visiting the factory heard at first hand from the estate agent, Ballingal, the plans for the future development of the industry. In order to make the concept of Adare cigarettes better known to city dwellers, it was agreed that an exhibition, showing all facets of tobacco culture, from the planting to the harvesting on the estate, be held in Limerick during the following Summer.²⁰ In 1913, a group from the British Dairy Farmers' Association, who were visiting Limerick, took the opportunity to travel to Adare and see for themselves the tobacco fields and the working of the factory.²¹

The Irish tobacco industry was the subject of a debate in the house of lords in March 1911. Dunraven made two points in his interesting contribution. He stated that, in the three years, 1907-09, he had paid £6,300 in duty and had received £1,387 in assistance from the treasury, leaving the difference to be made up by sales of the finished product. These figures showed that the cultivation and harvesting of tobacco was a most expensive business and the growers were entitled to better encouragement from the government. The experiments to date had demonstrated two facts. Ireland could produce a good article at a fair price and the industry was of immense value from the standpoint of employment, particularly in rural districts. On the estate at Adare alone the cultivation of thirty acres (the seeds were set around the 20th of March and the young shoots were transplanted to the growing areas in the month of May) necessitated the employment of fifty nine men and boys and four girls; in harvesting (this process took place after the hay was saved, i.e. the months of August and early September) eighty five men and boys and sixty nine girls were employed and, in

18 The tobacco factory was owned by a private company, the Adare Cigarette Company Ltd., which was registered on 25 June 1912. The nominal capital was £3,000, divided into £3 ordinary shares at £1 each. The directors were Dunraven (who held nearly all of the shares), William Holliday, Corbally, Limerick, Archibald Murray, and Robert Rennie Ballingal, the estate agent at Adare (*ITTJ*, vol. 14, no. 9, 15 July 1912, p. 34). Some years previously Dunraven was approached to become a major shareholder in a cigarette manufacturing business in Limerick. He was anxious to forward the idea at the time lest Goodbodys or Gallahers began manufacturing in the city, but suffered from a shortage of ready cash and could only put up £3,000 (Dunraven to the knight of Glin, 15 April [1905] (UL, Glin papers, P1/304)). The factory was not subsequently built. For a discussion on the year of the letter see n. 14 in the chapter entitled 'The City Giveth'.

19 See advertisement for Adare Cigarette Co. which stated 'these cigarettes are made and packed on the Adare Manor estate from tobacco growing there' (*LC*, 27 January 1912).

20 *LL*, 5 July 1912.

21 *LC*, 22 May 1913. The group also visited the osier growing plantations, another of Dunraven's enterprises.

subsequent operations (in the months of November to February or March), there was work for thirty five men and boys and twenty nine girls.²²

As it was clear that the Small Growers' Scheme was not likely to attract the support for which it was intended, a new arrangement, known as the Rehandling Scheme, was devised to allow experiments to continue for a further ten years, to start with the 1914 crop. As this scheme, which represented the most efficient means of preparing and marketing tobacco then known, was looked on as the best chance to date to complete the experiments already under way, the main experimenters readily accepted it. It was an extension and development, on commercial lines, of the unsuccessful Small Growers' Scheme except that, in this case, it was designed to apply to farmers rather than to small holders. The responsibility for the success of the scheme was entrusted to three rehandlers, Dunraven, Everard and the Wexford²³ Tobacco Growers' Association. A grant of £35,000 was made available²⁴ to the rehandlers to enable them to continue under the new scheme. In the case of the first two, precise conditions²⁵ were laid down. In the first year of the new scheme, 1914, Adare and Co. Offaly²⁶ (Mullacrew) had fifty seven growers who cultivated eighty nine and five eight acres; Randlestown, had seventy growers on 113 and one eight acres, and at Tagoat, Co. Wexford, 10 growers cropped fifteen and one quarter acres. In total 137 growers grew tobacco on 218¼ acres.²⁷ The result of the first year's venture seemed generally satisfactory. Yet, at year's end, unexpected difficulties, mainly due to severe early frost, delayed the harvesting of the crops in both Adare and County Offaly.

The figures for the 1915 season²⁸ showed an increase both in acreage and number of growers participating. In Adare and Mullacrew, sixty growers on 106 and one eight acres produced an estimated 67,300 lbs of tobacco, a figure in excess of that produced by Everard.

22 *Hansard*, 5th series, vol. 7, cols. 566-7, 21 March 1911.

23 There was a strong tobacco growing tradition in Wexford. Prior to the suppression of the industry in the 1830s, growers there, taking advantage of its benign climate, cultivated 1,000 acres that supported ten tobacco factories (Sylvia Everard, *Tobacco Growing in Ireland*, p. 4). The last point is at variance with the statement of Dunraven in the house of lords on 29 March 1886 (see n. 8 above).

24 *LC*, 13 June 1912; *ITJ*, vol. 24, no.1, 15 November 1912, p.10.

25 *Jn. DATI*, vol. XV, no. 3, April 1915, pp 527-8. The rehandler was obliged to provide the growers with all necessary instructions and equipment; to purchase the growers' crops at a price fixed on a commercial basis, and to rehandle all the tobacco produced under the scheme in accordance with American methods adapted to Irish conditions.

26 Tobacco had been grown in County Offaly since the early 1900s under the guidance of the Richardson family. It was joined to Adare under the new scheme. In 1915 there were twenty eight growers on forty four acres around Birr and Tullamore (*LC*, 20 February 1915).

27 *Jn. DATI*, vol. XV, no. 3, April 1915, p. 528.

28 *Jn. DATI*, vol. XVI, no. 3, April 1916, pp 404-10.

The rehandlers again experienced difficulties as growers, mindful of their losses during the first year of operation, became anxious to pass the crop on to the rehandler as quickly as possible, and did not pay enough attention to the drying or curing of the crop. To adequately prepare the crop for marketing, according to American standards and to comply with the regulations governing the scheme, each of the two major rehandlers was obliged to install suitable machinery. Everard introduced the Proctor system in 1914 and rehandled the crop of that year according to that system. Dunraven had a similar machine installed²⁹ by early 1915. As the amount grown in Wexford did not warrant such expense, it was agreed that their crops would go to Randlestown for rehandling.

A newspaper reporter visited³⁰ Dunraven's tobacco enterprise at Adare in February 1915, which resulted in much information being disclosed on the new process. The Proctor Stock and Apron Tobacco Dryer, Cooler and Orderer, to give it its full title, was already in active use. It was a huge machine, covering the major portion of the specially built Proctor house whose dimensions were 136 feet long, 20 feet wide and 36 feet high. Seventy workers, consisting of men, girls and boys, were busily engaged in grading and carrying out all aspects of the work. Spread over two locations, in the old and new farmyards, a half mile apart, the entire tobacco enterprise occupied in all an area of four acres. The cost of the Proctor machine alone, which was purchased in Philadelphia, came to £2,000 after erection. All aspects of production, from delivery by the growers to the packing of the finished product into casks or hogsheads, were carried out there. It was then either stored in the bonded warehouse or shipped to the manufacturer. Despite the enormous outlay involved, the two major rehandlers soon noticed deficiencies in the scheme. Firstly, great difficulty³¹ was encountered in training and maintaining a full staff of graders. As the work was only temporary, lasting for the first three months in the year, and as the rehandling stations were removed from centres of population, it was well nigh impossible to have the same set of workers each season. This necessitated the training of many new hands each year with consequent increases in running costs as the various machines had to be run intermittently to allow for stoppages, delays etc. A second dilemma was related to the huge machine itself. The capacity of the machine was intended to deal with the produce of 1,000 acres or more of tobacco but as the total crop was less than 120 acres in any of the two major centres, the

29 *LC*, 20 February 1915.

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Jn. DATI*, vol. XVI, no. 3, p. 409.

wisdom of installing such machines, without adaptation for smaller quantities, would have to be questioned. The cigarette factory in the village of Adare, opposite the hotel, was also visited where a large number of staff, mainly girls, were engaged in the production of Virginia, Turkish and Egyptian blend cigarettes, from tobacco especially grown around Adare blended with imported leaf. Dunraven borrowed the capital of £10,000, at 3.5% per annum for the entire enterprise in Adare, including buildings, machinery and equipment.³² The Irish tobacco industry was purely co-operative and any surplus accruing from the entire sale of the finished product was divisible among the growers according to average quality and yield.³³

In 1916,³⁴ Dunraven, in his two centres, on eighty three acres with fifty one growers, produced only 11,500 lbs. of prepacked tobacco. Everard on 89 acres had 58,668 lbs. Wexford sought and was granted permission to suspend operations for 1916 because, as the Great War was raging, labour was scarce and higher prices could be obtained from other crops. This was a major blow to the future of the industry. The reason for the low output in Adare was the disastrous fire³⁵ at the Adare processing plant on Monday, 1 January 1917. The fire, which originated in one of the drying sheds in the old farmyard, completely destroyed the Proctor house, consumed 4,300 lbs of tobacco; devastated the site, and had the immediate effect of throwing fifty operatives out of work. In all, four sheds and their contents were burned to the ground. It was most unfortunate that the growers had already delivered the bulk of the crop to the rehandling station while the machinery in the Proctor house was damaged beyond repair. Despite the mishap, work continued. The crops that had not been delivered to the processing plant and whatever had been salvaged from the fire were processed at Adare under the terms of the 1903-13 experimental schemes and later sold to a London firm of tobacco brokers.

As was to be expected, the Adare plant and machinery was covered by insurance and a sum of £5,053, in settlement, was agreed³⁶ in February. At the same time restrictions were set down in the event of either replacement or repair of the damaged Proctor machine. Any future Proctor house would have to be built of stone rather than wood, and a safer method of

³² *LC*, 20 February 1915.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Jn. DATI*, vol. XVII, no. 3, April 1917, p. 461.

³⁵ *LC*, 2, 6 January 1917; *LL*, 1, 3 January 1917; *ITTJ*, vol. 19, no.3, 15 January 1917, p. 6.

³⁶ Dunraven papers (UL, D 3196/G/28/1, item 5065). As the Proctor machine had a drying facility, the fire was caused either by misuse of the machine, a malfunction, or else some tobacco was being dried by the old method of suspending leaves over slow-burning fires.

drying the leaf would have to be found rather than suspending tobacco leaves over open fires, the method used up to this. These costly adjustments would have to be taken into account in any decision to recommence the operation. Dunraven, faced with the difficulty in replacing equipment, and also on account of inducements to farmers of guaranteed prices for the production of certain food crops, sought permission from DATI to suspend operations³⁷ in 1917, save for the two and a half acres to service the factory. The fire turned out to be disastrous on another point and was seen as a lost opportunity. Due to a world wide rise in demand, coupled with restrictions on imports to Britain during the war, prices, particularly for pipe tobacco, the production of which was best suited to Ireland, soared and seemed likely to render growth profitable without any state subsidy. Everard also experienced difficulty in 1917. His total acreage was only 46 acres with 31 growers. Dunraven, despite the costs and trouble involved, was most anxious to resume the enterprise, so as not to lose the momentum generated by the new scheme. Efforts were made to procure³⁸ a replacement machine in America, and when that was not feasible, due to the exigencies of the war effort and the difficulty of importation, a search was initiated to try and secure such spare parts as were needed to get the Proctor back in operation in time for the 1918 season. Permission was sought and granted to resume growing at Adare, on a limited scale, in 1918. In that year twenty one growers, including Dunraven himself, as was always the case, produced³⁹ 13,045 lbs of tobacco on eighteen and a half acres. The crop at Adare was processed under the old scheme with some difficulty due to the influenza epidemic. Everard fared somewhat better than Dunraven cropping just over fifty eight acres. By this time the future of the cigarette factory was also in doubt but, on the situation being reviewed by the directors, it was resolved⁴⁰ to carry on, using the small amount grown locally supplemented, in July,⁴¹ by China tobacco and Turkish leaf procured through a London agent and, in October, by Virginia leaf imported from America.⁴²

Another difficulty was by now becoming apparent, the 1916 tobacco crops showed both reduced acreage and number of growers compared to 1915, while Wexford got permission to

37 *Jn, DATI*, vol. XVIII, no. 3, 1917, p. 296.

38 Dunraven papers, (UL, D 3196/G/28/1, various items).

39 *Jn., DATI.*, XIX, no. 3, May 1919, p. 298. The treasury agreed, at this time, that Dunraven should be allowed compensation in respect of interest on idle capital and cost of maintenance of idle equipment in 1918 on the understanding that he would procure and erect new re-handling machinery at the earliest possible date (*ITTJ*, vol. 21, no. 7, 15 May 1919, p. 14).

40 Dunraven papers (UL, D 3196/G/28/1, item 5828).

41 Dunraven papers (UL, D 3196/G/28/1, items 7229, 8388).

42 Dunraven papers (UL, D 3196/G/28/1, item 6680).

opt out of all future experiments in the following year. As the Great War continued without any apparent ending, the spectre of possible food shortages loomed large in the minds of government ministers, so that farmers were offered inducements of guaranteed prices for the production of certain food crops. A further setback to the industry was the death of Major Willie Redmond while leading the 6th battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment at Messines, on 8 June 1917. It was Redmond who had fronted and ably led the parliamentary fight for, firstly, recognition and, later concessions for the fledgling tobacco industry in Ireland. Dunraven wrote⁴³ a short letter to the press, in which he refrained from any reference to his parliamentary work, but disappointingly, used it to promote recruitment for the British army, by contrasting the glorious sacrifice of Redmond with the lack of any interest in the war effort by the average Irishman.

The advent of 1919 brought further disaster to the tobacco industry, more particularly for Adare. On 6 March,⁴⁴ a fire was discovered in the cigarette factory just before the employees arrived for work. Some plant and a considerable amount of the finished cigarette stock were saved, but the building was completely gutted. When Dunraven, who was in London at the time, was contacted, he expressed⁴⁵ a great desire to find out the cause of the fire, perhaps fearing that republicans were to blame and was reported to be seriously considering his future involvement in the tobacco experiments. Despite all possible enquiries as to the cause of the fire no information could be secured. As in the case of the former fire the cigarette factory was fully insured and payment of £1,285 for buildings and £792 for machinery and stock were received⁴⁶ in respect of the claims. Dunraven and the directors of the cigarette company decided to rebuild the factory and to continue to grow as large a crop as possible. The 1919 tobacco crop⁴⁷ showed a further slight though significant decline. Dunraven, at Adare and Mullacrew, Co. Offaly, had the same number of growers, twenty one, as the previous year, on twenty and a half acres, producing a much better crop of 18,572 lbs. Everard, now with thirty-three growers, on a slightly lower acreage, showed only a yield of 39,340 lbs., a significant decrease. In September 1919, a provision of the finance act of

43 *LC*, 14 June 1917.

44 *LC*, 6 March 1919; *ITTJ*, vol. 21, no. 5, p. 17.

45 Dunraven papers (UL, D 3196/G/28/1, items 9450, 9468. Tradition in Adare lays the blame on a disgruntled former employee who had been dismissed a short time before that.

46 Dunraven papers (UL, D 3196/G/28/1, items 9539, 9551.

47 *Jn. DATI*, vol. XX, no. 3, p. 343.

1919 came into force,⁴⁸ which was to give a shot in the arm to the ailing tobacco industry. A preferential rate of duty was decided on for tobacco grown in the British Empire compared to imported tobacco, with a further rebate of two pence per pound weight in respect of homegrown produce. As Irish grown tobacco was regarded as home grown, it then bore a duty one shilling and sixpence per pound weight less than the duty imposed on U.S. tobacco. By this time DATI had, at last, come to the conclusion that heavy or pipe tobacco best suited Irish conditions, so experimenters were therefore required under the finance act, to specialise in the production of leafy dark pipe tobacco as this was seen as the best way of encouraging Irish growers to free themselves from exchequer dependency. Special permission was given⁴⁹ to Dunraven and Everard to grow nine and three quarter acres between them with cigarette varieties in order to allow their factories to continue.

In Autumn 1919 the two major experimenters represented⁵⁰ to the department that under the conditions then pertaining, they were unable to carry on with experiments without loss to themselves. They applied to the Development Fund for an annual grant to defray the salary and expenses of the tobacco experts employed in each centre and the cost of clerical assistance in connection with the experiments. More importantly, they requested⁵¹ permission to amalgamate the two schemes. This would reduce administration costs and circumvent the necessity of replacing, at greatly enhanced cost, the rehandling machinery lost in Adare in January 1917. On the recommendation of DATI this was approved subject to the condition that the total area cropped was not to exceed 1,000 acres. While the latter condition was a quantum leap in the development of the industry to date, any optimism was tempered by the stipulation that further experimentation, and therefore state assistance, would cease definitely after 5 years.⁵²

By 1920 the whole industry was in terminal decline. The abnormal demand and consequent high prices that pertained during the war years were no longer relevant. Despite the euphoria created by the provisions of the finance act of 1919 the crop of the following year showed no dramatic increase. Cropping drastically declined, from eighty and a quarter

48 *Jn. DATI*, vol. XX, no. 3, p. 344.

49 *Ibid.*

50 20th Annual report, DATI, 1919-20, p. 9

51 20th Annual report, DATI, 1919-20, p. 59.

52 20th Annual report, pp 58-9.

acres (Dunraven, nineteen and half acres, Everard sixty and three quarter acres) in 1920,⁵³ to approximately forty nine and a quarter acres, grown by fifty three farmers in Cos. Meath, Louth, Dublin, Offaly and Limerick in the following year.⁵⁴ Cigarette tobacco, in 1920, accounted for almost 12.5% of the total cropped in 1920, ensuring the future of the factories at Adare and Everard's at Merchants Quay, Dublin.

Difficulties of an economic and legal nature delayed the proposed merger between the two rehandlers, so Everard undertook⁵⁵ to rehandle and market the totality of tobacco grown in 1921. Political questions now began to bedevil the already ailing industry. Neither the 1920 crop of marketable pipe tobacco, amounting to around 43,669 lbs., nor the 1921 crop, amounting to 45,221 lbs., had been sold⁵⁶ up to 30 September 1922 because the establishment of the Irish Free State resulted in the loss of favoured commonwealth status for all Irish products, so Irish tobacco had to compete on the London market with tobacco produced, with the help of cheap labour, by countries both inside and outside the commonwealth. In the circumstances and in the hope that something would turn up, Everard decided to hold on to the crop.

The start of the dismantling of the Adare tobacco enterprise was not long delayed. After the disastrous fire of 1919 the cigarette factory was rebuilt and production recommenced. Poor market prices for cigars and cigarettes, coupled with an uncertain future, caused the shareholders, at a meeting⁵⁷ on 23 February 1922, to give notice that the company was to be wound up. A liquidator was appointed and production ceased around the following St. Patrick's Day throwing an unspecified number of workers out of employment.

The 1922 crop nationwide⁵⁸ was down again. Fifty-one acres produced a dry weight of around 35,000 lbs. This further exacerbated the situation as it increased the stock of unsold tobacco. Everard continued to process and market the entire crop as the proposed amalgamation of the two principal rehandlers had not taken place. The tobacco growing

53 20th Annual report, p. 58.

54 21st Annual report, 1920-1, p. 54.

55 Ibid.

56 21st Annual report, p. 55; 22nd Annual report, 1921-2, p. 46.

57 LC, 2 March 1922. There is no trace of the Adare Cigarette Company Ltd. in the dissolved companies file in the NAI. The vacant cigarette factory was occupied by the National Army on 19 June 1922 but was captured by irregular forces on 2 July. In early August, the village was retaken by the army. In 1924, Dunraven was awarded £1,125 at the Limerick Quarter Sessions for damage to the factory, the hotel and the former RIC barracks (LC, 5 August 1922; LL, 25 June 1924).

58 2nd Annual report, Department of Lands and Agriculture, p. 45.

experiment, initiated by Sir Nugent Everard, and later taken over by the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, finally came to an end with the harvesting of the 1923 crop,⁵⁹ which amounted to a mere thirty three and a quarter acres grown by thirty persons. While official records do not tell what happened to the unsold crops of 1920 to 1922, we are told that the 1923 crop was sold⁶⁰ at an average price of one shilling and sixpence per pound, a considerable loss to the producers. The department of Lands and Agriculture of the Irish Free State gave no direct grants in 1924⁶¹ but, as a gesture of support, granted a reduction of one shilling and six pence per pound on home grown tobacco compared to the duty payable on imported leaf. Fifteen growers took advantage of the concession, cropping twenty one and three quarter acres, but because of adverse weather conditions, the yield averaged only 456 lbs per acre, a figure well down on the 1923 average of over 720 lbs per acre. At the end of twenty five years of experimentation the requiem of the department was both pathetic and unbecoming. No firm conclusions were noted nor was there any hope for the future of the industry:

The primary object of experiments organised by the department was to prove whether tobacco was a suitable and profitable crop for the farmer under existing conditions . . . during the entire period some 200 individuals acquired equipment for the growing of tobacco and obtained more or less experience with the crop.⁶²

As could be expected the take-up after 1924 was not great. The following year⁶³ the figures had dwindled to eighteen persons cropping sixteen acres. In the following three reports⁶⁴ of the department of Lands and Agriculture, covering the years from 1926 to 1929, no mention is made of tobacco growing. It is not known when Dunraven ceased to grow tobacco at Adare though it was probably in 1923.⁶⁵ No breakdown of the areas where tobacco was grown was given after the 1920 season but it can be inferred that he continued for the next three seasons, sending the crops each year to County Meath for processing.

59 3rd Annual report, 1922-3, p. 52.

60 4th report, 1923-6, p. 75.

61 Ibid.

62 4th Annual report, p. 74.

63 Ibid.

64 5th Annual report, 1926-7; 26th Annual report, 1927-8; 27th Annual report, 1928-9.

65 See inspector's report, 3 July 1924, which shows thirteen growers that year including one grower in County Offaly. Adare is not mentioned (NAI, AGI, box 5, A/8791/24).

Epilogue

Despite promises of assistance, the government of the Irish Free State never came to the aid of the failing tobacco industry. Everard's cigarette factory, that had commenced business in 1907, was the subject of a winding-up order on 15 March 1927 and his Irish Tobacco Company ceased to exist on 18 April 1930. By then all the principal players, Dunraven, Everard and his son, Richard, were all dead. So too was the Irish tobacco experiment.⁶⁶

In attempting to assess the impact of the Irish tobacco industry, one must look at a number of factors, for and against the operation. It was proved beyond doubt, time on end, that tobacco could be grown successfully in Ireland. The quality of the end product was always, however, in doubt. The rain-laden climate suited only the hardiest and heaviest type of leaf, but this type of tobacco could be produced more efficiently elsewhere and marketed in London more cheaply than the Irish variety. Even the Turkish Samos variety of cigarette or cigar tobacco, cultivated extensively by Dunraven, had to be mixed with foreign leaf in order to produce a saleable article, which suggests that there was never such a commodity as an Irish cigarette or Irish pipe-tobacco. The British government while appearing to be always willing to aid the developing industry did so, on closer examination, on a nugatory and begrudging basis. Like the reality faced later by the government of the IFS, powerful business interests in Britain, which had invested heavily in the colonies, opposed, in the name of free trade, any worthwhile relief to competing industries. The rehandling scheme, 1914-23, was doomed from the start. It must have been obvious to the originators of the scheme that the grants available could never compensate the rehandlers, by virtue of the small acreage permitted, for the cost of installing the expensive machinery required to process the crops.

⁶⁶ For further information on the partial demise of the industry see Sylvia Everard, *Tobacco Growing in Ireland*, pp 7-12. For efforts to revive the industry in the 1930s see J. Anthony Gaughan, *A political odyssey, Thomas O'Donnell* (Dublin, 1983), pp 229-31. For a note on tobacco growing in the 1940s see M. E. Daly, *Industrial development and Irish national identity* (New York, 1992), pp 90, 112. The cultivation of tobacco by private growers under licence, permitted under the terms of the Tobacco Act of 1934, continued through the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s but on a very limited scale. See various boxes of material, sixteen in all, in the NAI, marked AGI and covering the years 1900 to 1955. Boxes 7 to 16, in the main, cover the years after 1930. Despite the fact that Dunraven was the second largest grower in the country, it is remarkable that, apart from odd references here and there, no file or folder exists on the production of tobacco in Adare. The nearest one gets is a listing of eight growers (mostly living between Adare and Old Kildimo) included in lists of growers for the years 1907 to 1919 (NAI, AGI boxes, no. 14, 19/5/1).

In reality tobacco culture in Ireland was a landlord thing.⁶⁷ Despite the fact that tobacco cultivation was a co-operative venture, too few farmers or small holders were willing to participate, for, to do so, they would have to deal with landlords or, worse, their agents or farm managers. On that account they got little encouragement from Irish Party politicians (with the exception of William Redmond in the early 1900s) who still viewed with suspicion any progressive measures initiated or undertaken by former landlords. It was left to a most unlikely source, D. P. Moran's *Leader*, to remonstrate with labourers as well as small and large farmers for their unwillingness to support the best prospect for employment in the country and for profit in the cultivation of the land they were likely to obtain:

When a half dozen of our landlords, with real patriotism and courage, have grown and cured tobacco, in an effort to encourage employment and tillage, and when enterprising Irish tobacco manufacturers have spent thousands in advertising and pushing the sale of this tobacco in a palatable blend, the nationalist farmers and labourers, who denounce England's impoverishment of their country, will not smoke it (or cultivate it).⁶⁸

The two main players, Dunraven and Everard both invested heavily and lost proportionately in the enterprise, the latter more so. At least Dunraven recouped some of his investment through insurance payouts in respect of the two accidental fires at the rehandling plant in 1917 and at the cigarette factory in 1919. Everard's Proctor machine, or part of it, ended up in the 1930s, drying onions, under the auspices of the County Meath Agricultural Committee.

Yet, the industry could have been a catalyst for agricultural expansion and rural prosperity during its time of operation. Both the Small Growers and the Rehandling schemes were primarily intended to be co-operative, to benefit, with little investment on their part, what might be described as small farmers, just then getting their feet under them following the trauma of the land war. The principal benefit to that class was that whatever happened subsequently, each small grower was guaranteed payment on presenting his crop to the rehandler. The paucity of the acreage permitted could never either encourage or allow the benefits to be spread except to a very small number of growers. At the same time the

67 Among landlord growers up to at least the commencement of the rehandling scheme were Lord Barrymore in County Tipperary, Sir John Keane in Cappoquin, Captain Otway Cuffe in Kilkenny, George Taaffe in Ardee and Digby Bentley, Hurdlestown House, Broadford, County Clare.

68 *The Leader*, 28 January 1911.

principle of co-operative manufactory and marketing in the dairy sector was blossoming in County Limerick and elsewhere in the southern half of Ireland. One would wonder what might have lain in store for the tobacco enterprise if its future was entrusted into the hands of agricultural co-operative societies rather than to well meaning but perhaps, politically and socially unacceptable operators. On the other hand, the Wexford Tobacco Growers' Association, a co-operative undertaking from an area that had a long history of tobacco growing, had failed. Once the Proctor era dawned for the industry, no co-operative society, without the help of more than generous grants, could have entered this new phase. The entire tobacco enterprise was labour intensive. From the time the crop was delivered to the premises of the grower in the earlier days or to the rehandler, later, many hands were needed to produce the finished article. The busiest time was from January to April, a time when work of any kind was slackest in rural areas. A feature of the work was that it provided employment for males and females of all ages. In the case of the latter category, it more than made up for the dearth of places, just then becoming apparent in the big houses of County Limerick, as the landlord class began to disengage themselves from life in Ireland.

In the final analysis, like many other similar enterprises, the Irish people themselves proved to be the final executioners in the slow process of extinction. Irish farmers were unwilling to grow the crop. The government of the Irish Free State was never fully committed either to continuing the experiments or adequately supporting the industry when it had to stand on its own. It is indeed ironic that, in the early 1920s, while Irish grown tobacco remained unsold on the London market, three tobacco manufacturers from Britain, availing of the new IFS custom arrangements to boost native employment, were allowed to set up factories here to the detriment of native employment.

PART THREE

LOST OPPORTUNITIES

PREPARING THE GROUND

Following the unexpected death of his father in 1871 the then Viscount Adare succeeded to the title, becoming the fourth earl of Dunraven and Mountearl. One of his subsidiary titles, Baron Kenry, entitled him to take his hereditary seat in the house of lords, where he first sat on 19 February 1872.¹ For the following six years he interested himself but little in the affairs of either Ireland or the United Kingdom, preferring to use that time, the last stage of his private life, to travel extensively in the United States.²

The next phase of his life may be said to have commenced when he next³ took his place in the house of lords in February 1878 when he interested himself, appropriately enough in view of his later minor government post, in matters dealing with Britain's foreign policy – the possible British abandonment of India and what was known as the Eastern Question, the imminent outbreak of hostilities between Russian and Persia.

Dunraven's first exposition on Ireland's affairs came in April of that year. The occasion was a debate on the murder in County Donegal, some ten days beforehand, of the earl of Leitrim. In a lengthy contribution Dunraven firstly expressed shame, as an Irishman, at this latest agrarian outrage. He went on to explain that Ireland was then and always had

¹ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 209, col. 1421, 19 February 1872.

² Dunraven wrote three books on his summer travels in America, *The Great Divide* (London, 1876); *Canadian Nights*, (London, 1914); *Hunting in the Yellowstone* (New York, 1917). He first visited America in 1869 and, three years later, happened upon a remote virtually unpopulated area, called Estes Park, in the Rocky Mountains north of Denver, Colorado. Returning in 1874, he embarked on a scheme of indirect purchases in Estes Park and soon owned eight thousand acres and had control over another fifteen thousand. His intention was to convert the area into a private hunting preserve for himself and his British friends. The venture only lasted a few years and then the area was turned over to cattle grazing but that, too, failed. By 1880 homesteaders began to dispute his title to the lands and, becoming disillusioned, due to the constant conflict, and the difficulty in managing such a vast property from home, he first leased the land and in 1907 sold the entire property for what he could get. It is estimated that he lost between \$200,000 and \$300,000 on the venture. Yet his sojourn there was productive of some good. 'It was fortunate that he managed to control the land he did, keeping it in the original state, wild and untamed, so that, instead of many small lots, with houses and fields, we can enjoy the beautiful resort area it is today' (Dave Hicks, *Dunraven, the earl of Estes*, Colorado, 1968). His stay there is commemorated in lofty Mount Dunraven, a rugged peak, 12,271 ft., that looks down on Estes Park. One of the short guidebooks on the area, Kenneth Jessen, *Estes Park, a quick history* (Colorado, 1996), contains a useful bibliography. See also Dunraven, *Past times*, i, pp 89, 140-03.

³ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 238, col. 55, 21 February 1878.

been dissatisfied and disaffected because she had been evilly treated and misgoverned for many generations. These he listed as frightful religious disabilities, repression of her trade and manufactory and ill judged government administration, all of which combined to result in a sense of widespread injustice. As Leitrim was a notorious, litigious and oppressive landlord, who now became a victim to agrarian unrest, it was inevitable that the land question, which Dunraven felt was beyond the power of any individual or government to settle, would loom large in his contribution. He outlined the putative claim of Irish people to the real ownership of the soil of Ireland, coming to the conclusion that the complete transference of ownership to the claimants would prove no lasting remedy. In view of his later *volte face* in this regard the reason he gave then was far from convincing, namely that the relatively small amount of land available would lead to unhealthy competition among would-be purchasers who would outbid one another and then, inevitably, fail to keep up the repayments. Another reason given was that wholesale transference of legally held lands would lead to alienation of landlords from the people and induce them to fall back on the law to uphold their legal rights. Yet Dunraven was not fully critical of the Irish race, as he had already excused them as being victims of unfortunate circumstances. He considered that there were 'no more frugal, self-sacrificing people in the world than the farmers of Ireland'⁴ but he failed to understand their intense and unnatural competition for land to the exclusion of all other outlets for their talents. This was in sharp contrast to the industry and diligence of Irishmen as he had seen them in America. He concluded by suggesting that he failed to see how a peasant proprietorship, home rule or any other sort of rule could remove the causes of discontent felt by the majority of those living in Ireland whether they were landlords, tenants or townspeople.

It was, in many ways, a curious if accurate expose of life in Ireland. Unusual in that somebody had the gumption to admit, in the house of lords, that Irish people suffered real grievances; thoughtful, in that he did not emulate his fellow peers by reviling and vilifying the entire Irish race or at least the majority population; pessimistic, in that he saw no resolution to her many problems; frank, in his assessment of the craving for land among the peasant population, and generous in his understanding that the reckless, improvident rollicking Irishmen of stage and novel had ceased to exist. Here was somebody, of no political influence or significance at the time, who was prepared to atomise the corpus of the Irish nation and make allowances for what the dissection revealed. That he saw no solution

⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 239, cols. 1200-07, 12 April 1878.

to apparently insurmountable obstacles at the time is of no concern. Anybody with such a perspicacious and sagacious mind would, in time, arrive at solutions. So it came to pass, but not just yet.

During the following years Dunraven was on a learning curve, highlighting the difficulties under which Ireland laboured and often suggesting remedies, sensible but far removed from the stance he took on such matters in later years. Distress in Ireland, caused by particularly harsh weather in 1879 and the winter of 1880 resulting in a poor crop return, was the subject of a debate in the house of lords in February 1880. Dunraven did not agree⁵ with his fellow county man, the first Baron Emly, who contended that it was time that the government stepped in and proffered direct aid to save the people from starvation in some parts of Ireland. He was still an old style conservative of the *laissez faire* school who abhorred interference by the state in the lives of the people. Taking the famine of 1845-8 as an example, Dunraven deprecated the manner in which the whole nation then became demoralised as all classes - owners of land, occupiers, small tradesmen and labourers - threw themselves upon the state and scrambled for public money to the detriment of the cultivation of the soil and other profitable occupations. The same logic he applied to any prospect of peasant proprietary. Speaking to a debate⁶ on the state of Ireland in the same month Dunraven commented on John Bright's⁷ plan whereby the government would lend occupiers money, at advantageous rates, to purchase their holdings. In that event the government would then, in turn, become a type of landlord, collecting both capital and interest over the designated number of years. He held that as tenants were, even then, generally unable to keep up rent payments to their landlords, they would be quite incapable of paying the combined charges to the state and would soon fall into arrears with disastrous implications for the government. As yet, it never crossed his mind that the level of rents in Ireland was too high, so as to make farming uneconomic nor had the notion of a broker or middleman between purchaser and provider of capital, as exemplified by the Estates Commissioners under the 1903 land purchase act or the Land Commission later, entered into any equation. Despite the fact that it was only the third year of his public life Dunraven, having accurately diagnosed the causes of ailing Ireland, was now probing for suitable remedies.

One area of public endeavour in which Dunraven was always misunderstood and

5 *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 250, cols. 498-502, 12 February 1880.

6 *Hansard*, vol. 250, cols. 1545-59, 27 February 1880.

7 An English social reformer who was M.P for Birmingham.

misrepresented was in the realm of home rule. From 1880 onward home rule was increasingly being advanced as a type of nostrum to cure, in conjunction with peasant proprietorship, all the ills of Ireland. Ending his speech⁸ on 27 February 1880, Dunraven professed, like a great many others, not to comprehend exactly what the term home rule meant. He did not attempt to give his understanding of the term but went on to say that it was not a question for Ireland alone but had relevance for the population of the rest of the United Kingdom and had implications for the peoples of Britain's dependencies and colonies. Until 1920 these two principles were the corner stones of Dunraven's thinking on home rule. A few days⁹ later he commented again on government aid for distress. The government proposed to advance sums from the accumulated Irish Church Fund, resulting from the disestablishment of the Established Church, towards the relief of distress, Dunraven was not happy at the prospect as he feared that such funds would be spent on unnecessary public works and, in any event, he always held that 'if the state were to supply the necessities of life, it is well to exact some measure of labour as an equivalent.'¹⁰

Around this time Dunraven, like most of the landlord class, became increasingly concerned¹¹ with the upsurge of agrarian agitation and resultant outrages. This he saw as a well orchestrated attempt, organised and funded by revolutionaries in the United States, to upset and ultimately overthrow the whole social fabric of Ireland and bring about the separation of Ireland from England. Replying¹² to the queen's speech in January 1881, he felt that the inevitable result of this agitation was unrest among a demoralised and confused population due in part to the government's failure to apply the rigours of the law to miscreants. The best way to combat agitation was a legislative programme of ameliorative measures such as the introduction of realistic local government and suitable alterations in the land laws to begin the process of peasant proprietorship. Realising that the benefits of such measures would be slow in coming, Dunraven encouraged the government, in the short term, to continue using the exceptional powers that had been given them as:

some permanent alteration was necessary in the ordinary law of Ireland . . . Ireland could not be ruled by ordinary law . . . crimes of an agrarian nature remained practically

8 *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 250, col. 1556, 27 February 1880.

9 *Hansard*, vol. 251, cols. 16-7, 1 March 1880.

10 *Hansard*, vol. 250, cols. 498-502, 12 February 1880.

11 *Hansard*, vol. 252, cols. 1743-5, 11 June 1880; vol. 254, cols. 158-9, 12 July 1880; vol. 257, cols. 64-6, 6 January 1881.

12 *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 257, cols. 64-6, 6 January 1881.

unpunished . . . the government should consider other means of trying these cases other than trials by jury. . . [the government] should try and make the law fit the country instead of making the country fit the law.¹³

Dunraven took an active interest¹⁴ in the second reading of the Land Law (Ireland) Bill, 1881 (Gladstone's second land act), an important milestone along the road to land purchase, by supporting and proposing a number of amendments favourable to tenants. In 1882 he was named¹⁵ as a member of a select committee to inquire into the working of recent legislation in reference to land in Ireland and its effect upon the condition of the country. In view of his belief that law and order had broken down in Ireland, Dunraven was horrified by the release of Parnell and others from Kilmainham Jail, in April 1882, where they had been incarcerated under the Protection of Persons and Property (Ireland) Act, 1881. He was particularly aggrieved that the government saw fit to bargain with land agitators, as the release was apparently made conditional upon a certain line of action being adopted by the suspects while they, in turn, made that line of action conditional upon the adoption of a certain programme by the government.¹⁶ Dunraven's most severe stricture was reserved for Gladstone and his government, arguing that if the terms agreed with Parnell were likely to be of such benefit to Ireland and the United Kingdom then they should have adopted that policy without reference to any agency outside of themselves. What Ireland needed was strong and resolute governance, not compromises with miscreants.

From 1881 to 1884, except for his observations on the release of Parnell and his earlier response to the report of the commission that inquired into the Irish jury system, when he argued¹⁷ for the return of the Habeas Corpus act, Dunraven mostly confined himself, in the house of lords and in letters to various newspapers,¹⁸ to remarks on the recent land act, together with his usual commentaries on the foreign affairs of the United Kingdom. On a

13 *Hansard*, vol. 259, cols. 1353-7, 18 March 1881.

14 *Hansard*, vol. 264, cols. 320-33, 768, 1 August; col. 791, 4 August; cols. 935, 946, 955, 964, 972, 5 August 1881.

15 *Hansard*, vol. 266, col. 978, 17 February; col. 943, 24 February 1882.

16 *Hansard*, vol. 270, cols. 37-41, 5 June 1882.

17 *Ibid.*, 3rd series, vol. 268, cols. 451-4, 31 March 1882.

18 D 3196, G 11, Dunraven papers, Adare, pp 55-113.

number of occasions he demonstrated how emigration¹⁹ could be used to relieve poverty, particularly in the west of Ireland.

Dunraven returned to more specifically Irish political matters in July 1884, when he commented²⁰ on the representation of the people bill, the main provision of which was the admission of a very large number of people to the franchise. He objected strongly that, due to the condition of the country, the government did not envisage applying the measure to Ireland. Taking as his starting point the aphorism that it was unwise to allow legislation to wait on agitation, Dunraven could not understand why so many, in both houses of parliament, opposed the extension of the franchise to Ireland. Firstly, not to do so would discriminate against Ireland and so give the country a real source of grievance and, secondly, the worst possible outcome would be an increase in the numbers of Parnell's followers. This in turn could lead to difficulties for parliament, even handing the Irish Party the balance of power, which was the method by which the government of Ireland was then being carried on. As long as Parnell and his allies made government difficult, if not impossible, by obstruction and not by argument, then the affairs of the United Kingdom could only be carried on by one of two methods – either by private understandings, underhand negotiations and secret treaties (as in the case of the Kilmainham Treaty), which were most immoral or by some combination of the representatives of England, Scotland and Wales as would render the government independent of Parnell and his followers.

¹⁹ In one of his first contributions in the house of lords, Dunraven, speaking on crime in Ireland, stated that the population of the country was too large for a very limited amount of land with no outlets into industry or manufacture and the trend, therefore, should be towards a diminution of the population (*Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 239, cols. 1200-07, 12 April 1878). Two years later he opined that it was time that the government began a scheme of state sponsored emigration as the people were too poor to finance their going and the landlords could not afford to assist them as they did in the past (*Hansard*, vol. 254, cols. 158-9, 12 July 1880). Assisted emigration, Dunraven told the house in August, should be directed to the British colonies which needed to be populated and another huge advantage was that persons who settled in the colonies became in time, thoroughly well disposed towards British rule. His own travels in America had taught him that emigrants there invariably retained animosity towards Britain. Canada then would be his first choice and, in any event, it was the nearest and cheapest to get to (*Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 255, cols. 605-8, 9 Aug. 1880). Later in that same debate, Viscount Monck disclosed that, during the previous week, he and Dunraven had discussed that very topic with Sir John MacDonald, the prime minister of Canada (*Hansard*, vol. 255, col. 609, 9 August 1880). In winding up for the government, the earl of Kimberley said that the matter was an Irish rather than a colonial problem, thereby effectively putting an end to the affair (*Hansard*, vol. 255, col. 611, 9 August 1880). Dunraven was quick to reply that if that were the case then more generous loans should be made available to boards of guardians and that money advanced to emigrants to Canada could be secured on holdings of land there, in accordance with the Bright clauses of the recent land act (*Hansard*, vol. 255, col. 618, 9 August 1880). This was the first of Dunraven's crusades for the betterment of the Irish people, even if it was a little bizarre, but it, like countless similar attempts over the years, carried a taint of suspicion that rendered it ineffective and useless. Was it proposed for the good of Ireland or for the greater good of England and the British Empire?

²⁰ *Hansard*, vol. 290, cols. 168-73, 7 July 1884.

In 1885 there was a radical change in Dunraven's political life. Following the general election the Conservative leader, the marquis of Salisbury, became prime minister and appointed Dunraven as under secretary for the Colonies, a post without a seat in the cabinet. During the life of that ministry, from June 1885 to February 1886, Dunraven, apart from his official duties, found time to visit²¹ a number of English provincial centres to enunciate the policy of the new administration. Usually he confined himself to matters concerning British colonial policy or internal United Kingdom affairs but, on at least two occasions, he alluded to and expanded on his views on official government policy towards Ireland. Speaking²² in Warwick, in October 1885, he called the Kilmainham Treaty one of the most disgraceful episodes in English history and poured more scorn on the Liberal opposition by reminding his audience that, when in power, the last government had passed more than forty coercion measures towards Ireland as against but a single one passed by the Tories up to then. He consented to the then new Conservative policy towards Ireland, the so-called 'killing home rule by kindness', whereby, instead of bullying the Irish race, policies of a practical nature were embarked on to improve the material life of her citizens. Concluding his Warwick speech he iterated that it would be impossible for Ireland to be politically separated from Britain, as it would be ruinous to her trade and economy. Later, in the same month, in a speech²³ in a location not identified, Dunraven listed four factors, which combined to make Ireland an unfortunate country. Firstly, as the country produced no coal, industries, save that of agriculture, were necessarily non-existent. Secondly, the cold damp climate, while good for grazing, was not conducive to tillage and so the crops were unable to support the population. Thirdly, Ireland was a ready prey to political agitators. Fourthly, Ireland had greatly suffered from Liberal misrule. While he did not directly allude to it, it was implicit in his expose of the tribulations of Ireland that the new Conservative policy was specifically designed to remedy her ills.

Dunraven's term of office did not last long. On 1 February 1886, Salisbury announced in the house of lords that his government had resigned. Without the benefit of an election, Gladstone was called upon to enter into his third administration and before long introduced his first home rule bill which ended in ignominious defeat on 8 June 1886. Parliament was dissolved later that month and the opposition regained power in July.

21 See Dunraven papers, Adare, G 11, pp 125-67.

22 *Norfolk Daily Standard*, 13 October 1885, cited in Dunraven papers, Adare, G 11, pp 127-31.

23 *Western Mail*, 26 October 1885, in Dunraven papers, G 11, pp 143-57.

Dunraven was offered, and accepted his old post, though there was some surprise in parliamentary circles that he was not offered a seat in the cabinet. The holding of government office, albeit at junior ministerial level, did not again inhibit Dunraven from commenting on Irish affairs, showing him to be an arch conservative and implacable opponent of home rule. Speaking at Penarth,²⁴ Glamorganshire, in October 1886, he explained that the Conservative Party would always have to bear the brunt of the battle against dismemberment of the U.K. and went on to warn his Tory audience that many hard battles would have to be fought to achieve that end and that all loyal Britishers would need to be vigilant and not, as he put it, fall asleep. In the following month he pointed out²⁵ at Swansea, on 26 November 1886, that the main lesson to be learned from the last general election was that the people had given their verdict against home rule for Ireland and had deliberately returned the Conservatives to ensure that the union would be maintained. In January 1887, Dunraven commented²⁶ on the growing Irish influence in America. There, he said, the real aim of Irish agitation was ultimately to assist in the fashioning of Ireland as a separate state. This, he said, was to be achieved in two ways. Firstly, large numbers of second generation Irish had removed their allegiance from the Democratic Party to the Republicans in order to endeavour to have a controlling interest in policy making decisions, and, secondly, until such time as that process was completed, subtle efforts were being made to drive a wedge between America and the U. K., citing the recent attempts to stir up trouble between the U.S. and Canada over ownership of the valuable Newfoundland fisheries. Two points may be made about these speeches. Dunraven held then, as always, that the question of home rule for Ireland concerned as much the people of the United Kingdom as the people of Ireland, and he was becoming aware of the growing political influence of second generation Irish in the United States and felt a sense of unease once the thrust of that pressure was directed towards England.

Dunraven, when not quite six months in office, shocked the political sphere in England by resigning, without any forewarning, from his government post. Sharing his reasons with fellow members of the house of lords in February 1887, he said²⁷ that he neither

24 Dunraven papers, G 11, pp 179-83.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 187.

26 Speech at Runcorn in Dunraven papers, G 11, pp 189-91.

27 *Hansard*, vol. 310, cols. 1715-25, 17 February 1887. General disenchantment with party and government policies, and a desire to speak freely on matters of concern to him, brought about his resignation. He was also influenced by the resignation of Lord Randolph Churchill as chancellor of the exchequer in December 1886. See Churchill to Dunraven, 12 January 1887, in which the former

resigned because of any matter connected with the Colonial Office nor because of the difficulties between the U. K. and the U. S. over the Newfoundland fisheries, though he was not in agreement with government policy on that matter, but now he had an opportunity to speak freely on that evolving issue from the back benches. Another reason, though not exclusively the cause of his resignation, was the seeking of additional repressive legislation by the government to apply specifically to Ireland. Dunraven felt that sufficient legislation was already on the statute book to deal with unrest in Ireland and what was lacking was the will to implement it. He cited a curious incident to back up his assertion. In Limerick city, the mayor and town council had recently refused to honour debts due to the British exchequer. In order to secure payment the government looked for additional powers but Dunraven felt that such was quite unnecessary, as sufficient authority already existed.

Freed from the constraints of ministerial office Dunraven became a popular and much sought after speaker on the Conservative Party/Primrose League²⁸ circuit. Often he made no reference to Ireland or its problems though when he did, he inevitably mentioned home rule and land agitation, topics which seemed to be, at that time, coming more and more into public focus. Like many of his party colleagues he was becoming increasingly irked at the news from Ireland. In October 1887, at Stockport,²⁹ his pessimistic views, unlike those of 1878, were expressly those of the landlord class showing little sympathy with the aspirations of the oppressed Irish nation. He regarded boycotting as the cruelest torment that could be inflicted on anyone and averred that the ‘massacre’ at Mitchelstown, on 9 September 1887, had been

prompts Dunraven to resign his minor government post and ‘try a bold course’ to initiate a crusade for a return to the fundamentals of Tory political principles (Winston S. Churchill, *Lord Randolph Churchill* (London, 1951), pp 604-05; NAI, Dunraven papers, N/1/5). The above reasons for resignation are borne out from Dunraven’s letter of resignation (Dunraven to Salisbury [the prime minister], 3 February 1887, NAI, Dunraven papers, N/1/5). See also Dunraven to Salisbury, 13 January 1887, where it becomes clear that dissatisfaction with the government’s repressive policy towards Ireland was the prime reason for the resignation, ‘I expressed doubts [in an interview with Salisbury at the time of the formation of the government] as to whether I should be able to approve the probable policy of the government towards Ireland’ (NAI, Dunraven papers, N/1/5). Churchill, who felt that the government was faulty, feeble and hopelessly inadequate to what the times required, was pleased that Dunraven had also resigned. He referred to him as ‘a man of considerable importance, and has made a position for himself with the workingman’ (Churchill to his mother, 21 February 1887, cited in W. S. Churchill, *Lord Randolph Churchill*, p. 616). Two years later, either as compensation for his departure from office or to sideline him lest he become a thorn in the side of the government [in conjunction with Lord Randolph Churchill], the secretary for the colonies, Knutsford, offered Dunraven the governorship and high commissionership of the Cape Province at a combined salary of £6,000 per annum (Knutsford to Dunraven, 11 February 1889 (NAI, Dunraven papers, N/1/5)). The offer was not accepted.

28 The Primrose League was a right wing Tory grouping instituted in November 1886. Although Dunraven was not a founding member he adhered to its principles which subsequently formed the bedrock of his anti-home rule stance. For more on the Primrose League see Winston S. Churchill, *Lord Randolph Churchill*, pp 202-05.

29 17 October 1887, Dunraven papers, Adare, G 11, pp 193-9.

brought about because, as he said, the people resisted the police in the execution of their duty. Among his oratorical skills Dunraven was able to tailor his remarks to the expectations of his listeners. On that occasion he turned to the wider picture of possible Irish separation and reminded his audience that the Tory party had a sacred duty to hold the fort and keep the field against home rule. While the tenor of his remarks was, at this time, anti agitation he could also be quite objective in his criticism. In Cardiff,³⁰ in June 1887, he was of the opinion that the widespread discontent was due, more to bad times, bad harvests and bad prices, than to any innate desire for national freedom, though he was fearful of the influence of professional agitators traversing the countryside stirring up trouble by means of mantras based on alleged British injustices, the very latest being 'remember Mitchelstown'. Dunraven was also fine-tuning his views on home rule. Ireland, he held, should be governed like other parts of the United Kingdom, giving the example of Scotland, whose affairs were looked after by a government minister. The office of the lord lieutenant symbolised that Ireland was a conquered race, the discontinuance of which would give the Irish people a sense of national pride.

Accepting that the question of home rule 'had been settled, once and for all, at the last general election,'³¹ and as a Tory government was in power, Dunraven turned his attention to matters of a more social nature. On 28 February 1888 he moved³² in the house of lords that a select committee be appointed to inquire into the sweating system in the clothing industry in the east end of London. His motion was accepted and when the committee was set up the following month Dunraven was named as chairman. Following representations made to him, Dunraven asked leave,³³ in August, to widen the scope of the inquiry to embrace the whole of the United Kingdom. Evidence was taken, under oath, in different locations during the rest of 1888 and up to July of the following year. On 15 August 1889, the committee began the work of considering the final report³⁴ that the chairman had drafted. When it was submitted to the house of lords, on 14 February 1890, the peers, due to time constraints, agreed³⁵ to set up a sub-committee of the house, with power to appoint their own chairman, to examine the report of the select committee and report back. Dunraven surprised the house

30 13 June 1887, Dunraven papers, Adare, G 12, pp 20-2.

31 Dunraven papers, Adare, G 12, pp 30-2. Dunraven was speaking in Cardiff.

32 *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 322, cols. 1598-1610, 28 February 1888.

33 *Hansard*, vol. 329, cols. 1382-3, 3 August 1888.

34 Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, pp 107-8.

35 *Hansard*, vol. 341, col. 297, 14 February 1890.

when, on 24 March 1890, he sought permission to withdraw³⁶ from the select committee. He explained that, as chairman, he was credited with certain duties and responsibilities among which was the drafting of the final report. This function was resented by members of the select committee who subsequently went behind his back and obtained the appointment of the sub-committee. When the report of the sub-committee was submitted on 9 June 1890 Dunraven gained the initiative by proposing³⁷ that legislation be brought in to ameliorate the plight of those labouring under the sweating system by setting up a government department to deal with labour affairs. Obviously stung by his sidelining Dunraven took the opportunity also to criticise what he called the watered down report of the sub-committee.

In March 1888 and later,³⁸ Dunraven interested himself in the debate concerning the reform of the house of lords, a controversy then coming to the fore. His suggestion aimed to limit the number of peers eligible to sit; to bring in a proper disciplinary code, and the placing of certain curbs on life peers. Another matter that interested him greatly was the Newfoundland fishery dispute, which had been one of the factors in his resignation from government office. He had a certain affinity with Newfoundland having hunted and fished there in his wanderlust days prior to succeeding to the title in 1871. Under ancient treaties France had the right to fish close to the shores of Newfoundland, much to the chagrin of the natives, who had themselves built up lucrative markets for fish in Canada and in the United States. The colonists passed a retaliatory act of parliament but had not the means to enforce it nor was the British government willing to protect the fisheries from the French trawlers. Dunraven felt that the time was opportune to awaken the conscience of Britain to what was happening. On 17 February 1891, he asked in the house of lords that papers regarding the dispute be laid before the house³⁹ – a device to gain public attention by resurrecting the matter. When a delegation arrived from the colony, and sought permission to be heard at the bar of the house, to protest against a proposed government bill to reactivate a *modus vivendi* between Britain and France regarding the dispute, it was Dunraven who moved⁴⁰ that the delegation be heard. Once this was agreed Dunraven took no part in subsequent proceedings. While the matter was not resolved to mutual satisfaction until 1894 Dunraven had played an

36 *Hansard*, vol. 342, cols. 1666-7, 24 March 1890.

37 *Hansard*, vol. 345, cols. 283-308, 9 June 1890.

38 *Hansard* 3rd series, vol. 323, cols. 1, 325, 327, 1584-8, 2, 6, 19 March 1888; vol. 325, cols. 518-540, 562, 26 April 1888; vol. 327, cols. 407-8, 18 June 1888; vol. 328, cols. 861-2, 10 July 1888.

39 *Hansard*, vol. 350, cols. 817-8, 17 February 1891.

40 *Ibid.*, vol. 352, cols. 1131-5, 23 April 1891.

important role in bringing the impasse to public notice and thereby expediting the later settlement. It is worth noting that Dunraven's interest in the fisheries dispute was born out of a certain measure of sentiment but more importantly as a natural follow-on to the principles of the Primrose League. As that group's basic tenet was the preservation of the empire, it followed that all legitimate objects and ambitions of the colonies should be actively supported and encouraged by the government. The break up of the empire was anathema to followers of the League. That belief also coloured Dunraven's view of the home rule movement in Ireland and caused him to speak out so forcefully against Gladstone and his vision of a semi-independent Ireland. While Dunraven never went so far as to emulate his soul mate, Lord Randolph Churchill, who exploited and moulded northern unionist opinion against home rule, his opposition was trenchant, consistent and sincere.

After six years of Tory rule, which produced many worthwhile concessions to Ireland, a general election beckoned in 1892. Fearing that home rule or repeal would become the principal election issue, unionists, north and south, began to bestir themselves. Dunraven was invited to attend a unionist demonstration in Limerick on 17 June 1892 but was unable to attend due to urgent business in London. His letter of apology, dated 11 June 1892, furnished an ideal opportunity, not only to expand on his objections, but also to rally support among the hitherto lethargic southern unionists. Repeal [the term used by Dunraven] would be:

fatal to the material prosperity of our country since the development of her resources and her future welfare depend upon the security derived from maintaining the principle of union essentially intact.⁴¹

In intimating that, in his opinion, repeal would never be obtained, Dunraven, while he was addressing the business and moneyed classes, also made a covert appeal to non unionists who were opposed to home rule to have the courage to speak with their lips what they felt in their hearts and not to be frightened to do so.⁴² Intimidation, he later told⁴³ the house of lords during a debate on the Government of Ireland Bill, 1893, was a powerful weapon used by agents of the Land League and Irish Party to keep the nationalist people of Ireland in check and help to concentrate their minds on matters such as home rule and land reform.

⁴¹ Dunraven papers, Adare, D 3196 G 12, p. 79; *LC*, 18 June 1892.

⁴² Dunraven to Barrington, 11 June 1892, cited in *LC*, 18 June 1892; Dunraven papers, Adare, G 12, p. 79.

⁴³ *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 10, cols. 353-5, 17 March 1893.

The election resulted in the return of Gladstone who introduced his second home rule bill in January 1893. Unlike the previous occasion, Dunraven took a prominent part in opposing the bill. In the first part of 1893 he embarked on an extensive tour⁴⁴ of Britain speaking at Conservative anti-home rule rallies. He also found time to attend a similar rally in Limerick on 27 March 1893, where he moved the main resolution. Apart from the usual arguments why Ireland could not survive outside the United Kingdom he engaged in uncharacteristic and dangerous rhetoric. He pointed out that should the bill pass it meant to Ireland the inevitable prospect of civil war and to England entanglement, which would prove ruinous to the empire [Both these statements were uncannily prophetic. The civil war in Ireland, in the 1920s, was not exactly what was speculated upon in 1893 while the secession of Ireland from the United Kingdom began the unravelling of the fabric of the British Empire]. Continuing on the same theme he quoted unionist speakers from the plantation counties who said that ‘they would not accept this parliament in College Green and if it was attempted to be forced upon them they would resist it by force.’⁴⁵ While these sentiments may not necessarily have been his own yet he quoted them to a highly charged and volatile audience and they were highlighted in the leading article of the local unionist newspaper.

In parliament he lost no opportunity to express his detestation of the proposed measure. In replying to the queen’s speech he said that ‘home rule was opposed by the minority that comprised practically all the wealth of the country, not only in capital but in skilled industry and cultivated intelligence.’⁴⁶ The following month he railed against the pressure being put on farmers and labourers in Ireland to sign petitions in favour of home rule. When the second reading came before the lords in September 1893, Dunraven in a long contribution stated, somewhat wide of the mark, that:

if the lords did reject the bill that decision would be the collective result of the well-thought out and perfectly matured, totally independent opinions of the members of the house.⁴⁷

During the course of the debate, a question was raised as to who exactly did Irish peers

44 Dunraven papers, Adare, G 12. The period in question was from 27 February to 9 June 1893.

45 *LC*, 28 March 1893.

46 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 8, cols. 357-67, 3 February 1893.

47 *Hansard*, vol. 10, cols. 353-5, 17 March 1893.

represent. Dunraven gave his assessment of his own position in that matter. He said that his views coincided [he was careful not to use the word represented] with those held by protestant farmers and labourers, the great bulk of well-to-do catholics and the entire gentry in the part of Ireland in which he lived – a considerable constituency. He went on to say that:

as far as he was concerned his sympathies were entirely with the people of Ireland. He could identify himself with anything that was a popular movement in Ireland but he objected to home rule from conscientious motives.⁴⁸

On the surface, it might appear that Dunraven, like his fellow peers then and like an illustrious Irishman later, looked into his heart and saw what he wanted to find. Yet one cannot but be impressed by Dunraven's sincerity and his well argued assertion that the economy of Ireland would collapse utterly under a home rule regime. In his winding up remarks on that occasion he told his listeners that in voting against the measure he was 'acting under his sense of duty and believing the course of action which he adopted was the true course towards his beloved country.'⁴⁹

As the lords rejected the bill the matter seemed to have come to an end. Dunraven certainly believed so. Addressing the Bridgend Conservative Association, in February 1894, he said that its defeat 'saved the country [the United Kingdom] from disruption and dismemberment.'⁵⁰ The following month he defended the house of lords against the odium heaped upon it for bringing about the defeat of the home rule bill and consequent resignation of the grand old man of British politics, William Ewart Gladstone. He said that the house of lords had certain duties placed upon it, 'duties which they were bound constitutionally to perform. It must perform these duties and they were the duties of a revising chamber.'⁵¹ Dunraven's final remark on home rule in the decade was to tell⁵² his listeners in Bath, on 16 April 1894, that repeal was as good as dead.

From 1894 to the turn of the century Dunraven interested himself in various non-political matters. In 1896 he was appointed chairman of a commission to inquire into horse

48 *Hansard*, vol. 17, cols. 436-46, 7 September 1893.

49 *Hansard*, vol. 17, col. 445, 7 September 1893.

50 *Western Mail*, 22 February 1894, cited in Dunraven papers, Adare, G 12.

51 *Northampton Herald*, 17 March 1894, Dunraven papers, Adare, G 12.

52 Dunraven papers, Adare, G 12.

breeding in Ireland while he later contributed to proceedings when the local Government (Ireland) bill was going through parliament.

Dunraven's opinion of the Irish people underwent a significant change during his membership of the house of lords from 1872 to 1896. His disdain for them in the early years, resulting in particular from their obsession with possession of even a parcel of land, changed to compassion for them in their misery, which he felt was not entirely of their making, and engendered in him a desire to ameliorate their lot. His attitude to the country remained steadfast during that period. At least up to 1904 he could not comprehend any future for Ireland unless it faithfully adhered to the terms of the Act of Union. For some reason, which is not readily identifiable, he then was prepared to concede that the political bonds uniting the two countries should be loosened, if only a little.

WHEN NOBODY WANTED TO BE REFORMED

Following upon the success of the land conference in making recommendations which could lead to a settlement of the long standing land problem it was inevitable that some of its members would turn to other seemingly intractable Irish problems, the most obdurate of which was the political dilemma facing the country – how to concede a measure of home rule to Ireland and still satisfy the unionist minority. Accordingly, in March 1903, five members of the LCC prepared a circular suggesting that the *modus operandi* of the land conference might usefully be applied to the equally thorny question of Ireland's future within the British Empire.¹ Dunraven was not present at that gathering and later used his position as chairman of the LCC to stop, for a number of reasons, its circulation.² Firstly, the time was inopportune. Secondly, since the circular was directed towards landlords who intended to remain in Ireland after the sale of their estates, their future was still unsure and depended on whether the terms of the land bill would be favourable to them. Thirdly, as the land conference was set up for a specific purpose, it could not engage in matters outside the original parameters. Despite his misgivings as to its timing, if not its contents, Dunraven sent a copy to Wyndham telling him that it would be suppressed.³

During the months that followed, Dunraven was in contact, on a regular basis, with Wyndham and MacDonnell, either separately or as a group of three. Much of their discussions centred, at the start, on problems dealing with the land bill. When that matter was successfully completed, attention turned to a resolution of the university crux and, when that failed, attention was beamed on the political situation. In March 1904 the three discussed Irish politics.⁴ Dunraven was at that time considering the formation of a centre party, hoping initially to attract moderate unionist opinion and later join forces with William O'Brien and his followers. Following discussions, MacDonnell was mandated to invite the more prominent unionists, who might be interested in joining such a venture, to a formal dinner in order to meet Dunraven. On reflection, however, MacDonnell was unwilling to proceed, as he did not wish to implicate Wyndham in the business at that time, something

1 Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, p. 25; *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 141, cols. 435-6, 17 February 1905. A copy of this circular, signed by W. Hutcheson Poe, Lindsey Talbot-Crosbie, R. H. Prior Wandesforde, A. More O'Farrall and M. V. Blacker-Douglas, cannot be traced (Dunraven, *The outlook in Ireland* (Dublin, 1907), appendix 1, p. 271).

2 Note by Murray Hornibrook, July 1924 (hereafter Hornibrook), Mackail and Wyndham, *The life and letters of George Wyndham*, (London, 1925) ii, appendix A, p.792. Hornibrook was principal private secretary to Wyndham, 1903-05.

3 Hornibrook, p. 792.

4 Memorandum of Sir Antony MacDonnell, dated 8 February 1905, Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, appendix III, p. 190 (hereafter Memorandum of MacDonnell).

with which Wyndham concurred, and so the matter was dropped.⁵

On Thursday 25 August 1904, during horse show week, a private meeting of the land conference committee was held in Dublin. Some twenty five persons attended, including Cols Hutcheson Poe and Everard, members of the land conference; long-time supporters of land purchase in Capt Shawe-Taylor and Lindsey Talbot-Crosbie, together with Dunraven's Limerick ally, James O'Grady Delmege. Dunraven, who chaired the proceedings, proposed 'that the Land Conference Committee be and is hereby dissolved.' After this was agreed, Talbot-Crosbie and Lord Louth, the only other titled person present, proposed and seconded another motion to the effect that it was desirable to constitute a new organisation to be styled the Irish Reform Association (IRA) and that a committee be appointed to consider and report on the subject. This motion was agreed and a sub-committee, the members of which are unknown, was appointed to formulate a programme and have it ready for the following day.⁶ The programme was presented at a meeting of the whole group the next afternoon.⁷ A provisional organising committee consisting of Dunraven, Poe, Sir Algernon Coote, Talbot-Crosbie and Everard was appointed and other matters, including consideration of a constitution, appointment of officers etc. were postponed to a future meeting. Poe was requested to act as honorary secretary, a surprising appointment as both Shawe-Taylor, who had acted as secretary to the land conference and Ambrose Lane, who was joint-secretary to the LCC, were present at the meeting.

This then was the nucleus of the centre party that Dunraven was planning for some time. All in all, with the exception of Dunraven, the members were a nondescript group of middle to lower ranking landlords hardly likely to inspire or attract widespread unionist opinion. While it had the trappings and aspirations of an organisation designed to be a force in Irish political life, on examination it had no future and it was doubtful whether those present at the inaugural meeting had a clear understanding of what exactly was to be reformed. The small number present were bound together by their participation in or support for the successful Land Conference Committee and by a mistaken belief that further changes could be brought about by using the same formula. On the other hand they did not represent either the aristocracy or the bulk of Irish landlords, two groups whose wholehearted support

5 MacDonnell to Dunraven, F. S. L. Lyons, 'The Irish unionist party and the devolution crisis of 1904-5' in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. vi, no.

21, March 1948, p.5 (hereafter Lyons, *Irish Unionist Party*); *Hansard*, 4th Series, vol. 141, col. 438, 17 February 1905.

6 *IT*, 26 August 1904.

7 *IT*, 31 August 1904.

was necessary if the new moderate party was to flourish and its programme be followed through.

The programme or discussion document,⁸ as presented to the press, may be briefly considered under five headings. Firstly, the future prosperity and development of Ireland and the settlement of ongoing Irish problems depended on the pursuance of a policy of reform initiated and sustained by conciliation and goodwill among all classes and creeds. Secondly, the maintenance of the union between Great Britain and Ireland was essential to the political stability of the empire and to the prosperity of the two islands and such union was consistent with the devolution to Ireland of a larger measure of local government than she then possessed. Thirdly, a system should be devised whereby expenditure of Irish finance could be conducted in a more efficient and economic manner. Fourthly, the system of private bill legislation, which was working so successfully in Scotland, should, with modifications, be introduced into Ireland. Fifthly, also necessary were the settlement of the question of higher education, the furtherance of land purchase, and the provision of suitable housing and the general betterment of the labouring classes in Ireland. It was in reality a document aspiring to attract the attention and support of the unionist and business classes; provide a framework within which real material progress could be made in Ireland, and was addressed to all who had the highest interests of the country at heart. With its appeal for goodwill among all classes and its insistence on the preservation of the Act of Union, the programme was not likely to find favour with either the Irish Party or the bulk of nationalists.

The fact that the report was not available for the Thursday meeting but was ready for the following day suggests that it was already made out, only waiting for the sub-committee to vet it. It is safe to presume that Dunraven was a member of the original sub-committee or had drafted the programme document, for his imprint can be seen in the first, second and fifth points of the report. If, so who was the inspiration behind the remaining two points? Point number three implied that some form of subordinate legislature would be set up in Ireland. It is extremely unlikely that it was suggested by Wyndham, so therefore it may have been MacDonnell. MacDonnell, in his memorandum⁹ of explanation, in 1905, of his part in what was subsequently called the Devolution affair stated that, after the aborted dinner arrangement in the early months of 1904, nothing happened until Dunraven contacted him in

⁸ Report of IRA, *IT*, 31 August 1904; Dunraven, *The Outlook in Ireland*, app. 1, pp 271-80.

⁹ Memorandum of MacDonnell, pp 190-01.

August reviving the scheme for a third party. In order to cover himself, MacDonnell wrote to Wyndham and asked him had he seen Dunraven about the scheme. Wyndham replied on 17 August to say that ‘he had seen Dunraven and hoped to see him again.’ MacDonnell took this to mean that his chief was *au fait* with and approved of what Dunraven was planning and so, when he was approached by Dunraven later that month about a programme for the new party, MacDonnell felt able to speak his mind freely and went on to outline his own ideas for better control of Irish budgetary affairs and generally to assist in shaping the first programme of the IRA. Hornibrook corroborates¹⁰ this, stating that MacDonnell just gave Dunraven a few lines for discussion for the report. At the same time, he advised MacDonnell against having any further truck, on kindred matters, with the new party or with Dunraven. Dunraven asserted¹¹ in the house of lords that he first spoke to MacDonnell concerning a programme for the about-to-be launched IRA on the day before the old land conference committee was dissolved. In his autobiography, *Past Times and Pastimes*, Dunraven included MacDonnell’s memorandum in full and did not repudiate or challenge MacDonnell’s account of the events of August 1904.

Reaction to the programme was varied. The *Irish Times*¹² was content, at that juncture, to bid a cordial welcome to the new association and to wish success to its patriotic labours. While commending some of the members for good work already done by them for Ireland, it was pleased that they did not set out to court nationalists by avowing sympathy with their political aims, and then went on to sound a note of caution to its leading lights. It briefly alluded to past failures of associations and clubs that had set out on the same laudable road of uniting all classes and creeds in a common effort to promote prosperity and harmony in Ireland and advised the promoters that, as the success of the new venture depended less upon the wording of the programme than upon the manner by which it was going to attempt to put the proposals into effect, it should hasten very slowly in laying down a definite programme. Other unionist commentators were not so sanguine. The right wing Dublin *Daily Express*¹³ saw home rule by instalments in the proposals, while the *Belfast Telegraph*,¹⁴ as might be expected, was opposed to the new ideas and publicly asked the promoters to let the public know what their aims were. Comment was more muted on the nationalist side

10 Hornibrook, pp 794-5.

11 *Hansard*, vol. 141, col. 438, 17 February 1905.

12 *IT*, 31 August 1904.

13 *Daily Express*, 31 August 1904.

14 *Belfast Telegraph*, 31 August 1904.

though John Redmond, writing from America, saw¹⁵ the proposals as signposting the road to imminent home rule.

Across the channel, the proposals also came under severe scrutiny. The *Economist*, noting the connection between the new association and the old land conference committee and how their proposals then had contributed to what it called the generally accepted unsatisfactory working of the Wyndham Land Act, was:

unable to assume that Dunraven and his friends are confidently to be recognised as possessing credentials to act as pilots in respect of Irish policy in future.¹⁶

The *Spectator* opined that if the members of the reform association were only amiable idealists ‘they will probably be abashed by the cold douche of criticism which has been poured upon their maiden effort.’ If they are strong and wise men they will adopt the policy of Brer Rabbit and ‘lie low and say nuffin’ until they have some well thought-out proposals to lay before the public.’¹⁷ More stringent and incisive criticism came from the *Times* that laid its finger on what was to become the heart of the debate surrounding the programme. The more that newspaper meditated over the proposals the more certain it became that it was:

a deep-laid plot which Dunraven, with possibly the sanction of certain members of the Irish government, has concocted against the union and this despite the commitment of the programme to the preservation of the union. . . . Devolution as it is there foreshadowed, must imply the transfer of legislative power to some elected body in Ireland and this process, however disguised, can mean nothing more than home rule.¹⁸

If Redmond gave the preliminary programme his benediction then Davitt, with greater freedom and less responsibility than other Irish leaders, was convinced:

that the reformers’ proposals are designed to thrust a wedge into the ranks of the nationalists and to induce or seduce the more emotional of them to abandon the national

15 *IT*, 6 September 1904.

16 Cited in the *Irish Times*, 5 September 1904.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Times*, 5 September 1904.

demand for the sake of obtaining a gas and water vestry.¹⁹

This was a clear reference to O'Brien and his southern friends then apparently only waiting to be seduced by the wiles of Dunraven. The *Irish Times*²⁰ was unable to accept Davitt's view, suggesting that Dunraven and his associates were not attempting to conciliate nationalists of the type of Davitt but rather to attract moderates like O'Brien and his band of supporters. Perhaps Davitt was attempting to goad O'Brien into retaliation in an effort to ascertain whether O'Brien was implicated in the conciliation plot, but the latter had the good sense, for once, to remain silent. The truth was that O'Brien was not privy²¹ to the proposals and was not aware of them until they first appeared in the public press. Davitt remained the principal adversary on the nationalist side. He returned to the attack at Rochfordbridge²² on 18 September though now he concentrated on Dunraven by suggesting that he and his friends were dishonourable in pretending to have been converted to the cause of an Irish parliament. As Davitt had done successfully in the case of the land conference, he closely coupled Dunraven's name with the IRA and its new proposals, using such pejorative terms as 'Dunraven and his friends', the 'Dunraven body', and 'Dunraven's latest programme'. Davitt also attempted to publicly associate Dunraven with MacDonnell whom he described as the most dangerous man who had ever held the post of under secretary for Ireland as far as the fortunes of the national cause were concerned. Finally Davitt could not let the occasion pass without making the connection between the proposals and the earlier land conference. Noting that MacDonnell was identified by the *Times* as the person behind the new proposals, as he was behind the land conference, Davitt again saw a conspiracy whereby, with the connivance of MacDonnell:

an effort was being made on the part of men, who obtained all they asked for their class and much more in the land conference, to obtain a new lease of life, on the plea of conciliation, for the Dublin Castle system of ruling Ireland.²³

¹⁹ *FJ*, 5 September 1904. Davitt was speaking at Clonmacnoise the previous day.

²⁰ *IT*, 6 September 1904.

²¹ O'Brien was made aware of the upcoming meeting of land conference landlords (Dunraven to O'Brien, 26 July 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/4)). He had seen the report of the IRA programme in the newspapers by the time he wrote to Dunraven on 2 September telling him that it had, 'on the whole, made a very gratifying sensation' (O'Brien to Dunraven (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/5).

²² *IT*, 19 September 1904.

²³ *Ibid.*

In the meantime, Dunraven and his committee, ignoring advice from many quarters, but in answer to a general demand for more details, decided to press ahead and flesh out the policy sketched out on 26 August in order to attract more widespread support.²⁴ Dunraven turned again to MacDonnell who readily agreed to assist. While engaged on that business MacDonnell took care to write²⁵ to Wyndham, who was on holiday at that time, to inform him what he was engaged in. Not hearing back from Wyndham on this occasion and also because the earlier report of the Association had not occasioned any comment, favourable or otherwise, from his immediate superior, MacDonnell assumed that he was mandated to proceed along the lines he had outlined to Wyndham and concerning the issue which Wyndham, Dunraven and himself had discussed in the past. As the proposed recommendations began to take shape in MacDonnell's mind, he informed²⁶ the lord lieutenant, Dudley, of what he was about and travelled to Garinish Island, in Sneem, to spend²⁷ two days with Dunraven, before travelling to spend a night in the company of the marquis of Lansdowne in his home at Dereen, near Kenmare. On his return to Dublin Castle, MacDonnell was so sure of his position that he arranged that the completed document, soon to be submitted to individual members of the IRA for approval, would be typed²⁸ by the staff in Dublin Castle.

Equally, Dunraven was quite clear that Wyndham, despite subsequent denials, knew of MacDonnell's work over devolution in August 1904, and that he had given both himself and MacDonnell ample evidence of his sympathy. Following the publication of the first report on 31 August, and subsequent demands for more detailed proposals, Dunraven and MacDonnell met with Dudley [the lord lieutenant] and 'two friends' - who happened to be unionist MPs - to hammer out further details. When the latter group expressed a doubt

24 Memorandum of MacDonnell, paragraph 13, p. 191.

25 This was the infamous lost letter of 10 September 1904 unearthed by Murray Hornibrook in Autumn, 1912. The relevant section reads, 'In the Irish Reform Association Manifesto I fancy you have recognised the trace of conversations we have had. I have helped and am helping Dunraven in this business which has for many a day seemed to me to offer the best hope of an unravelling of the tangled skein of English and Irish relations.' (Mackail and Wyndham, *The life and letters of George Wyndham*, ii, Appendix A, pp 764-5).

26 Memorandum of MacDonnell, paragraph 14, p. 192.

27 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 141, col. 439, 17 February 1905.

28 The document was typed in Dublin Castle which could be taken as giving it quasi official standing. This was done at the request of Dunraven who did not have secretarial assistance in Garinish and because he felt that there had been some leakage with regard to the earlier report (it appeared in London the day before it was given out for publication in Dublin) (*Hansard*, vol. 141, col. 439, 17 February 1905).

whether, from Wyndham's [apparent] approval of the August scheme, they were justified in assuming that he would approve of this expansion of that scheme we are told that:

on Dunraven's prompting, the 'express authority' of the chief secretary was not sought, and the scheme was published, apparently without Wyndham's knowledge, on 26 September 1904.²⁹

A meeting³⁰ of the reform association had been fixed for 23 September for the purpose of receiving a further report from the organising committee. Dunraven presided over the smallish gathering of seventeen with as many as fifteen sending letters of apology, which was surely an indication of the loss of interest among those who had attended the inaugural meeting and which should have served as a warning to the chairman to proceed with caution. The Garinish document, soon to be the second report of the IRA, jointly crafted by Dunraven and MacDonnell, was also on the agenda. Following prolonged discussion, it was adopted unanimously on the motion of Lords Rossmore and Louth and cleared for circulation to the press on 26 September, but not before Dunraven had to convince members that Wyndham, by his non comment on the earlier proposals, had given tacit approval to the on-going work of the Reform Association.³¹ The main thrust of this report,³² which covered nineteen separate points, was the devolution of certain powers to a Dublin based assembly. It began by reiterating the firm desire to maintain the union between Great Britain and Ireland in order to allay fears on the unionist side. It then went on to indicate the lines on which the devolution process could be carried into effect. This was to be dealt with under two headings by conceding to Ireland (a) administrative control over purely Irish finance (b) certain

29 Alvin Jackson, *The Ulster party* (Oxford, 1989), p. 257. The date of the meeting was not given. Regarding the publication of the second set of proposals without Wyndham's knowledge, Andrew Gailey has argued that what Wyndham opposed in September 1904 was not so much the proposals of the Reform Association but their inopportune appearance, 'what he really objected to was public pronouncement on questions that he had yet to decide on', Andrew Gailey, 'The unionist government's policy towards Ireland, 1895-1905' (Ph.D thesis, Cambridge University, 1983), p. 230, cited in Jackson, *The Ulster party*, p. 255. W. S. Blunt, *My diaries*, 28 February 1905 points out that Wyndham [while in Ireland] became converted to views not very distinguishable from home rule but was not prepared for Dunraven's sudden announcement of the programme previously discussed between them. Blunt further stated that Wyndham, when he made his short run to Frankfurt, gave orders that he was not to be disturbed by having letters forwarded to him and was consequently unaware, until his return, that Dunraven had launched their scheme of Devolution on the world (*My Diaries*, 28 September 1904).

30 *IT*, 26 September 1904.

31 Jackson, *The Ulster party*, p. 257.

32 Dunraven, *Outlook in Ireland*, Appendix 1, pp 273-6; *IT*, 27 September 1904.

parliamentary functions connected with local business to be conducted in this country. In his analysis of this report F. S. L. Lyons³³ treats of it under four principal headings. For the purpose of this dissertation two only may be briefly alluded to - the setting up of a financial council, to be made up of twelve elected and twelve nominated members, to control purely Irish expenditure, and the establishment of a statutory body, composed of Irish representative peers, Irish members of parliament and members of the financial council, to promote bills for purely Irish purposes. If the first report merely outlined the skeleton then this one certainly portrayed the meat and so was certain to attract greater public scrutiny. It was not so much the setting up of the financial council and the statutory body that was to anger unionists but rather its composition. Since the establishment of democratic local government in Ireland in 1899, unionist opinion contended, not without justification, that its adherents, even those regarded as moderates or with conciliatory views, had virtually been excluded³⁴ from participation in county or local affairs in three-quarters of the country. Therefore the proposed council or body, unless preventative action was taken, would soon become a bastion of nationalism, adopt political stances and set Ireland on the road to home rule or worse.

Dunraven was quite enthusiastic when he received a copy of the proposals from MacDonnell prior to the meeting of 23 September. In return he wrote, undated, to MacDonnell:

We make no attempt to satisfy the sentimental desire for national self- government and while we assent that Ireland suffers from certain practical ills, they can be cured without repealing or invalidating the Act of Union or diminishing the ultimate control of parliament.³⁵

Dunraven was obviously pleased that the detailed set of proposals, uncompromisingly pro-union, were partly fashioned to assuage unionist opposition in the hope that the trend evidenced by their fairly mute response, apart from the Dublin *Daily Express*, to the first outline of reforms would continue and so give this latest document some chance of success.

33 Lyons, *Irish Unionist party*, pp 6-7.

34 The manner in which Dunraven was excluded, after the 1902 election, from membership of the finance committee of Limerick County Council was a case in point.

35 Dunraven to MacDonnell, n.d., [Sept. 1904] (Bodleian Library, MacDonnell Papers, eng. hist c. 350 ff 104-07).

The first salvo of criticism, the source of which must have caused a huge surprise, came from none other than George Wyndham. Writing to the *Times*³⁶ on 27 September, Wyndham distanced himself from both the IRA and its proposals and condemned out of hand the very notion of devolution. When MacDonnell saw this letter he immediately wrote to Dunraven to say that he was withdrawing from any connection with the IRA.³⁷ In reply Dunraven expressed his surprise at the attitude of Wyndham:

If Wyndham had been in Dublin I would certainly have talked with him. As a matter of fact I have often spoken to him on the subject and have expressed my opinion that the task was hopeless unless reform of administration and some delegation of power to deal with Irish business were included in the programme – an opinion with which I was under the impression he entirely agreed.³⁸

What unionist opinion in Ireland failed to comprehend was that the IRA called for Irish self-management and not self-government. That distinction was blurred in the minds of the executive committee of the Irish Unionist Alliance, which disassociated itself from the members of the reform association and said that ‘the devolution to Ireland of a larger share of

36 *Times*, 27 September 1904.

37 Mackail and Wyndham, *Life and letters of George Wyndham*, ii, p. 777.

38 Dunraven to MacDonnell, 29 September [1904] (Bodleian Library, MacDonnell papers, eng. hist. c.350 ff 108-9). Dunraven was entitled to be surprised on another score. Two months before that he had dined with Wyndham and others. The occasion was described as ‘a pleasant party, with much talk about Ireland’ (Blunt, *My diaries*, 15 June 1904). Following the death of George Wyndham in June 1913 three accounts of the devolution crisis were published, Mackail and Wyndham, (eds.), *The life and letters of George Wyndham* (London, 1925); Blanche E. C. Dugdale, ‘The Wyndham–MacDonnell imbroglio, 1902-06,’ in *Quarterly Review*, cclviii. 511 (Jan. 1932), pp 15-9, and Lyons, *The Irish unionist party* (1948). They were all somewhat similar in tone and, by careful manipulation of the known facts, were studious in their determination to preserve the reputation of Wyndham. Over the years they were generally accepted as representing the true facts of the case. Andrew Gailey, *Ireland and the death of kindness: the experience of constructive unionism, 1890-1905* (Cork, 1987) was virtually the first to challenge the orthodoxy of the three previous commentators. He was followed two years later by Alvin Jackson, *The Ulster party* (Oxford, 1989), pp 253-8. Both Gailey and Jackson went to some lengths to explain that not only did Wyndham read MacDonnell’s letter to him of 10 September 1904, but that he replied to it in respect of a matter dealing with the Dunsandle estate, but ignored what MacDonnell had told him concerning the business he was engaged in with Dunraven (Jackson, pp 257-8). Jackson appears however to be in error on two minor points. Firstly, he appears to have been unaware that Wyndham was not in Germany during the first half of September 1904, and, secondly, if Dunraven had met with Wyndham on 27 September (Jackson, pp 255-6) [the day that Wyndham’s disavowment of any knowledge of the affair appeared in the *Times*] Dunraven would surely have informed MacDonnell when he wrote to him on 29 September 1904. Jackson based his assumption of the meeting between Dunraven and Wyndham on Dunraven’s autobiography, *Past times*, ii, p. 26, ‘on September 23 [no year given but it can be inferred as 1904] I had a conversation with Sir Antony at the Chief Secretary’s Lodge, and on the 27th I had a long talk on the subject [the devolution scheme of the Irish Reform Association] with the chief secretary.’ But Jackson could not be expected to know that Dunraven was in error on a number of occasions in his autobiography, *Past times*, in respect of events and dates.

self-government than she now possesses is one attended with the gravest danger to the unionist cause.³⁹ The *Irish Times*,⁴⁰ also on the day of publication was rather non-committal, confining itself to drawing extracts from unionist and nationalist newspapers, at home and across the water, which went along predictable lines. Most interest in the case was soon to centre on Wyndham's rebuttal. Noting his disclaimer the *Irish Times* wrote:

This declaration, coming from one by whom, according to rumour, the new proposals were regarded with a certain amount of friendliness, may be regarded as having sealed their fate so far as the present parliament is concerned.⁴¹

Thus, for the first time, the exact position of Wyndham in the matter was called into question. In the climate of doubt prevailing, the *Irish Times* called for clarification from one who knew:

It might set the public mind at rest if Dunraven would make a statement on the subject, for at present there is a very widespread belief that he and his policy have first been encouraged and then thrown overboard.⁴²

But Dunraven, adopting the same stance as he advised O'Brien after the publication of the land conference report, made no public statement. Neither did Wyndham or MacDonnell and so the whole mystery remained static but uncompleted.

Irish unionists, alarmed by the first set of proposals, now viewed the follow-up document and its fallout with trepidation. As was expected it was the Ulster unionists who took the lead. The day after the second set of proposals appeared, William Moore and Charles Craig, two prominent Ulster unionist MPs, wrote thus to the *Belfast Newsletter*:

Lord Dunraven and his associates can be ignored, but the administration, which, though masquerading as unionist, plots behind them, cannot.⁴³

³⁹ *IT*, 27 September 1904.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Belfast Newsletter*, 27 September 1904.

Thus the spotlight of unionist opinion swung from Dunraven and his proposals to a searching analysis of the part played in the production of the document by the Dublin Castle authorities. Moore and Craig, by calling for a unionist conference in Belfast rather than in Dublin, effectively began the process of welding together northern opinion, at first into a significant pressure block, and later into a more militant grouping, by their ominous call to their fellow northerners to prepare themselves for action in the future to defend their place in the United Kingdom. This turn of affairs was a devastating blow to the aspirations of Dunraven and the IRA, whose complete adherence to the union was genuine, for now the split in unionism was not only likely to deter southern unionists from associating with the reform group but effectively put an end to the chief method by which the association was to forward its programme – the encouragement of a policy of conciliation and goodwill between all shades of political opinion in Ireland which would inevitably lead to pressure on the government to implement the needed reforms.

Parliament reassembled on 15 February 1905 and it was not long before the Ulster unionists went on the offensive, but first it was necessary to seek information. On the following day, in reply to a question by Craig, Wyndham admitted that MacDonnell had assisted Dunraven; that he had acted erroneously but honestly; that the government disapproved of his action, and that MacDonnell had assumed office in Ireland at the chief secretary's special request.⁴⁴ The day after Wyndham spoke in the house of commons, Dunraven wrote to MacDonnell:

I am surprised to learn that Wyndham had no cognisance of the proposals of the IRA until after publication of our second report on 26 September, which was an amplification of our first report of 31 August [date of publication], which must, I should have thought, have come under Wyndham's notice. I have distinct recollection of your frequently referring in conversation with me to having consulted Wyndham or having told Wyndham this or that.⁴⁵

As was to be expected the *Irish Times*⁴⁶ addressed itself to Wyndham's guarded reply in its leader page on the following day. The writer asked what business was it of any under

⁴⁴ *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 141, col. 326, 16 February 1905.

⁴⁵ Dunraven to MacDonnell, 17 February 1905 (Bodleian library, MacDonnell papers, eng. hist. c. 350 ff 126-7).

⁴⁶ *IT*, 17 February 1905.

secretary, in Dublin, to be drawing up political schemes with an irresponsible free lance like Dunraven without consulting his official chiefs and obtaining their consent. He went on to put a number of questions, the answers to which unionists were very anxious to know – (1) whether the discussions which Wyndham and MacDonnell had with Dunraven prior to August 1904 related to a scheme of devolution? (2) if so, what was the nature of the scheme when Wyndham last saw it? (3) whether MacDonnell had any actual or implied authority to continue his assistance to Dunraven after that date?

The personal statement⁴⁷ to be made by Dunraven in the house of lords the following day now assumed greater significance and was expected to provide answers to many questions. Dunraven's account may be conveniently divided into three segments.

(1) The members of the Irish Reform Association, 'the country gentlemen'⁴⁸ as designated by Sir Edward Carson, the solicitor-general, were alone responsible for the origination of the scheme and were not mere dummies who, as alleged by Carson, had appended their names to a document for which they were not accountable and into which they had no input.

(2) The policy was put forward in all seriousness without any deception being practised at any time, believing that it was essential to attain the twin objects of better government for Ireland and putting the legislative machinery in Ireland on a sounder footing.

(3) Dunraven then went on to give an account of the part played by MacDonnell.

Following the non-publication of the circular of 3 March 1903, the question of proposals for reform was shelved and was not resurrected until Dunraven came to Dublin during horse show week in 1904 to attend what was to be the final meeting of the LCC. On the day beforehand, 24 August, Dunraven spoke to MacDonnell and asked for advice about the direction which a reform association, that was about to be formed, should take. MacDonnell obliged and so the first report, that of 26 August, came to be promulgated. Afterwards, there was a demand, mostly from newspapers, for further details, a course of action which Dunraven was not in favour of at that time as the members of the new association had scattered and he himself was suffering from gout. Dunraven, for some reason, acceded to the clamour and wrote to MacDonnell asking for elaboration of what he, the under secretary, had outlined when last they met. MacDonnell, thinking that such was within the terms under

⁴⁷ *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 141, cols. 433-43, 17 February 1905.

⁴⁸ Carson speaking in Manchester, 6 February 1905 (*Times*, 8 February 1905).

which he had consented to take up the position in Dublin and the fact that they had been discussed previously with the chief secretary, was happy to oblige, first of all taking care to inform his superior of his intention. When no reply was received, MacDonnell sent the rough draft to Dunraven and afterwards visited him in Kenmare Bay. There they had adequate time to go thoroughly into all aspects of the subject matter and had the contents of the final draft pretty well mapped out after two days. Dunraven now found himself in some difficulty. He needed some forty copies or so for distribution to members of the association for perusal and approval but had no secretarial assistance available to him on his yacht. MacDonnell suggested that Dunraven keep the draft as worked out and when it was perfected to send it to Dublin where he [MacDonnell] would arrange to have it typed and the requisite number of copies made. This was how, in all innocence, it came to be typed in Dublin Castle. The completed document was considered by the members of the reform association on 23 September and when adopted, was published on 26 September 1904. If Wyndham's speech of the previous day was regarded as a guarded statement then Dunraven's was equally so. Anybody who imagined that precise information would be given as to Wyndham's involvement was sadly mistaken. Certainly a blow by blow account was given as to MacDonnell's involvement in the second report, even going so far as to explain in great and superfluous detail how it came to be typed and printed in Dublin Castle, yet little light was thrown on any conversations concerning devolution between Wyndham and Dunraven in the months prior to publication of the first report. While revelations as to MacDonnell's part were interesting to the Ulster unionists, it was not likely that they would be satisfied since they needed some proof that Wyndham was implicated, as an indication that the government was soft on the question of home rule.

An in-depth analysis was provided by the *Irish Times*⁴⁹ of the next day. It welcomed the fresh light thrown upon the mysterious birth of the devolution idea and noted that Wyndham was *au fait* with Dunraven's plan of forming a moderate centre party, being more receptive to the idea than was his understudy. In summarising Dunraven's story, the leader writer observed that, at varying times on his journey along the thorny road of devolution, Dunraven had the countenance and corroboration of the three principal members of the Irish executive for, at the end of the debate Lord Lansdowne disclosed⁵⁰ that he had received a

49 *IT*, 18 February 1905.

50 *Hansard*, 4th series, vol. 141, col. 461, 17 February 1905. The following day Dunraven again wrote to MacDonnell and said 'that Lansdowne was mistaken in thinking Wyndham was abroad at the time of the publication of the first report' (Dunraven to

letter from the lord lieutenant, Dudley, to the effect that he too was privy to the negotiations between MacDonnell and Dunraven, the former having consulted him about the devolution scheme. Lansdowne, in a second contribution, slipped in,⁵¹ as it were, the limited information that MacDonnell had not, in the speaker's view, exceeded his functions as they were not those of an ordinary under secretary. This latter information, innocuous as it was, was the signal for a sustained attack on the government as both John Redmond, leading for the nationalists, and Moore, for the unionists, demanded to know the exact terms by which MacDonnell was appointed by Wyndham. In answer Wyndham gave what was described as 'the cleverest of all his clever speeches,'⁵² which, in spite of its ingeniousness, failed to convince his eager listeners.⁵³ The Ulster unionists, not satisfied, now pursued Wyndham with unrelenting fury. Dunraven and his part in the imbroglio were sidelined, while sympathy was extended to MacDonnell who was now seen as having been scandalously treated. Wyndham's position became so untenable that there was no surprise when the prime minister, Balfour, announced his resignation from office on 6 March 1905.

While the fallout from the proposals appeared to occupy the attention of the country during the end of 1904 and the beginning of 1905 Dunraven held the first of a series of meetings in furtherance of the objects of the IRA with a view to establishing it as a realistic political party. Appropriately the first was held in Dublin on 7 February 1905. The Rev J. P. Mahaffy, a fellow of TCD, agreed to chair the meeting, not that he supported the aims of the IRA but rather that he wished to appear open-minded. Dunraven was the principal speaker and said that the government of Ireland was a farce as well as being the most expensive in the world and was in the hands of people who knew nothing about the country. This system he was determined to change. He did not make too many disciples that day if one was to go by Patrick J. O'Neill, chairman of Dublin County Council who, speaking as a nationalist, said:

Dunraven had made a crushing indictment of Castle government. Home rule was however the only effective remedy and he was not without hope that Dunraven and his

MacDonnell, 18 February 1905 (Bodleian library, MacDonnell papers, eng. hist. c. 350 ff 128-9)). If Dunraven knew that Wyndham was in England at the time of the first report it begs the question did not Lansdowne also know? MacDonnell later confirmed that Wyndham was at Clouds, near Salisbury [the then home of his parents] during the first half of September 1904 (Bodleian library, MacDonnell papers, eng. hist. c. 370 f 29). This puts a completely new construction on Wyndham's letter of 27 September 1904. That fact escaped the notice of F. L. S. Lyons, *The Irish unionist party*, pp 1-22 or was not pertinent to his thesis, and therefore omitted.

51 *Hansard*, vol. 141, col. 466, 17 February 1905.

52 *IT*, 21 February 1905.

53 *Hansard*, vol. 141, cols. 325-6, 16 Feb. 1905.

associates would come to recognise this.⁵⁴

Neither did Dunraven garner much support when he took his campaign to Belfast a few days later. No local person could be found to chair the meeting, a bad omen, so Talbot- Crosbie was consigned to fill that role. Dunraven pointed out to the small, largely uninterested, gathering that the principles of the IRA could be carried out to the advantage of the country and were calculated to offer a reasonable solution of Irish problems and Irish difficulties and were also compatible with the maintenance of the union. Yet, as a unionist, he regretted to say that they had not been dealt with fairly in Ulster.⁵⁵

The final chapter of this ill-fated venture took place in Limerick in December 1905 concerning which the *Limerick Chronicle* observed, ‘it is a long time since a political meeting of such dimensions and such a character has been held in the Theatre Royal.’⁵⁶ As there was much heckling and interruption from the body of the hall during the speeches it was anything but a partisan gathering, while a perusal of the listed attendance shows a good sprinkling of middle ranking and professional citizens but scarcely any of those who might be described as the ‘heavy hitters’ of unionism in either the city or county. Dunraven was, as usual, the principal speaker and, in a spirited, if inordinately long, address, slammed his detractors, John Dillon, the attorney general, Atkinson, the *Freeman’s Journal*, the *Munster News* and the Ulster unionist MPs, Moore and Craig; he recounted the good that flowed from the Recess Committee and the Land Conference when opposites sat and worked together for a common good, and, in stoutly defending the proposals of the IRA, pointed out that they differed little from those espoused by John Redmond and the Liberal party in Great Britain:

Mr Redmond wanted a legislative assembly, with an executive responsible to it and called himself a nationalist. Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman [a future Liberal prime minister] wanted the effective management of Irish affairs in the hands of a representative authority, and he called himself a home ruler. Lord Dunraven wanted the creation of a statutory representation that should have complete control of all Irish

⁵⁴ *Times*, 8 February 1905.

⁵⁵ *IT*, 10 February 1905. The meeting was held the previous night.

⁵⁶ *LC*, 21 December 1905. For an ultra nationalist view of Dunraven’s speech at that meeting see *The Leader*, 30 December 1905.

domestic affairs and he called himself a unionist.⁵⁷

Whether it dawned on Dunraven or not, neither his message nor what he hoped to achieve was having the slightest effect on middle Ireland, both unionist and nationalist, the very people who were expected to rally to the banner of the new centre party.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

EPILOGUE

One point that comes clearly from the confusion is that Dunraven was, at worst, the co-author and co-originator of both sets of proposals. During his chairmanship of the sweated labour committee in England and the land conference in Dublin he regarded it as the duty of the chairman to produce, after consultation with interested parties, the final report. This he repeated when chairman of the IRA and a member of its organising committee charged with the production of a report outlining their ideas on the better government of Ireland. He was not one of the dummies of Carson, nor one of the harmless peers and country gentlemen of Vigilans or a puppet of W. O'Brien, as asserted by the London correspondent of the *Irish Times*, on 19 February, after Dunraven spoke in the house of lords:

The action of O'Brien will be interesting in the extreme seeing that he has been in the thick of arranging for the pacification of Ireland. . . Had conciliation become an absolute fact the devolution movement would have gone along with it on parallel rails. Mr O'Brien was pulling the wires very carefully for the latest Dunraven scheme.⁵⁸

It is also somewhat disingenuous of Dr O'Halpin to write, 'the way in which the scheme was drawn up is a measure of the naiveté of its author. Dunraven had no plans worked out when he launched his manifesto.'⁵⁹ Prior to the holding of the land conference Redmond was so enthused by an outline of Dunraven's vision of the future, amongst which was some idea/notion of home rule for Ireland, that he communicated⁶⁰ them to O'Brien. Accordingly, when the opportunity presented in 1904 Dunraven went to considerable trouble to consult the highest authorities in the Dublin administration to flesh out the plans he was pondering in his mind. If he could be accused of not being a doer, he certainly could not be accused of not being a thinker. The naivety expressed by O'Halpin could well have been related to the timing of the launch of the two reports coupled with the expectation that they would be widely accepted and then acted upon by the government. The Unionist government was coming to the end of its term of office and was not expected to be returned. It might have made more sense to 'sell' the idea to the Liberal opposition to be used as a plank in their programme for the forthcoming election. A weakness in the timing was the failure to bring

⁵⁸ *IT*, 20 February 1905.

⁵⁹ Eunan O'Halpin, *The Decline of the union* (Dublin, 1987), p. 45.

⁶⁰ Redmond to O'Brien, 1 December 1902 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 10496 (1)).

national opinion of any type, even the conciliationists of O'Brien, on board. A rapprochement with the liberals might have gained some support among the nationalists in Ireland. It was also only natural that Dunraven would turn to MacDonnell for advice and assistance since MacDonnell was a source of information and inspiration prior to the holding of the land conference and the passing of the land bill. In addition it would appear that Wyndham had authorised MacDonnell's continuing contacts with Dunraven on matters that had been discussed among the trio.

One of the chief benefits of the devolution scheme was that the question of home rule, by whatever name it might be called, was restored to its rightful position in the psyche of the nationalist people and in the maelstrom of Irish politics. For many years home rule was almost smothered in the close embrace of progressive unionism and it is paradoxical that it was a coterie of unionists who breathed life into its almost moribund condition. It is somewhat disturbing to see the hostile reception on the nationalist side to a measure described as being similar to the Parnellite model of self-government for Ireland and ironic to observe nationalist speakers in the house of commons out-talking the unionists in their denunciation of the devolution proposals. Obviously TP O'Connor's riposte that 'devolution was the Latin for home rule' counted for nothing in nationalist circles which figured out that the granting of the devolution proposals would prevent or delay the obtaining of full home rule, whatever that term meant, on the return of a liberal government. The reawakening of unionist anger⁶¹ took Dunraven and his associates by surprise and the manner in which Ulster mobilised public opinion to take on, cow down or even defeat a conservative/unionist government served as a model for a later and more serious confrontation with a liberal government. The government was brought to heel in 1905. Why should the year 1913 be any different? Would the government dare to risk a rupture with the Orangemen? The government in waiting, closely observing the turn of events, learned much from the fateful

61 As a follow-on to the unionist anger brought about by the publication of Dunraven's university proposals in January 1904, it was the devolution affair which most thoroughly exposed the limitations of the parliamentary policy being pursued by the Irish Unionist Party under the leadership of Col Edward Saunderson. Alvin Jackson outlines what then happened, 'the anxiety which infected prominent members of the unionist establishment was felt more widely in Ulster; and this in turn provided the guardians of loyalist fundamentalism with a following and a credibility which they had hitherto lacked. . . the devolution affair provided a much more fertile opportunity. . . [and] had proved that the loyalist organisation was both misconceived, in terms of its parliamentary focus, and inadequate, in terms of its local weakness. . . [what was needed] was a vision of loyalism propped up by local representative institutions and co-ordinated in Belfast,' Alvin Jackson, *Colonel Edward Saunderson, land and loyalty in victorian Ireland* (Oxford, 1995), pp 155-6. The imminent founding of the Ulster Unionist Council brought about the desired change. It was ironic that Dunraven, who abhorred the dismemberment of Ireland at a later date, was the catalyst for the rise of militant loyalism that later inevitably sundered the political unity of Ireland.

years of 1904/05. Never again would home rule be foremost in liberal party policy, it being relegated, at the subsequent general election to a mere aspiration, to be dished out, if necessary, by instalments.

The attempt to found a centre party of some type was inevitable. Since one of the corner stones of the land conference was that former landlords would remain in Ireland and, since they were numbered among the ruling class of pre-1899, something which many of them regarded as their birthright, some outlet would have to be created for them if they were to become part of the mainstream of future Irish political life. As those among them who desired a change were spurned by official unionism in Ireland and rejected by nationalists the only course open to them was the foundation of a new political consensus, namely the Irish Reform Association – perhaps too drastic and dramatic a title and certainly founded on too narrow a base. As it was, the bulk of landlords and protestant businessmen remained aloof, taking their cue from the uncompromising position of the Irish Unionist Party. Only the bravest, imprudent or imbecilic, depending on one's point of view, and numbering no more than forty souls rallied to the cause. Writing in 1905⁶² Dunraven pointed out that any attempt to start or create a moderate party on a purely academic basis would be futile. It was absolutely essential, he argued, to have, in the first instance, a positive constructive democratic policy – a policy embracing a large extension of local self-governing powers – in fact, the proposals fleshed out in the two programmes of the IRA. The hostile reception given to the proposals, coupled with the militant reaction among unionists generally and northern unionists in particular, meant that it would be futile, if not downright devious, to launch any moderate party on the basis of these same proposals. It is generally assumed that the IRA was that new party but it may not have been intended to be so. Perhaps it was merely a vehicle through which the 'positive, constructive democratic policy', as envisaged by Dunraven, would be floated for public perusal and scrutiny. Once generally accepted a political grouping to implement the changes would follow.

Finally, it was impossible to suppose that Dunraven would consciously enter into any

62 Dunraven, *Crisis in Ireland* (Dublin, 1905), p. 36. For a fuller expose of Dunraven's thinking on devolution see J. H. Morgan, *The new Irish constitution*

(London, 1912). In part 2, pp 337 – 357, Dunraven, writing on the history of devolution, covered the subject from the publication of the 1904 proposals to

the Irish council bill of 1908 which was at first accepted but later rejected by the Irish Party. He further pointed out that the concept was not novel in 1904

since, in 1885, Liberal Party politicians, William Gladstone and Joseph Chamberlain, were in favour of that policy towards Ireland.

conspiracy, overtly or covertly, to overthrow the legislative union. He had fought the 1899 and subsequent county council elections in Limerick as a unionist when it would have been more advantageous to cast aside that mantle. He stoutly defended the interests of the empire during the Great War and maintained, at a personal loss to himself, his loyalty to the British crown and parliament until the events of 1922 brought about an inevitable sea change in his point of view. From then on he was a supporter of the Irish Free State.

THE DEATH OF CONCILIATION

William O'Brien was so consumed by the success of the land conference of 1902 that he embarked on a crusade that exhausted his energy as well as his finances and dissipated the high standing he hitherto had enjoyed in nationalist Ireland. His companion on that fateful journey was Dunraven, enthusiastic yet circumspect, who was a perfect foil to the often injudicious but always energetic O'Brien. Both O'Brien and Dunraven saw the result of the conference as manifestation of the triumph of the 3Cs, conference, conciliation and consent, over the obduracy and self-interest of formerly bitter opponents. It was, in many ways, an oversimplification of the reality. Both sides at the land conference desired the same result, namely the transfer of the soil of Ireland from owner to occupier and what was really at issue was the compilation of a plan or scheme by which this could be achieved in an orderly and mutually acceptable manner. Much of the credit for the satisfactory end result must go to Dunraven and John Redmond who, by thorough exploration of the other's philosophy on the subject (in a sense a practical demonstration of the working of the policy of conciliation), signposted the road to the eventual successful outcome. That, too, was not achieved without a measure of compromise. In the early exchanges of letters between Dunraven and Redmond it was noticeable that, where minor differences of opinion were looming, there was always the desire to act in a conciliatory manner so as not, in Dunraven's words, 'to defeat the common object.'¹

Mindful of the difficulties surmounted before and during the conference itself '[it was] rendered possible only by the conciliatory spirit animating the members and their statesmanlike attitude towards a most difficult problem,'² Dunraven, no less than O'Brien, saw its success as a guide to future achievements. Any problem, however intractable, was capable of solution using the conference method. The failure of the Irish party to adopt the policy of the 3Cs and the defection of John Redmond from the conciliation camp caused disappointment to its main protagonists. O'Brien, resourceful as ever, determined to by-pass the party and appeal directly to the people in order to 'get *our* point of view thoroughly established in people's minds.'³ He intended to invite a number of notable persons in Ireland, obviously partial to his new way of thinking, to contribute an article to the *Irish People*, of which O'Brien was again editor. Dunraven, as always happened at the commencement of

1 See Dunraven to O'Brien, 25 December 1902; O'Brien to Dunraven, 27 December 1902 (NLI, William O'Brien papers, 8554/2).

2 Dunraven to O'Brien, 10 January 1903 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/2).

3 O'Brien to Dunraven, 14 September 1903 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/2).

any new venture, was enthusiastic, ‘your idea of publishing an expression of various opinions is an excellent one . . . The land conference has shown what can be done by a certain undefined sentiment applied to a definite purpose.’⁴ Dunraven, as expected, was invited to participate. His contribution was disappointing to O’Brien on two points, reference to the Boer War and Dunraven’s definition of home rule. In a revision⁵ of the article the reference to the Boer War was removed while O’Brien accepted Dunraven’s viewpoint on home rule on the grounds that there was, at that time, no clear definition nor did he [O’Brien] know exactly what the term was supposed to mean.

Another blow to the furtherance of the concept of the 3Cs came in early November with the shock resignation by O’Brien of his parliamentary seat and his announcement of his intention to cease publication of the *Irish People*. It came as a complete and unwelcome surprise to Dunraven who called it a national disaster and begged him to reconsider.⁶ In reply O’Brien explained the reason for his apparently precipitate action:

The trouble is with certain leading people and there is no way of dealing with them except, (1) by a hateful personal campaign, (2) by testing how far they have any alternative policy of their own and giving them a free field to try it out.⁷

O’Brien went on to indirectly blame the inaction of Dunraven as a cause of his resignation. Since the unreasonable demands of landlords gave ample ammunition to the opponents, within the Irish party, of the 1903 land act, Dunraven should have cut off that avenue of discontent. As O’Brien ceased publication of the *Irish People* at the time of his resignation it meant an end to the series of articles on the future of Ireland, something that caused Dunraven much concern as he felt that ‘the idea was admirable and could have produced

4 Dunraven to O’Brien, 3 October [1903] (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/2).

5 See Dunraven to O’Brien, 20, 22, 26 October 1903; O’Brien to Dunraven, 27 October 1903 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/2). Dunraven’s long article, entitled national good fellowship, appeared in the *Irish People* on 7 November 1903. A flavour of the contents can be gleaned from the paragraph headings (undoubtedly the work of O’Brien) – one obstruction gone (the land problem); the power of a united Ireland; war and peace (the prospects facing the Irish nation); the condition of the people; the revival of national life; how far is co-operation practicable?; three dangers gone (the divisive barriers of religion, land and parliamentary representation). The article called for the establishment of ‘an association of representative men and of men of business capacity and expert opinion’ as the time for a positive constructive policy of regeneration in Ireland had come. While not necessarily meaning a political grouping Dunraven, even at that time, was contemplating some sort of organisation to further the material, if not the wider interests of Ireland.

6 Dunraven to O’Brien, 9 November 1903 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/2).

7 O’Brien to Dunraven, 12 November 1903 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/2).

great results.’⁸

O’Brien was still in the political wilderness in April 1904 but while he was bloodied by the failure of the policy of conciliation he was unbowed. He assured Dunraven that all was not yet lost:

The potentialities of the land conference spirit are not yet all exhausted but it will take much bitter experience on both sides before there can be much practical use in attempting to repeat the experiment.⁹

Suggestions were made at that time to enlist O’Brien and his followers in a unionist sponsored campaign for the disruption of the national party. He was very annoyed and complained bitterly to Dunraven saying that any meeting between them at that time would give rise to fresh gossip.¹⁰ In reply Dunraven advised O’Brien to take no public notice of the piece in the *Irish Times* and deplored the intransigent attitude of the extreme and irreconcilable wings of both the Irish parliamentary party and the landlord party and considered it vile that:

Irishmen who have differed much politically in the past and may differ a little in the future cannot talk over matters affecting the well being of the country.¹¹

Any association of the type envisaged by Dunraven in his article in the *Irish People* seemed an impossible dream.

Dunraven and O’Brien had not met for some time now, as it would be politically incorrect for the latter, in particular, to do so. Ever since the land conference, Michael Davitt, the former leading land agitator, was of the opinion that O’Brien’s change of political

8 Dunraven to O’Brien, Xmas 1903 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/2). In that letter Dunraven suggested that O’Brien might continue the series in the *Daily Independent* as it was favourable to him of late. This, however, was flatly rejected by O’Brien (O’Brien to Dunraven, 29 December 1903, NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/2).

9 O’Brien to Dunraven, 28 May 1904 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/3).

10 *IT*, 26 May 1904. Alluding to the discontent of Ulster unionists over the devolution proposals the leading article stated, ‘the growing dissatisfaction of O’Brien’s friends with the present authority of the national party should not be allowed to die away for want of encouragement.’

11 Dunraven to O’Brien, Sunday [end of May 1904] (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/3).

direction was due to the influence of Dunraven, 'I believe he has been deceived by Wyndham and Dunraven.'¹² The lack of contact made Dunraven 'very helpless and very solitary'¹³ which would indicate that his role in political matters was rightly that of follower rather than of leader.

Dunraven wrote to O'Brien in late July 1904 saying that he was thinking of calling together the land conference committee (of landlords) for a preliminary meeting to discuss their future role in Irish affairs but that it would be much later in the year before any concrete proposals emerged. O'Brien was not to be associated in any way with what might emerge as Dunraven did not want 'the danger of a taint of landlordism sticking to your [O'Brien's] skirts.'¹⁴ While Dunraven intimated to O'Brien the difficulties in constructing any kind of platform, the new movement, soon to be known as the Irish Reform Association (IRA), evolved quicker than he anticipated.

The programme of the new association pleased O'Brien and, as he was contemplating associating himself with a Cork based pro-conciliation group within the United Irish League, he suggested to Dunraven that they should go on separately and not attempt any common action for the present. Since the publication of the IRA programme, the anti-conciliation wing of the Irish Party targeted Dunraven and sought to misrepresent him by reproducing, in the *Freeman's Journal*, fragments of an old controversy¹⁵ between him and the newspaper. When O'Brien became aware of this he, with his usual optimism, encouraged Dunraven to persevere:

You and your association have been making excellent progress and the future is with you, I mean as to the principle of an all Ireland combination . . . I am thoroughly well satisfied with progress in our own camp. The National Convention executed a very perceptible change of front in the irreconcilable attitude. Redmond has come to an agreement with me – no disturbance of me or my followers at the general election and

12 *Irish Times*, 4 July 1905.

13 Dunraven to O'Brien, Sunday [end of May 1904] (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/3).

14 Dunraven to O'Brien, 26 July 1904 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/4). Dunraven was acutely aware of the invidious position of O'Brien if any link between them came to light. This lack of contact was irritating him too and, in exasperation, he asked O'Brien, 'are we to play as conspirators and approach each other shrouded in cloaks and slouch hats . . . why such cloak and dagger?' (Dunraven to O'Brien, Tuesday, June 1904, (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/4)).

15 Dunraven to O'Brien, 19 December 1905 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/6). See also *FJ*, 18 December 1905; *Munster News*, 25 November 1905.

vice versa.¹⁶

With the arrival of James Bryce as chief secretary in December 1905 Dunraven lost no time in interesting him in the policy of conciliation telling him that if a conciliatory attitude towards questions immediately affecting the social and economic welfare of the country were maintained, then acceptance of such autonomy as was possible under the union would be gradually accepted by the people of Ireland.¹⁷ Bryce, however, offered neither encouragement nor assistance to the policy of conciliation. For much of 1906 both Dunraven and O'Brien were taken up with the problem of evicted tenants to the detriment of their other interests.

It was the middle of 1907 before Dunraven was able to return to the policy of conciliation. As often happened with Dunraven he correctly read the signs but was unable or unwilling to promote remedial action. Observing the sorry state of Ireland in mid-1907 - land sales stagnating, the nationalist party torn asunder by internecine strife and many evicted tenants not yet settled, Dunraven, with sadness, looked at the root cause of the country's misery, putting the blame on both sides of the political divide:

What immediately troubles me is that Ireland appears fated to be ground between the two millstones – party advantage or filling up the gap appears to animate some; fermenting agitation and discrediting the conference and conciliatory idea appear to occupy others. Nobody thinks about Ireland.¹⁸

By the middle of 1907 O'Brien, having failed to reform the Irish party from within, was frustrated by the moribund state of the conciliation agenda. He informed¹⁹ Dunraven that he intended to call a convention in Cork to decide whether he should continue to court public opinion by speechmaking or throw himself into an active educative programme of propaganda in his newspaper, the *Irish People* (published again by O'Brien when he returned to active politics). He assured Dunraven that there was an active and effective conciliatory force on his side. Dunraven, he suggested, should shake himself and endeavour to further the

16 O'Brien to Dunraven, 20 December 1905 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/4).

17 Dunraven to Bryce, 17 January 1906 (NLI, Bryce papers, 11,012 (1)).

18 Dunraven to O'Brien, 28 July 1907 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/9).

19 O'Brien to Dunraven, 28 August 1907 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/9).

cause in two ways that were open to him. Firstly, to obtain some collective or individual expressions of support for the policy from those on his side and secondly, to use the special opportunities he had at his disposal to make his views known in various influential quarters in England among both Liberals and Tories.

In the autumn of 1907, in an attempt to heal the breach between them, O'Brien and Redmond met, but failed to reach any agreement. Dunraven commiserated with O'Brien reminding him that he had done his utmost for peace and unity and so his position could not fail to be strengthened.²⁰ In reply O'Brien intimated that he intended to remain within the party and that, given goodwill and a little patriotic spirit on both sides, he intended to give a new direction to the party that would soon 'bring the irreconcilables to their senses by leaving them on the bleak shore alone.'²¹ For O'Brien the psychological moment had come for taking the tide that 'would lead to a splendid national combination with which the party would quietly and inevitably be obliged to come to terms.'²² As it was now clear that the IRA existed in name only, Dunraven and his small band of followers were to be an integral part of the new grouping, which would gain prominence in a short time and then subsume the Irish party. O'Brien was the leader this time, while Dunraven was the follower. Aware that any new organisation founded by him would, of necessity be rural or at least southern based, O'Brien had sent Shawe-Taylor (who had already been to America where he met with Clan na Gael activists) to Dublin to interest Sinn Fein while Dunraven, for his part, was to muster support from among southern unionists favourable to the ideals of the IRA. The plan was that a united demonstration be held in Dublin as the launching pad but the main and only difficulty, according to O'Brien, was in whose name should it be called. For obvious reasons neither his own name nor that of Dunraven would encourage participation by the broad consensus required. All this he explained to Dunraven in his letter of 28 December. The question of who should call this demonstration was also exercising²³ the mind of Dunraven. The idea was sound and likely to produce admirable results, but there were difficulties in the way. Firstly, the IRA would appear to be the proper vehicle and, by doing so on 'cordial welcome' lines, could attract anybody and everybody but unfortunately, in the public estimation, it was more identified with its political plank (a Dublin parliament but very much

20 Dunraven to O'Brien, 26 December 1907 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/9).

21 O'Brien to Dunraven, 28 December 1907 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/9).

22 Ibid.

23 Dunraven to O'Brien, n.d. [end of 1907] (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/9). This letter appears to precede Dunraven to O'Brien, 30 December but after O'Brien to Dunraven, 28 December. The probable date is 29 December 1907.

under the control of Westminster) than its broader programme of widespread social and economic change. A meeting called under the joint signatures of Dunraven and O'Brien would not suffice as Dunraven felt that serious attempts were being made to undermine what little influence he possessed in Ireland by absolutely false allegations²⁴ of bargaining for eighteen nationalist seats in parliament for the IRA; by founding a moderate centre party to wreck the Irish Party, and scheming to gain control of the *Freeman's Journal*. A joint call would taint O'Brien with the machinations of Dunraven. If O'Brien called the meeting on his own account he would lay himself open to the charge of wishing to force a division in the Irish party. Dunraven for a while then considered himself as the caller of the meeting but later ruled this out as he said that he was not strong enough, morally or physically, to even suggest calling a meeting. In any event the ascendancy class should remain aloof as the landlord and the devolutionist must, for a long time, lie under the suspicion of possessing wrecking tendencies. Secondly, Dunraven was suffering at that time an attack of what he called 'this infernal gout' and so was likely to be out of action for a few weeks. In the absence of a call by a truly independent outside body, Dunraven suggested that the last resort was a requisition to O'Brien from some group in the county or city of Cork requesting such a meeting. Finally, and more importantly for later, Dunraven said that, while he would gladly speak alongside O'Brien at this demonstration (it was to be held under the auspices of a loose home rule banner), there was a difference of emphasis regarding home rule beginning to surface between them. O'Brien advocated repeal of the act of union while Dunraven desired to couple Irish representation at Westminster with the delegation of certain administrative and legislative functions to a parliament in Dublin. This difference of opinion was, many years later, to finally sunder the entente between them. At the time of the Irish Convention of 1917-18 Dunraven, against the advice of his long time colleague, took part in the discussions to forward his federalist ideas while O'Brien, after agreeing at one time to participate, in the end declined to be part of the discussions.

As the whole idea of this new organisation was sprung upon Dunraven, the enormity of

24 See report of Limerick libel trial, O'Brien v *The Freeman's Journal*, *LL*, 11, 13, 15 March 1907; D.D. Sheehan, *Ireland since Parnell*, pp 134-6; William O'Brien, *Olive Branch in Ireland*, pp 356-73. Dunraven was implicated in a number of the 'infamous' six false, defamatory and malicious libels. He categorically repudiated any involvement in any conspiracy in his Limerick speech of 20 December 1905 (*LC*, 21 December 1905). Sheehan stated that while the *Freeman's Journal* suppressed O'Brien's speeches and arguments, it threw its columns open to ruffianly attacks upon him. The alleged libels were, according to O'Brien, published in the *Freeman's Journal* over the previous years but he decided to sue following the 'Letter from Glenroe', 19 June 1906. The libel case was tried before the Limerick Spring Assizes in 1907.

what was planned and the distinct possibility of failure (aware of O'Brien's exaggerated claims and the failure of the devolution proposals of 1904) caused him, as was his wont, to be cautious and circumspect as he wrote to O'Brien a day or two later. He was not in a position to judge whether the psychological moment had indeed arrived and, anyway, in his desire to found a new organisation, O'Brien could be accused of widening his quarrel with his former colleagues and so be accused of irrevocably sundering the Irish Party. The holding, at that time, of this unity demonstration was also fraught with problems:

Is the moment favourable for joint action? It would attract public attention unquestionably but what would be the motive attributed to us? Would it be the true one of a desire to accentuate the value of unity, or would most people fasten upon your demand for an immediate meeting of a reconstituted UIL convention and Redmond's refusal and attribute to us and especially to me, a desire to embarrass the party?²⁵

The question of the demonstration was to the fore when Dunraven wrote²⁶ to O'Brien soon afterwards. By now he had clarified his attitude. It would not do for him to call it (failure to attend due to his state of health would be both misunderstood and misrepresented) but he urged O'Brien to use the IRA on the 'cordial welcome' basis. Realising that a good wide platform was essential to success Dunraven, as a gesture of intent, undertook to get Lord Derby and Sir West Ridgway, British devolutionists, to attend. The planned demonstration (and new organisation) was abandoned as quickly as it was conceived. In mid January 1908, O'Brien unexpectedly signalled that he and his colleagues would attend the next meeting of the party. Dunraven, pleased on hearing the news and glad to be freed of the complications associated with the proposed Dublin meeting, wrote to O'Brien:

While it may be premature to write *finis* I trust it is allowable to say 'alls well that ends well'. Thanks to you and you alone there is, to say the least, a fair chance of a party united in principles and essential to the progress of Ireland. Any sort of demonstration would be most injudicious at present; it may be useful later on if any general agreement can be arrived at.²⁷

25 Dunraven to O'Brien, 30 December 1907 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/9).

26 Dunraven to O'Brien, 1 January 1908 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/10).

27 Dunraven to O'Brien, 18 January 1908 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/10).

Despite the use of the word premature, Dunraven was convinced that the party leaders were willing to acquiesce in rather than oppose the policy of conciliation and that, down the road, if a reasonable and conciliatory spirit prevailed, working agreements on amendments to the 1903 land act could be arrived at between the O'Brienites and the party generally. Later on, as well, Dunraven hoped that suspicions relating to the willingness of landlords or former landlords to work for the good of Ireland would evaporate thereby creating a truly united springboard from which much could be achieved for Ireland in future years.

While the leading lights of the Irish party viewed the return of O'Brien with more indifference than enthusiasm, they did not take long to show the newcomer that his policy of conciliation and demand for a return to the ethos of 1903 would not be tolerated.²⁸ Anticipating that his sojourn in the party might not be of long duration O'Brien was already preparing for that eventuality. In January 1908 O'Brien met with Dunraven and a plan was agreed between them for an all-Ireland party in which 'all men who loved Ireland could take their place.'²⁹ While Dunraven agreed with O'Brien's plan he had little else to offer and the matter was allowed to drift. Later O'Brien reported to Sophie:

We are quite at one as to the future. All he [Dunraven] lacks is energy. I suggested it would now be perfectly possible to move the farmers if five men would subscribe £1,000 apiece to defray the expenses of organisation. *He did not know any such five men. . . .* nothing can be done to give expression to our views and neither men nor money are available.³⁰

Once again Dunraven's lack of contacts in Ireland militated against his taking meaningful action along a much desired path, though it is doubtful that the course of future events, as envisaged by O'Brien, would be completely to Dunraven's liking.

Undeterred by his rebuff of the previous April O'Brien decided, once more, to beard the lion in his den. He decided to attend the national convention of the Irish Party that had

28 O'Brien, *An olive Branch*, (London, 1910), pp 432-6; for a more or less official party view of events at that time and what transpired at the party meeting of 29 April 1908 [at which O'Brien was present] see F. S. L. Lyons, *John Dillon* (London, 1968), pp 302-03.

29 F. K. Schilling, 'William O'Brien and the all for Ireland league', B Litt thesis, TCD, 1956, p. 66.

30 O'Brien to Sophie O'Brien, n.d., [11 December 1908], (UCC, Wm. O'Brien papers, Box BH). The italics are mine.

been called for 9 February 1909 to pass judgement on the recently introduced land bill of Birrell.³¹ In order to bolster O'Brien's position at the meeting, where he intended to propose that the party reject the land bill, Dunraven presided over a specially convened meeting of the executive of the IRA from whence an eight point statement was issued to the press. This document unequivocally condemned Birrell's bill as a measure 'so destructive of further land purchase that we can only attribute the government's action to the baneful influence of those who all along wished to wreck the act and destroy the spirit of the land conference.'³² O'Brien was under no illusion that his views would be favourably received. Neither was Dunraven:

You are in a venture as desperate as any undertaken by fabled knights of old. I am sure you have the best wishes and sympathy of every honest and commonsense man in Ireland.³³

In the event O'Brien not only failed to rescue the damsel in distress but also was prevented from even speaking to her. In what he later called the 'baton convention'³⁴ O'Brien, together with his few supporters was prevented from expressing his views by the strong arm tactics employed by ushers (later referred to by O'Brien as Molly Maguires), who were Belfast supporters of the Ancient Order of Hibernians or Board of Erin, brought down specifically for that purpose.

O'Brien's ill treatment that day, made up his mind to confront and oppose the party.

31 For the causes of the breakdown in land purchase and the reasons for Birrell's land bill of 1909 see J. V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien*, pp 185-6.

32 *CE*, 6 February 1909. The meeting was held on 2 February. It is interesting that the IRA [no doubt under the influence of Dunraven] followed closely the

line of O'Brien and placed firmly on the Irish Party the totality of blame for the failure of land purchase and the necessity for the bill.

33 Dunraven to O'Brien, 9 February (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/10). No year is given in this letter, which was written in Adare Manor. We know from local newspapers that Dunraven was in Adare during the first half of February 1909. The opinion of the present writer is that the letter was written in 1909 and concerned the so-called Baton Convention. The only difficulty in that hypothesis is that it was dated 9 February, the day that the convention opened and so could not have offered much encouragement to O'Brien as he prepared to face an apparently hostile assembly. The letter could also be construed as referring to the formal establishment of O'Brien's new party in 1910. While Dunraven was in Adare during part of February 1910 (*LC*, 24 February 1910) it is improbable that he wrote to O'Brien on 9 February commending him on the formation of the party and, five weeks later, telling him 'I think you are making a serious mistake as to time' (see n. 42). Schilling does not refer to this letter in his excellent thesis.

34 For an account of the convention (which ran over two days) see *Olive Branch*, pp 441-54; Sheehan, pp 211-5; J. V. O'Brien, pp 187-8; Lyons, *John Dillon*, p. 303; *CE*, 10, 11 February 1909.

O'Brien was full of optimism when he wrote to Dunraven to tell him that 'the moment is ripe for starting an all for Ireland association on conciliation lines.'³⁵ While Dublin was friendly, he told Dunraven, Cork was the better place to make a start as members of the Gaelic League, Sinn Fein, the G.A.A., Young Ireland Society and the UIL had already attended preliminary meetings. O'Brien hoped that, with a broad but as yet undefined platform, he could attract as wide a following as possible from agricultural labourers to landlords, professionals to prominent business magnates. He hinted that Dunraven could play a vital role if it was widely known that he was taking part as the rump of the almost defunct IRA and hundreds of unionists, that O'Brien always imagined were biding their time on the sidelines, were only waiting to join forces, under the conciliation banner, with kindred spirits from the opposite side of the political divide. The participation of Dunraven from another standpoint was also crucial. The second prong of O'Brien's assault on the Irish party necessitated the appearance of a daily newspaper as even the *Cork Examiner* was now boycotting his speeches. O'Brien reckoned that if he could raise £10,000 a newspaper would be financially viable. He would subscribe £3,000 and, if Dunraven and his friends could come up with a like sum, O'Brien was certain that the public would willingly subscribe the remaining amount. Dunraven replied³⁶ by return of post. He agreed with the necessity of a daily newspaper; suggested that Limerick was the best place for publication as it would tap into the west as well as the south of Ireland but, being of a more practical nature in matters of business, could not see that a daily newspaper could be started on the figure suggested by O'Brien. Regarding the levy of £3,000 placed upon him, Dunraven felt that the political programme of the All for Ireland League (AIL) would play an important role in the raising of that sum. If the new organisation stood for even a moderate policy of home rule then support was doubtful. On the other hand if the principal plank of the programme stood for a genuine interpretation of the policy of conciliation and adherence to the main principles of the land conference then, in conjunction with tenants who had purchased or who hoped to purchase, a successful organisation could be built up capable of sustaining a daily newspaper. In short then what Dunraven envisaged, on behalf of his constituency, was a non-political land-orientated organisation concerned, not with questions of home rule or devolution, but with securing an end to the long overdue land purchase scheme initiated in 1903. Dunraven having seen the platform of the AIL wrote³⁷ again a few days later noting that the programme was little different to that of the IRA but

35 O'Brien to Dunraven, 22 February 1909 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/10).

36 Dunraven to O'Brien, 24 February 1909 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/10).

37 Dunraven to O'Brien, 27 February 1909 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/10).

made no comment on the political content of the document. The first unofficial gathering of O'Brien's new group took place in Kanturk, County Cork, the heartland of support for D. D. Sheehan, MP, one of O'Brien's strongest allies, on 21 March 1909, but this was merely a prelude to an official launch in Cork City in April. In his letter of 27 February, Dunraven told O'Brien that he was due to leave for Pau shortly and was not returning until the end of April. This was a disappointment for O'Brien as he felt that the Cork meeting should be held as early as possible and would lose some of its impact with the absence of Dunraven. Since O'Brien was having second thoughts about the raising of the money needed to start the paper Dunraven assured him that, in the event of he, Dunraven, being unable to raise the £3,000, levied as it were on him, he could be relied upon to provide that sum out of his own resources. Two weeks later³⁸ Dunraven, still not gone to Pau, was endeavouring to persuade Baron MacDonnell (the former under secretary in Dublin) to attend the Cork meeting and, while he was willing to give financial support towards the founding of the paper, he did not wish to go on the board of directors nor appear anywhere as a shareholder. This was a further blow to O'Brien who had hoped that the presence of Dunraven as a director would encourage financial support for the newspaper as well as promote membership of the new association among the unionist class.

Despite the fact that the Dublin papers did not carry any report of the Kanturk meeting, word of the informal launch reached the capital. John Redmond roundly condemned³⁹ the new organisation by warning Irish nationalists against the dangers of a new split in the party, whereupon five MPs defected from O'Brien. The opposition of Redmond was the final straw as far as O'Brien was concerned as he was ever hopeful that Redmond would unshackle himself from the influence of Dillon and Devlin and join the new movement. Worn out by ill-health and despair O'Brien, without prior notice, announced on 25 March that he was vacating his seat in parliament; dropping the AIL, and shutting down his newspaper, *the Irish People*. Dunraven, by now in Pau, was taken by surprise when he learned about it in the public press. He made three points when he subsequently wrote to O'Brien. Firstly, he framed a sort of panegyric for O'Brien coupled with regret as to his own inability to have been of greater help to him:

It is and always will be a source of the greatest pleasure and pride to have been

38 Dunraven to O'Brien, 8 March 1909 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/10).

39 LC, 23 March 1909.

associated with one who worked so honestly, honourably, strenuously and unselfishly for Ireland. . . My great regret is that I have not been able to give you the assistance you deserved in the fight you have made.⁴⁰

Secondly, he questioned whether it was a mistake to have started a new organisation under the circumstances – insufficient support in the press and no effective means of carrying on an active campaign. Thirdly, Dunraven wondered whether defeat should necessarily have been followed by retirement from all political affairs to the detriment of his constituents and faithful followers. If Dunraven had reservations as to the timing of the enterprise he never made any serious attempt to deflect O’Brien from his intention but then, once O’Brien had decided on a course of action, he was not for turning.

O’Brien spent the rest of 1909 recuperating in Italy. Correspondence between Dunraven and O’Brien resumed in November. Replying⁴¹ to a letter of a general nature from Dunraven, O’Brien showed that his health was improving. He expressed great delight in a letter Dunraven had published in the *Freeman’s Journal* in which he exposed the blunders and wickedness of the Irish party over the previous years – a sure sign that O’Brien had almost regained if not his physical health, then at least his vituperative and vitriolic self. O’Brien informed Dunraven that, while nothing would induce him to re-enter parliament, he would shortly be returning to Cork to support anti-Dillonite candidates in the forthcoming general election. O’Brien viewed the election as vital in a new attempt, despite failure in the immediate past, to start or re-start a national movement. He concluded by telling Dunraven, ‘if Cork can be held for the policy of conciliation, sooner or later it will be the nucleus for a great national movement.’

Once back in Cork O’Brien threw himself boldly into the fight against this old enemy – the Irish Party. Despite the misgivings of Dunraven he launched his new newspaper, *The Cork Accent* on 1 January 1910 and consented to contest his old parliamentary seat in the general election later that month. Later, buoyed up by his own success and that of seven of his followers in the January general election, O’Brien was soon making plans to resurrect his anti-Irish Party league. When Dunraven became aware of O’Brien’s intention to launch his

40 Dunraven to O’Brien, 31 March 1909 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/10).

41 O’Brien to Dunraven, 5 November 1909 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/10).

new movement he expressed his opinion more forthrightly than on the previous occasion telling him that he did not think the moment was opportune, ‘I think you are making a serious mistake as to time.’⁴² Dunraven was then much more occupied⁴³ with securing a final settlement of the land purchase crux than any anti-party manoeuvring likely to distract from what should be the main thrust of any attack on the Irish Party. O’Brien was however anxious to press ahead and fixed the re-launch of the AIL for 31 March 1910 at a rally to be held in Cork. Dunraven who had already said that it would not be possible for him to be in Cork on that day was extremely annoyed to find that he was listed among the speakers, ‘my doctor tells me I have not the remotest chance to attend. The fact that I am billed to speak will make it difficult for me to explain.’⁴⁴ Dunraven did write⁴⁵ a long letter, which was read at the meeting, to explain his non-attendance, in which he iterated his conviction that an organisation was necessary to further a policy that was essential for the welfare of Ireland. This policy should be threefold – such self-governing power as is consistent with the position of Ireland within the Empire; land purchase on the lines of the great measure of appeasement of 1902-03, and protection against excessive and unfair taxation. Dunraven was in fact quoting from a resolution, in which he had an input, to be put to the inaugural meeting. The programme of the AIL, that was officially announced at the rally, was conciliatory, designed to attract landlords and business people, yet vague enough to interest moderate or progressive unionists. Dunraven was again given the task of boosting membership from among his own constituency. For some time he was attempting to re-convene a conference, as in 1902, to seek amendments to Birrell’s land act of the previous year. He wrote to many persons, including many of those who were associated with the old land conference committee and others who seemed favourable to progressive unionism, but found that both he and his appeal made but little impact. He subsequently explained to O’Brien that he suffered from a great disadvantage as an organiser:

I am not a *persona grata* with everyone, not with landlords, who accuse me of desertion. . . not to some of your friends who look upon me as the arch enemy of home rule . . . not to others who seem to think my object is to burst up the parliamentary party . . . I don’t propose to put my oar in [seeking unionist support for the AIL] with a

42 Dunraven to O’Brien, 18 March 1910 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/11).

43 See Dunraven to O’Brien, 31 January [1910], (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/11).

44 Dunraven to O’Brien, 26 March 1910 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/11).

45 *CE*, 1 April 1910.

splash. I must bide a wee.⁴⁶

The replies⁴⁷ were discouraging. Almost all had no stomach for a conference and, by inference, desired no truck with the AIL.

Dunraven was a curious mixture of optimism and reluctance. If he did not desire to put his oar into the water at that time then others were willing to do it for him. He complained⁴⁸ to O'Brien that the London branch of the AIL had, he believed, nominated him as vice-president without his consent and he fancied that the newly established Limerick branch would want him as president. While he was willing to assist the league by every means in his power he was unwilling to act as a spokesman or officer and felt that membership and a subscription was quite sufficient. While Dunraven asked O'Brien to advise the London branch to drop the matter for the present there was no need for any action in the case of Limerick. At a meeting of that branch the chairman was obliged to clarify the position of the presidency, 'some people took it on themselves to state that Lord Dunraven was honorary president of the branch. He was not, nor did he ask, nor was he asked to be such.'⁴⁹

Lest the new organisation would get a grip on rural Munster the Irish Party fought back. John Dillon, after meetings in Cork and Waterford, spoke at Kiltelly, County Limerick at the end of May. He warned his listeners that, in the name of conciliation, certain persons [undoubtedly Dunraven and O'Brien], sought to break up the nationalist ranks; plant the landlords on the necks of the people, and hand back to them the whole political power of the country. If that policy succeeded, they would have very little liberty from Lord Dunraven, Lord Castletown and company.⁵⁰ Whether he realised it or not, Dillon was adopting the method, advocated by D.P. Moran, to counter the policies of O'Brien and Dunraven, namely, to fight them at every occasion using the weapon of persistent ridicule. Moran invariably coupled the two together as Lord Done-ravin and Willie Never-done-ravin and referred to the

46 Dunraven to O'Brien, 11 April 1910 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/11).

47 Dunraven to O'Brien, 17 April 1910 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/11).

48 Dunraven to O'Brien, 17 May 1910 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/11).

49 LC, 28 May 1910.

50 LL, 30 May 1910.

league as the All-for-William League.⁵¹ Other lesser lights were only too happy to follow Moran's lead. At a joint meeting of the three Limerick executives of the UIL, D. J. Madden, Rathkeale, said that 'the cause represented by the Irish party would not be torn by faction, by Lord Devolution, William O'Brien or anyone else.'⁵²

Dunraven, by sending a cheque for £1,000, made good his promise to financially assist the *Cork Free Press*, a daily newspaper soon to be launched by O'Brien to replace his news sheet, *The Cork Accent*.⁵³ At an AIL branch meeting in Limerick City to organise an upcoming rally, Dunraven was seen as a valuable addition to the cause, as the chairman:

looked upon him [Dunraven] as a good home ruler and a man who was, in conjunction with William O'Brien, prepared to settle the economic questions of the country same as the land question.⁵⁴

Despite the failure to honour him with the presidency of the branch, Dunraven was held in high esteem by the Limerick AIL members. A public meeting in Limerick, held on 8 July 1910, where the Theatre Royal 'was crowded in every part,' was pronounced by the *Limerick Chronicle* as a major success. Dunraven was the keynote speaker and addressed such topics as his belief in the principles of the AIL; his desire, since 1901, to endeavour to place Ireland at the top of his personal agenda; the land act of 1903 and Birrell's land act of 1909, and the necessity of a fair and adequate financial provision for Ireland in the event of any future home rule bill. A number of minor unionist figures in the locality attended or sent apologies while O'Brien, the second speaker, referred in eulogistic terms to the actions of Dunraven in his efforts to settle the Irish land question.⁵⁵

The Limerick rally marked the high point of the AIL in Limerick and Dunraven's involvement in the new organisation. The chairman of the Limerick branch saw in

51 See *Irish Leader*, 13 March 1909, 2 April 1910. Moran, the founder of the journal, was an influential force in the Irish-Ireland movement from 1900 to 1916. As late as 1913 Moran was still lampooning Dunraven and O'Brien. See long satirical parody in *The Leader*, 13 December 1913.

52 *LL*, 8 June 1910. Madden, an unsuccessful candidate for Cumann na nGaedheal in the 1932 general election, was a Fine Gael TD for Limerick West from 1948 to his death in 1955.

53 Dunraven to O'Brien, 17, 30 May 1910 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/11). Even before its launch Dunraven expressed misgivings over its future viability (Dunraven to O'Brien, 10 October 1910 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/11).

54 *LC*, 25 June 1910.

55 *LC*, 9 July 1910; *LL*, 11 July 1910.

Dunraven's remarks his conversion to the principle of home rule and felt that his detractors should note such.⁵⁶ The riposte of the Irish Party was not delayed too long. A nationalist demonstration, 'the largest which has been seen in the city [Limerick] for many years past' was held on 11 September 1910, at which all the Dublin-based and local leaders spoke. John Dillon who could not let the occasion pass without a jaundiced reference to Dunraven said that:

the great question before the Irish people was whether they meant to keep a united party in parliament or to dismiss the leader and disband the party and then hand over the control of Irish politics to William O'Brien, Lord Dunraven, Lord Castletown and Lord Barrymore.⁵⁷

As was seen in the election contest with Coleman in 1899, Dunraven was able to hold his own in the ridicule stakes. Writing in the *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, he welcomed the conversion of the Irish Party to the notion of federal home rule, a different policy to that enunciated in Ireland, as indicated in recent fund-raising missions to the United States and Canada.⁵⁸ At this time Dunraven was veering towards a federal solution of the age-old problem of the relationship between the United Kingdom and Ireland. He attempted to interest O'Brien in the process.⁵⁹ Dunraven was also well able to defend himself, when he chose to do so, as he showed when replying to the remarks, made by John Dillon when speaking at Loughrea on 1 November, concerning Dunraven's letter to the Belfast newspaper:

If Mr Dillon says I entered into a conspiracy in 1902 to break up the Irish Party the allegations are absolutely false. If by 'my party' Mr O'Brien is referred to as

⁵⁶ *LC*, 12 July 1910.

⁵⁷ *LC*, 13 September 1910. At that meeting Willie Redmond, MP, laid down unequivocally the terms under which unionists would be welcomed into the nationalist fold. 'When Dunraven and Barrymore and others, openly, honestly and boldly, at a meeting such as this, declare to the Irish people that they were sick of English rule and would support, by heart, by voice, by thought, a home rule bill for Ireland in the house of lords, then he would talk to them.' (*LL*, 12 September 1910).

⁵⁸ *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, 28 October 1910.

⁵⁹ Dunraven to O'Brien, 23 July 1910 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/11). Federalism, as understood by Dunraven, was a form of government in which Ireland would agree to grant control of international or common affairs to a central authority (the parliament in Westminster), but retain control over internal affairs in a Dublin parliament. In time the system would apply to other parts of the U.K. The notion was gaining some credibility among non-unionists in Ireland. See Maurice Healy, MP, on federalism when addressing a meeting of the Limerick branch of AIL (*LC*, 22 October 1910).

conspiring with me, that falsehood was disproved at Limerick in March 1907 [when O'Brien won his libel case against the *Freeman's Journal*]. I am tired of correcting Mr Dillon's imagination.⁶⁰

The coming general election, due in December, the second contest in 1910, was also exercising the minds of Dunraven and O'Brien. It was essential that the apparent success of the September rally in the city in July and a later one in Kilmallock on 11 September and a meeting⁶¹ in Limerick to form a city and county executive be transferred into the more tangible form of votes for an AIL candidate. The question of funds (or lack of them) loomed large as both the party and O'Brien himself were penniless and friendless. Candidates were willing to run in certain areas provided funds were made available to them. A potential candidate (whose name is indecipherable) wrote to Dunraven intimating that he was willing to run as an independent nationalist or unionist but needed backing. In exasperation Dunraven wrote to O'Brien, 'nor can I pay indefinite expenses. Can you find a little money?'⁶² A Tipperary person (itself an ominous omen) was selected as the Limerick City candidate but was comprehensively defeated by the outgoing nationalist, Alderman Michael Joyce.⁶³ Dunraven was pleased with the overall results as he informed O'Brien in December:

I think it marvellous and an indication of the great vitality of the movement that we were able to hold our own. . . . If we have a year or even a few months to organise the AIL shall have a fair chance. . . Rest assured that we will all do our best to ensure that the next time you enter the lists you shall be as well equipped as your antagonists.⁶⁴

60 LC, 3 November 1910.

61 LC, 22 October 1910. By then Dunraven had been elected president of the city branch.

62 Dunraven to O'Brien, 30 November 1910 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/11). By now O'Brien's many ventures were eating into his wife's fortune. See T. M. Healy, *Letters and leaders of my day* (New York, 1929) ii, p.503 for a brief observation of O'Brien's financial position. In July, Dunraven expressed a willingness to travel to America to speak on federalism with Maurice Healy (and presumably collect funds for the AIL) but by October the idea had gone cold (Dunraven to O'Brien 23 July, 10 October 1910 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/11). See also A. J. Ward, '[Moreton] Frewen's Anglo-American campaign for federalism, 1910-1922' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xv (March 1966), pp 256-75. Promises of money from America were made to O'Brien if he adopted a federalist stance in respect of home rule. For obvious reasons he did not want to be seen as opposing or delaying the national desire for a parliament in Dublin. He did, however, receive just under £4,000 as an inducement to declare for federalism (J. V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien*, pp 202-3 .

63 LC, 8 December 1910. The returns were Joyce, 2452, John H. Rice, 682.

64 Dunraven to O'Brien, 22 December 1910 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/11).

The end of 1910 saw the effective ending of Dunraven's involvement in the actual working of the AIL, although he continued to support its aims.

The close working relationship between Dunraven and O'Brien began to come apart in the early 1910s due mainly to a chronic shortage of funds to keep the organisation alive. The newspaper was the chief cause of worry. After little more than a year in production the *Cork Free Press (CFP)*, was in severe financial difficulty and despite an investment by Dunraven of more than £1,000 and lesser sums by former members of the defunct IRA, it was being kept alive by O'Brien using his wife's personal funds. With such a background it was inevitable that tensions between Dunraven and O'Brien were close to the surface. In July 1912 the manager of the newspaper, without the knowledge or consent of O'Brien or other large shareholders, decided to replace monotype printing machines with linotype machines. That in itself was not of immense importance but when word got out it placed Dunraven in an invidious position as, not only was he a major shareholder as well as chairman of the Monotype Machine Syndicate Ltd., that supplied the machines in the first instance, but a sum of money was due to the company by the *CFP* and the company was pressing for payment.⁶⁵ As Dunraven had gone guarantor for the debt he paid £587 to the company only to discover that O'Brien, from his own resources, had already cleared the debt. While it was a minor affair it caused tension between the two and helped to loosen the close bond of friendship that had existed between them heretofore. It caused considerable annoyance to Dunraven at the time, not that he felt obliged to redeem the debt, but it came at a time when 'he was at his wits end [in attempting to muster support among moderate unionists and former members of the IRA to launch a major drive for a conference on the home rule problem] and, at his financial end.'⁶⁶ Once the debate on the home rule bill commenced Dunraven and O'Brien largely went their separate ways, Dunraven, in conjunction with Moreton Frewen and other federalists, to combat the menace of home rule for Ireland by substituting the concept of home rule-all-round (a parliament in Ireland, Scotland and Wales to deal with purely local and internal matters, while sending a lesser number of members to the parliament in Westminster) while O'Brien, soon to abandon his crusade against the Irish party, turned his attention to seeking a home rule measure, fashioned by a conference and acceptable to both north and south of Ireland.

65 Mr Askwith [later Lord Askwith] to Dunraven, 8 November 1900 (UL, Dunraven papers, D 3196/G/13). See also UL, Glin papers, P1/304.

66 Dunraven to O'Brien, 25 July [end of July], 2 August, 22 August, 28 August 1912; O'Brien to Dunraven 24 August 1912 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/12).

FOR KING AND EMPIRE

Shortly before World War 1 broke out in early August 1914, Dunraven, who was then seventy-three years old, was suffering a periodic occurrence of gout, so instead of seeking a cure in Vichy,¹ as he had intended, he was forced to go to Buxton Heath, Norfolk. On his return to London just before the declaration of war² he was approached by his friend, Lady Dudley, wife of the second earl of Dudley, who had served as lord lieutenant in Ireland from 1902 to 1905, who explained to him that she needed the services of a sailor or yachtsman who would ferry wounded officers from a military hospital in France out to larger ships to bring them back to England. That meeting enkindled in Dunraven his old longing to don uniform to serve and defend king and empire. As he was still suffering the result of his harrowing experiences in the Boer War, the *fons et origo* of his intermittent bouts of illness, this offer, allowing him to follow his nautical inclination, seemed a useful and pleasant prospect. Since his yacht, *Cariad*, a sailing vessel, was quite unsuitable for that purpose he purchased a steam yacht, *Greta*, and fitted it up at his own expense.

On the day that war was declared Dunraven was in print in the *Cork Free Press*³ calling on the government to withdraw its troops from Ireland in the sure knowledge that the volunteers, north and south, would safely defend its shores from any threat of invasion. In this he was reiterating Redmond's assurance of the previous day in the house of commons. Two months later following the call of John Redmond and the prime minister, Asquith, appealing for Irish recruits to join the rapidly expanding British army, Dunraven was quick to add his not inconsiderable pen to that same cause. In a long letter to the *Limerick Chronicle*,⁴ Dunraven made a special appeal to the men of Limerick to enlist. Speaking not as lord lieutenant of the county, but as a private resident therein, he based his plea on the duty of Ireland to march in step with the empire in order to crush the blatant militarism of Prussia with its concomitant litany of barbarity, torture and destruction of religious shrines. He had an easy solution for those who, for one reason or another, would be unable to serve abroad. They could undertake to serve in Ireland as part of a local defence force or assist in the maintenance of order, thus freeing members of the Royal Irish Constabulary to join the regular army. Dunraven was a very plausible advocate, appealing, on the one hand, to the sense of honour and righteousness of the Irish race who, in the past, had been ever willing to

1 Dunraven to O'Brien, 3 July 1914 (NLI, William O'Brien papers, 8554/15).

2 For an account of his wartime exploits see Dunraven, *Past times*, i, pp 230-60.

3 *CFP*, 4 August 1914.

4 *LC*, 6 October 1914.

fight the cause of little nations. On the other hand, he appealed especially to Limerick people, invoking Sarsfield, the wild geese, and the Irish Brigade, all of whom fought gallantly in the service of countries other than Ireland. It was ironic that on the day of his appeal to the people of Limerick, Dunraven was part of the same crusade for enlistment as such former adversaries as John Dillon, speaking in Ballaghaderreen, and T. P. O'Connor in London. Dunraven was at all times careful, however, not to make any references to wrongs done to Ireland by England in the past. That was best left to politicians like John Redmond, who, speaking⁵ to volunteers in Wexford, said that recent concessions granted to Ireland, from the local government act of 1898 to the addition of the home rule act of 1914 on the statute book, had more than made up for past transgressions.

Dunraven's personal endeavours to further the cause of recruitment gave him the status of a minor celebrity in England, more so than in Ireland. He was invited⁶ to become a vice-president of the London based Athlete's Volunteer Force. This was an ingenious plan by which athletes of all sorts, footballers, cyclists, swimmers, etc., would join together to form a company or unit and learn the rudiments of drill and rifle shooting so as to fit them for any emergency that might arise. As a recruiting agent, Dunraven was determined to make his mark in England as well as at home. In September 1914, he realised that the yacht, *Greta*, did not suit her work, so he purchased another and larger yacht, *Grianaig*, which he fitted up for hospital-ferry duty, again at his own expense. In October, the Admiralty took over the yacht as a hospital transport carrier, and Dunraven was given a commission as a lieutenant⁷ in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve. In mid May 1915, he was assigned to hospital duties in the Mediterranean, a much more hazardous tour of duty than any experienced up to then. While abroad Dunraven, kept in touch with the recruiting drive in the British Isles and was painfully aware that the system then in operation was not likely to provide the fresh drafts of troops needed to shore up the fighting force on the western war front. In August, he wrote to the *Morning Post*,⁸ where he took to task the munitions minister, Lloyd George, for his suggestions that certain categories of workers, like miners, might have the right to be excused from military service. Voluntary enlisting had failed as a means of sustaining numbers in the forces, argued Dunraven, and it was time that the concept of compulsory service, however

5 Ibid.

6 LC, 10 November 1914.

7 Dunraven, *Past times*, i, p. 233.

8 *Morning Post*, 3 August 1915.

unpleasant the transient political consequences might be, was introduced. As for government ministers, Dunraven felt that urgent action was required of them, not discourses or hints. Such was his ardour for the cause that he was not above lecturing ministers of the crown. The change in the recruiting strategy now advocated, from volunteering to compulsion, meant that Dunraven was no longer at one with the official policy of the Irish party and left him open to mischievous and deliberate misrepresentation of his motives by unscrupulous political opponents. Despite extensive recruiting campaigns in Ireland in 1915 voluntary enlistment had become a trickle and, more importantly, opposition⁹ to recruiting began to surface.

Dunraven had, by the middle of 1915, developed further his ideas on compulsion, calling it by its rightful name, conscription. Early in September, before returning to a tour of duty, Dunraven, varying his readership, wrote to the *Daily Mail*. His message was stark – the United Kingdom needed the implementation of compulsion. Referring to Ireland he did not envisage any serious trouble there if compulsion was introduced, pointing out that it did not necessarily mean military service, as tasks such as cultivation of the land and production of munitions and materials of war were also vital duties. The ending of the letter is somewhat surprising:

If Ireland does not fall into line she can stay out. I shall regret it for of all the nationalities composing the United Kingdom Ireland has the most to gain by bringing this war to a successful and speedy conclusion. Upon that all her aspirations, political and economic, depend.¹⁰

This was a plausible argument aimed at supporters of the Irish party but unlikely to sway the growing number of people already becoming disillusioned with John Redmond and his band of parliamentarians for their lack of progress in the area of home rule. If Dunraven was expecting a favourable response, the *Limerick Leader*,¹¹ alarmed by the implications of his latest clarion call, gave it a definite thumbs down in a leading article bluntly entitled ‘No Conscription’.

⁹ See anti-recruiting motion passed by Newcastle West RDC (*LL*, 25 June 1915).

¹⁰ *Daily Mail*, 3 September 1915.

¹¹ *LL*, 3 September 1915.

The compulsory service bill was introduced in the house of commons on 5 January 1916, by the prime minister, Asquith, who, in outlining the terms, said that it applied only to those ordinarily resident in Great Britain. Dunraven was present in the house of lords, on 11 January, when a debate on recruiting in Ireland was initiated by the earl of Middleton who wanted to know the number of recruits raised in Great Britain and in Ireland since the commencement of the war. The reply indicated that approximately 95,000¹² had come forward from Ireland. Dunraven,¹³ who spoke next, protested against the dissemination of such information or indeed any such inquiries as the figures given could not strike a fair balance in attempting to show whether Ireland had or had not borne her fair share of the war as compared to Great Britain. On the contrary, he was of the opinion that Ireland had borne its fair share of the war effort; the valour and bravery of the Irish regiments at the front could not be doubted, and he paid tribute to Irish prisoners of war in Germany who had rejected, since October 1914, enormous temptations to defect to Casement's Irish Brigade. In public statements to date Dunraven always expressed satisfaction with the progress of the recruiting campaign in Ireland, yet, in letters to the press, he invariably took the opposite view. Dunraven was back at Adare by 12 February 1916 from whence, in a letter to the *Irish Times* he addressed, as honorary colonel of the Royal Munster Fusiliers, his most vigorous and forceful denunciation of Ireland's contribution, or lack of it, to the war effort. Praising only the patriotism of the farming class,¹⁴ the nub of his argument was that while Ireland had done well in the matter of providing reinforcements for the forces, she had not done her best and he deeply regretted that she was not included in the compulsion bill. He gave two reasons for his trenchant views. Firstly, in the interests of fair play Ireland had a right to march in line with England, Scotland and Wales and to share equally in all the sacrifices of the war. Secondly, the exemption of Ireland might well be thrown back in her face some day. Ireland could make matters right by enlisting voluntarily in adequate numbers. He painted a bleak prospect for Ireland should the British Isles become a Prussian military province, before dwelling on the shame felt by the fighting Irish at the front at the inability of Ireland to provide adequate reinforcements for the Irish regiments. Dunraven concluded by asserting that he was intensely proud of Ireland while in England and at the front but:

12 The breakdown was Leinster, 27,458; Ulster, 49,700; Munster, 14,100; Connaught, 3,589.

13 *Hansard*, vol. 20, cols. 874-5, 11 January 1916.

14 Efforts were made to form a farmers' battalion in County Limerick in January 1916. One of the instigators was William Molony, the third candidate in the county council election of 1902, who subsequently received a captain's commission in the Royal Munster Fusiliers. See *LL*, 31 January 1916.

only in Ireland I feel shame, as every Irishman must, who sees young men loafing about race courses, railway stations and public places of all sorts, who ought to be backing the gallant Irish . . . They cannot be cowards. Cannot they see that for their own sakes and for the honour of the Irish regiments, for the existence of the country, they are bound to do their bit.¹⁵

This letter, which gained some notoriety as Dunraven's 'loafer address' was a severe rebuke to Irishmen and certainly not designed to motivate them to enlist.

Dunraven took a great interest in all facets of the conduct of the war. In the house of lords on 23 February 1916 he criticised¹⁶ the government for not taking more rigorous steps to enforce the naval blockade in the North Sea because, while exports from Germany had been reduced to nil, many imports were getting through. This state of affairs he blamed on agreements entered into between the administration and trading syndicates in neutral countries. In order to make the blockade effective he wanted clear instructions to be given to the Fleet and reasonable freedom to carry them out. It is remarkable the number of times Dunraven was able to come up with simple and obvious solutions to problems. Dunraven returned to active service in April 1916. He was safe in his hospital ship between Malta and Salonica when he was informed by his friends, courtesy of the news media, that he had been shot dead¹⁷ in a street riot in Dublin at the time of the Easter rising. On his return to London, the home rule question took up his attention in June and July, followed by an attack of gout in August. The death of the countess of Dunraven on 22 September 1916, necessarily pre-occupied the earl for some time. His crusade continued, however, in October. John Redmond was the source of his ire¹⁸ for his change of attitude to the war effort, from his unstinted support in August 1914, to his recent statement that Ireland would now be prepared to do nothing to hasten the victorious end of the conflict. Never short of suggesting remedies, however unpalatable they might be, Dunraven, in an open letter¹⁹ to the press, in October

15 *IT*, 14 February 1916; *LC*, 15 Feb. 1916.

16 *Hansard*, vol. 21, cols. 129-36, 23 February 1916.

17 *LL*, 3 May 1916.

18 Letter to the *Morning Post*, 12 October 1916.

19 *LC*, 17 October 1916.

1916, advocated the immediate application of the Derby scheme²⁰ to Ireland to fill the drafts for Irish regiments, and the appointment of the duke of Connaught, with his Irish title as a help, as head of a renewed recruitment campaign. The following month he set out to save the honour of Ireland, even if it was against her will, by coupling recruiting with a desire to satisfy the demands of Ireland for home rule:

Let us all bury the hatchet and cease from dwelling upon the blunders and crimes and follies of the past few years. Let a representative conference of Irishmen be set up to draw up the heads of a home rule bill.²¹

His hope here was that a favourable result of a conference would enable the duke of Connaught, with some confidence, to head a fresh recruiting campaign. This would have a reasonable chance of success with home rule no longer a decisive issue between the north and south of the island and between Ireland and Britain. It had finally dawned on Dunraven that suggesting recruitment without some sort of quid pro quo would never entice the people of Ireland. This was, like the notion of a conference, a revisiting by Dunraven of his O'Brienite days. At the commencement of the war, O'Brien threw himself, his limited organisation and his newspaper, the *Cork Free Press*, unreservedly into the recruitment struggle, making no demands or expecting any reward for Ireland, as he and the people were simply doing their duty to the empire. Dunraven later went further than that, declaring that, as a necessary corollary of any crusade, compulsion would, in the event of failure, have to be resorted to. The above threat begs the question, did Dunraven, for all his protestations to the contrary, ever really understand the Irish psyche? Urging that Ireland be immediately brought into line under the terms of the military service (or compulsion) act, Dunraven must have been one of the few persons in Ireland who could say that 'it was Ireland's privilege and Ireland's right to share equally in every sacrifice, and she has been defrauded of it'²² when her leaders refused to press for the introduction of conscription for Ireland. Long years spent in the rarefied atmosphere of power in Britain coupled with the deference shown to him at home by tenants, retainers and villagers had dulled his sense of judgement to such an extent that he failed to discern the profound sea change then enveloping Ireland. The people were then emerging

20 Men would join up in units according to their trades or professions, i.e. farmers, labourers, shop assistants, footballers, etc.

21 *Morning Post*, 2 November 1916.

22 *Ibid.*

from the shadows of the Irish Party with its preoccupation with home rule and were content to place the future of their country into the hands of persons whom Dunraven dismissively described as ‘a very small handful of crazy republicans.’²³ He utterly failed to understand the growing differences between Ireland and England and showed no appreciation of the sense of injustice felt by generations of Irishmen and the resultant antipathy to Englishness, in all its many facets, nor did he understand the purpose of the Rising of 1916 or the impact on the population of the execution of the leaders.

Up to now Dunraven had scarcely ever been challenged with regard to his attitude on the progression from voluntary enlistment, to recruiting, to compulsion, and finally, to conscription. The mood of Ireland was changing, as could be seen from rumblings within county and district councils. While the councillors were mostly elected under the aegis of the home rule-seeking Irish Party banner, the council members, like politicians everywhere, were quick to notice and then fall in line with the new tune of separatism. Before long a new wave of resentment against Britain was weeping the countryside. The contents of the last letter to the *Morning Post* were considered at a meeting of Rathkeale RDC on 8 November 1916. A two-fold resolution was unanimously adopted:

that we tell his lordship plainly that if conscription comes it will not be taken lying down, and that if, instead of cruising about the Mediterranean, he was mixing among the Irish, he would know more of the present temper against conscription than everything else English.²⁴

A copy was forwarded to Dunraven, for his consideration. Never one to shirk what he regarded as his duty, Dunraven duly replied, on 10 November, by way of an open letter so as to attract maximum publicity. He stoutly defended his stance on conscription, as Ireland would, when the final political settlement was made at the end of the conflict, be disgraced and would inevitably lose her political future; he claimed that he was not ignorant of current thinking at home, and that, in the course of his so-called cruising in the Mediterranean, he had succoured ‘many wounded Irish, real Irish, who were fighting splendidly for a sacred

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Minutes of Rathkeale RDC, 8 November 1916; *LL*, 10 November 1916.

cause.²⁵ Dunraven's letter was discussed at the following meeting²⁶ of Rathkeale RDC where it engendered another bout of vituperative comment, reminiscent of the invective showered on his head during the county council election campaign of 1899. Little new of a constructive nature emerged. The reference to cruising about the Mediterranean certainly detracted from the effectiveness of the resolution and Dunraven deftly turned the affair, which was intended to draw attention to his constant appeals for conscription, into a reasoned corroboration of his viewpoint.

Whatever the reason, Dunraven's ardour for conscription cooled considerably after the imbroglio with Rathkeale RDC. His enthusiasm for a successful outcome of the war never waned but he involved himself more with two disparate aspects of the conflict, namely the problems of food production²⁷ in the United Kingdom and Ireland as imports diminished and manpower waned, and the ban²⁸ on horse-racing in Ireland. For the second half of the year he became engrossed in the workings of the Irish Convention. Two contributions to the war effort, during that year, may be noted. In March 1917, he dampened²⁹ expectations that the United States was about to enter the war on the side of the allies, while in July,³⁰ to coincide with the beginning of the work of the convention, he made a fresh appeal to Irishmen to engage in the war effort.

The continuation of the war into 1918 generated severe problems for the government, as well as continued anxiety for devotees of conscription such as Dunraven. The manpower problem was acute and in order to provide some measure of amelioration, it was agreed by the war cabinet that conscription would apply to Ireland. This measure was included in the Military Service (No. 2) Bill, introduced in the house of commons on 9 April, and passed by that house one week later. In concert with the mood of Ireland and as a protest, the Irish MPs

25 Dunraven to Rathkeale RDC, *LC*, 21 November 1916.

26 Minutes of Rathkeale RDC; *LL*, 24 November 1916.

27 *LC*, 20, 23 January 1917. Dunraven was in favour of compulsory tillage during the war years. See also Dunraven and the food problem; Dunraven and the national fish supply (*LC*, 10, 17 May 1917).

28 See *Times*, 5 March 1915, 4 July 1917.

29 Dunraven to the *Morning Post*, cited in *LC*, 1 March 1917. Dunraven pointed out that non intervention in European affairs, except when American property was wilfully attacked, was in accordance with the traditional policy of the United States.

30 Pamphlet, '*Ireland Awake*' (NLI, Ir. 94109, p.19); *LC*, 26 July 1917). Following on the example of Rathkeale RDC, the honorary secretary of the Con Collins Sinn Fein club in Mountcollins took Dunraven to task over his appeal in this pamphlet. He wrote 'I wonder is the earl speaking to a nation of fools? We certainly will awake and save ourselves. For too long have we slept and slumbered while the mighty empire, which he asks us to help, have stolen our rights and liberties as a nation' (*Weekly Observer* (Newcastle West), 4 August 1917).

withdrew from Westminster and returned to Ireland where they joined forces with disparate nationalist groups, and so presented a formidable phalanx of resistance to the proposed new measure. For one who had so long advocated the introduction of conscription, Dunraven was subsequently strangely silent, both in his acceptance of it and in any suggestions as to its speedy implementation. Others however were not. Limerick Town Council as a mark of disapproval of his long time advocacy of conscription expunged³¹ his name from the roll of freemen in May 1918. This did not deter him from penning his sole contribution on the war effort for 1918, which came in the form of an open letter³² to the press 'Ireland and the War'. By mid year the capitulation of the German forces was becoming increasingly evident due to the arrival of American troops and so the need for additional allied resources was not so pressing.

Dunraven toured some of the battlefields in France just prior to Armistice Day in November and was present³³ at the Palace of Versailles at the signing of peace on 28 June 1919. While Dunraven's contribution to the war effort was reviled in Ireland, his service was recognised by the War Office in London. In 1919 when the *Grianaig* was stood down he was awarded an OBE and, three years later, was granted an honorary commission as a captain in the Royal Naval Reserve.³⁴

Dunraven emerged from the war years with his reputation tarnished and sullied but with his integrity and probity unblemished. If the people of Ireland considered Dunraven's attitude to recruiting to be misguided, his sincerity could not be doubted. He passionately believed that Britain's cause was Ireland's cause and felt genuinely aggrieved at the disdainful disposition of Irishmen towards the sacred duty, in his view, of defending home and hearth, and which was, to make matters worse for Ireland, putting in jeopardy the final political settlement of Ireland once the war was over. He offered no apology to any for his prolonged campaign for conscription. Ireland, if necessary, had to be saved from herself, something he saw as his duty.

31 *LL*, 3 May 1918.

32 *LC*, 28 May 1918.

33 Dunraven, *Past times*, i, pp 257-9. By a strange quirk of fate Dunraven was also present in the same Hall of Mirrors in 1871 when the Franco-Prussian War formally ended.

34 For details of Dunraven's military and naval commissions, including his army certificate of identity, 1916, see NAI, Dunraven papers, N/1/8.

THE CITY GIVETH AND THE CITY TAKETH

The year 1908 may be said to mark the acme of Dunraven's power and influence in Ireland. The land act of 1903 with which his name was affectionately associated was slowly creating a class of strong independent farmers. His advocacy of devolution, while not acceptable to the bulk of the nationalist people, was seen nonetheless as running along parallel lines with the national demand for home rule. On a different level, but one that was closer to the national spirit of Ireland at the time and more pertinent to local matters was Dunraven's involvement in the promotion of the Irish industrial movement in the province of Munster and particularly in his native county and adjacent city. He had given example by setting up a number of small enterprises at Adare including the cultivation and curing of tobacco and the growing of osiers. Of more relevance to the citizenry of Limerick was his encouragement and support for technical education and his efforts to procure a worthy building for such instruction. It was no surprise then that a formal act of recognition, of approval and regard for his many attempts to ameliorate the living conditions of his fellow countrymen, should be conferred upon him.

To Dunraven this act of recognition came sooner than expected. At a meeting of the Standing or Whole House Committee of Limerick Corporation, held on 25 November 1908, Councillor Matthew McInerney handed in the following notice of motion:

I propose that the name of Lord Dunraven be placed on the agenda paper to be proposed for the Freedom of the City of Limerick in recognition of his munificent gift of £500 to the committee of Technical Education to be distributed for scholarships to deserving students, and other gifts conferred on the city.³⁵

It was considered on 3 December when McInerney moved his proposition, seconded by Councillor Patrick McNamara. The only dissenter was Councillor J. Dalton who suggested that the names of several local merchants of standing should take precedence over Dunraven. The mayor, Alderman Thomas Donnellan, who chaired the meeting, invited Dalton to hand in a notice of motion to that effect. McInerney's motion was then passed unanimously amidst applause, Dalton not formally registering his dissent. A special meeting was decided upon for the following Monday, 7 December, to confer the award.³⁶ The town clerk, William Nolan informed Dunraven and received the following reply 'I am very sensible of the high

³⁵ Minutes of Limerick Corporation (MLC), 25 November 1908.

³⁶ MLC, 3 December 1908.

honour conferred on me.³⁷ At the conferral meeting Nolan alluded to the interest taken by Dunraven in the welfare of the country and made special reference to his attention to the industrial revival movement, which was vital for the future prosperity of Ireland.³⁸ In his address after signing the roll, Dunraven said that he appreciated the honour bestowed upon him for two reasons. Firstly, as the council was a democratic body, thoroughly representative of all classes in the city, the gift to him was the gift of all classes of his fellow countrymen and his fellow citizens. Secondly, he felt that the honour they had done him sprung from a kindly recognition on the part of kindly Irish hearts that he had tried to do something, however small, for the benefit of his country, his county, and of the city.³⁹

The honour to Dunraven was reasonably well received by newspapers representing all shades of opinion locally – the unionist *Limerick Chronicle*, ‘an honour which his lordship thoroughly deserved,’⁴⁰ while the nationalist *Limerick Leader*⁴¹ declined to comment editorially but gave a full account of the proceedings. On a national level the *Cork Examiner* opined:

Lord Dunraven has won the esteem of great numbers of his countrymen. He may not have convinced them to the policies he advocated . . . but people like a manly fighter and Dunraven is, above all things, a fair and generous protagonist.⁴²

The ultra-nationalist *Freeman’s Journal* did not consider the matter worthy of editorial comment though a report on the ceremony was given in great detail.⁴³

The nine years between December 1908 and May 1918 saw a sea change in the attitude of the citizens of Limerick towards Dunraven as exemplified by their public representatives. The man whose praises were sung when he was awarded the highest honour that the corporation could bestow was now stripped of that honour. It is necessary to place the reason for this turnabout in its historical context. That dreaded word conscription first entered the

37 Dunraven to Nolan, 5 December 1908, contained in MLC, 7 December 1908.

38 *FJ*, 8 December 1908.

39 *IT*, 8 December 1908.

40 *LC*, 8 December 1908

41 *LL*, 7 December 1908.

42 *CE*, 8 December 1908.

43 *FJ*, 8 December 1908.

vocabulary of warfare in 1916 when heavy allied losses at the battles of Verdun and the Somme necessitated drastic action to replenish the numbers of fighting men available to military command. By February 1917 a conscription act was in place in the United Kingdom but, owing to unrest consequent on the rising of 1916, the question of extending the measure to Ireland was dropped. This situation changed in 1918 when the British army again suffered severe losses on the Western Front. On 9 April, the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, introduced the Military Service (No. 2) bill in the house of commons and it passed into law a week later. There was no opt-out clause for Ireland this time. The Irish members withdrew from parliament and returned home where they joined with former enemies such as Sinn Fein, O'Brienites, trade unions, and the Irish Volunteers to fight the application of this obnoxious measure to Ireland. Feelings among the ordinary people were running very high and anti-conscription rallies were held all over the country as local authorities vied with one another in proposing motions of condemnation. As early as 14 April a huge rally was held in Limerick.⁴⁴ This provided the incentive to some members of the corporation to demonstrate that action would be more beneficial than a mere motion of condemnation. The victim was readily identifiable. Dunraven was long a proponent of conscription even when the War Office was encouraging voluntary enlistment and never desisted from forcefully expressing in public his view that any measure of conscription must be applied equally to Ireland. This country, he conscientiously felt, had to bear its fair share of the war effort.

At a special meeting of Limerick Corporation on 2 May 1918 the mayor, Councillor A. M. O'Mara, allowed Councillor M. Griffin, in pursuance of a notice of motion, to move an urgent resolution:

That owing to the action of Lord Dunraven in supporting conscription for this country his name be erased and struck off the roll of Freemen of the city.⁴⁵

Griffin said that it gave him no pleasure to propose that motion; that things in Ireland had changed since 1908; that ninety five percent of the Irish people were against conscription, and that any councillor who voted for the retention of Dunraven's name on the roll was supporting conscription for the country. Councillor J. Gleeson, in the course of seconding the

⁴⁴ *LL*, 15 April, 1918.

⁴⁵ *LL*, 3 May 1918.

motion, cheapened the tone of the proceedings by suggesting that Dunraven had promised a boot factory to the city when he was granted the freedom, thus implying that the disappointment at not getting the factory was an equally good reason for striking off the earl's name as the legitimate, if severe, protest against conscription. Councillor Dalton, who was the sole voice of dissent in 1908, supported the motion. Alderman McNeice pleaded for toleration saying that whatever shortcomings were in the catholic and nationalist city of Limerick he did not think it could be thrown in their face that they were bigoted or intolerant. Averring that he himself was anti-conscription, McNeice went on to say that Irishmen claimed to be lovers of liberty yet seemed to consider it right to deny it to those who differed from them. He appealed to Griffin to withdraw his motion and let a resolution be passed expressing disapproval of the action of Dunraven in supporting conscription. When Griffin refused to withdraw, McNeice proposed an amendment to transform the motion into one of protest against Dunraven's action. For this he found a seconder. The mayor of 1908, Councillor Donnellan, regretted the smaller than usual attendance and then added a further dimension to the whole saga. He said that Dunraven's name had been added to the roll of freemen on the suggestion of the Limerick Industrial Association because of his promise to erect a boot factory in the city and also his giving a grant towards technical education. The MP for the city, Alderman Michael Joyce, argued that at the time of the conferring Dunraven was a worthy man but that times were different now as he was attempting to force the people of Ireland to do what they did not want to do. While Dunraven was entitled to his own opinions his actions in that regard were so persistent and outspoken that the citizens of Limerick, through the medium of their councillors, were entitled to reply and the only way they could do so was in the manner proposed by Griffin. A former mayor, Councillor Sir Stephen Quin, who was also a deputy lieutenant of the county, wrote expressing his inability to attend and hoping that the motion on the agenda would not be proceeded with, as it would, in his opinion, be a disgrace to the city. When eventually a vote was taken Griffin's motion was passed by eighteen votes to two. The mayor and Donnellan abstained.⁴⁶

The matter surfaced briefly at the following meeting on 6 June. Dunraven was officially informed of the decision and the return of the casket and the certificate it contained was requested. Dunraven replied:

⁴⁶ *LC*, 4 May 1918, also *IT*, *CE*, *FJ*, 4 May 1918. The two who supported Dunraven were McNeice and Cllr L. O'Donnell. As there were forty councillors on Limerick Corporation there was considerable absenteeism on the night. While some of the non attendees may not have been in favour of Griffin's motion a fuller house would not have changed the result.

I have to acknowledge receipt of your letter of 3rd [May] in which you intimate to me that the County Borough Council of Limerick have removed my name from the roll of honorary freemen as far as I can gather on account of expressing freedom of speech on a political question. As to the certificate and the casket containing it, I looked on the certificate as a great honour and the casket as a personal gift and I do not see the propriety of returning them.⁴⁷

Some members regarded the action of the town clerk, in requesting the return of the two items, as mean and vindictive, yet they got no satisfactory answer to queries as to who authorised the demand for their return.

We now know nothing about what exactly occurred prior to the granting of the freedom – whether it was the spontaneous gesture of one or more councillors, as the motion would lead us to believe, or whether it had been inspired by an outside agency such as the Limerick Industrial Association. It would be out of character for Dunraven to promise a boot factory to the city in 1908. Any entrepreneurial ardour Dunraven had formerly possessed was cooled by his disastrous experience in Estes Park, Colorado. As well, some few years beforehand, he had confessed to his son-in-law, the knight of Glin, that he had no spare cash, no investments that he could sell, and no borrowing powers. Furthermore he had raised every possible penny he could lay hands on in order to make up the investment of £100,000 he had put into a monotype printing enterprise in England. In addition the tobacco enterprise in Adare had already cost him two thousand pounds.⁴⁸ Taking all in all it is most unlikely that Dunraven, a mere tenant for life on what was undoubtedly a vast estate, would be in a position to promise anything so adventurous as a boot factory.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *LL*, 7 June 1918.

⁴⁸ Dunraven to the knight of Glin, 15 April [1905] (*UL*, Glin papers, P1/304). The year set by the archivist may not be correct. It will already have been noted that Dunraven first wrote to Horace Plunkett in September 1906 to inquire about inclusion in the tobacco experiment. The figure of £2,000 already spent on the tobacco venture (letter of 15 April) could well represent the sum expended in preparing for and sowing in Spring 1908, the year a start was made in tobacco production. That would date the letter as April 1908. If, on the other hand, the tobacco enterprise referred to was the cigarette factory in Adare [an unlikely scenario] then the date would be April 1912. The most probable date is April 1908 or April 1909.

⁴⁹ Whether Dunraven ever promised a boot factory or not, he had a keen interest in promoting Irish manufactory at that time. He was president of a committee to organise the Munster-Connacht Industrial exhibition in Limerick in July 1906 (*LC*, 10 July 1906); he gave the inaugural address at the third Irish Industrial Conference held in Limerick in November 1907 (*LC*, 28 November 1907), while he was the principal speaker at a meeting in December 1908 in support of the Irish Industrial Association (*LC*, 8 December 1908). At no

Given the political climate of the time and the nationalist euphoria engendered by the anti-conscription campaign, it is indeed remarkable that nationalist newspapers, nationwide, did not use the occasion to compose lengthy editorials gloating over the fate and disgrace of such a prominent and outspoken supporter of conscription. On the whole, the reporting of the expunction was dignified and low-key, which was mirrored in the manner in which Dunraven accepted the verdict of the Limerick councillors in a matter that must have come as a great disappointment to him. Even if he anticipated the action of Limerick town council his temperament was such that he could not have turned aside from his deep and sincere conviction that conscription should be imposed on Ireland.

time did Dunraven make any public promise of a boot factory nor was it mentioned when he was entered on the roll of freemen. If such an undertaking was given to the Limerick Industrial Association it must have been done in private. In November 1910, a writer to the *Limerick Leader*, calling himself *Sean fhear* stated, in agreeing with a previous letter-writer, that 'the idea of establishing a boot and shoe factory in Limerick has often been before the public but nothing has come of it' (*LL*, 18 November 1910). Two weeks later, at a special meeting of the Limerick Industrial Association, a committee was set up to inquire into the ramifications of setting up such a factory (*LL*, 2 December 1910). If Dunraven had promised a boot factory two years beforehand then surely somebody in the industrial association would have remembered it.

A Belated Endeavour at Conciliation

The Irish Convention of 1917-18 owed its origin¹ to a number of factors. Chief among them was the Home Rule Act of 1914 and its companion enactment, the Amending Act, which was specifically designed to provide an exclusion mechanism for Carson's Ulster unionists in the event of the measure being instituted. The Rising of 1916 and its aftermath made it imperative that some solution be found to Ireland's ills. It was March of 1917 before Lloyd George, who had become prime minister in December 1916, was in a position to turn his mind to Ireland. In the meantime many suggestions as to how Ireland could be settled were bandied about, amongst which was the notion that a friendly conference between interested parties, north and south, might be able to arrive at some solution capable of implementation. By now Irish affairs were in the hands of the war cabinet at Westminster, a small select group established by Lloyd George on his accession to power. A proposal was expected to emanate from them by the end of March 1917 but the exigencies created by the German submarine campaign in April caused a delay. Lloyd George wrote to the Irish leaders on 16 May offering a choice of two settlements. One was acceptance of a measure of home rule for Ireland with six Ulster counties excluded or, as a last resort, a convention of Irishmen to try and hammer out an acceptable settlement.

This latest turn of events was acceptable to Dunraven as he felt that 'the best means of attaining a lasting settlement was by free discussion in a representative conference or convention'² but, at the same time, he was of the opinion that the other proposal of Lloyd George was very likely to increase rather than diminish the differences already existing in Ireland between nationalists and unionists. The leaders of the various Irish factions and parties gave the proposal an encouraging, if cautious welcome, the main objector being O'Brien, the long time apostle of conference and conciliation, who rejected the basis on which the conference was to be held, as his preference, like that of Dunraven, was for a small select group with any outcome to be put before the people by way of referendum.³ O'Brien foresaw it being clearly packed for a partitionist verdict and asked what could a half dozen or

1 For an excellent commentary, if lengthy and diffuse, see R. B. McDowell, *The Irish Convention 1917-18* (London, 1970), pp 43-100. For a comprehensive collection of documents dealing with the convention see Bodleian library, MacDonnell papers, eng. hist. c. 371.

2 Dunraven to O'Brien, 18 May 1917 (NLI, Wm. O'Brien Papers, 8554/16),

3 J. V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien and the course of Irish politics* (Berkeley, 1976), p. 231.

so challengers, his own small group and Dunraven, do at the Convention to oppose partition.⁴ O'Brien was attempting to influence Dunraven against attending if he was invited. He also felt that both he and Dunraven should adopt a common approach.

Dunraven, in reply⁵ agreed with O'Brien that the Redmondites would have sufficient votes at their disposal to carry partition but what he feared most was that some agreement would be arrived at involving partition skilfully concealed in some oblique jargon. He was sanguine as to the likelihood of a positive outcome. If Redmond and his followers did not flirt with partition, he was hopeful, in common with most in Ireland, that a settlement could be arrived at but much would depend on the amount of moderate opinion coming out of Ulster. Dunraven⁶ regretted that O'Brien could not see his way to serve on the proposed convention. He bemoaned the lack of any concerted anti-partition presence and felt that he himself, isolated and alone, could not do much. Dunraven felt that, if invited, he had a moral duty to accept if for no other reason than to make a sustained final protest against the inevitable imposition of partition on Ireland. He went on to suggest a way out for O'Brien. O'Brien should attend the first meeting of the convention and move a resolution that the findings be referred to a referendum of the people, north and south, and if such was rejected by the chairman or negated by the members, then O'Brien could, with a perfect conscience, quit the assembly. Dunraven was also in favour of such a referendum and was using⁷ his influence in the corridors of power in Westminster in an effort to impress on the authorities the necessity of such a referendum. Dunraven, anxious for some form of anti-partitionist support, made a final effort to induce O'Brien to change, 'is it too late even now for you to reconsider?'⁸

Dunraven went further by saying that he would propose a resolution at the Convention that any recommendation involving partition of any kind would not receive legislative sanction without the approval of the people ascertained by referendum. O'Brien urged Dunraven to write to the *Times* advocating the efficacy of a small conference of a dozen or so carefully chosen notables and clearly adverting to a certain breakdown as the only outcome of

4 O'Brien to Dunraven, 12 June 1917 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/16).

5 Dunraven to O'Brien, Friday [15 June 1917] (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/16).

6 Dunraven to O'Brien, 28 June 1917 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/16).

7 Ibid. Dunraven was hoping that if the necessity of a referendum were made an instruction to the conference then O'Brien might change his mind and attend.

8 Dunraven to O'Brien, 7 July 1917 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/16).

a patchwork crowded conference.⁹ Dunraven did write to the *Times*¹⁰ expressing his views on the Convention. Taking as his starting point the failure of the Redmondite (or Irish Party) candidate to capture East Clare in the recent parliamentary by-election, Dunraven enunciated the fact that the Irish party no longer represented the people of Ireland. This, therefore, had serious implications for the Convention since any recommendation concerning partition arrived at could not now be taken as having the support of the majority of the people in the twenty-six counties. Dunraven argued that the undertaking given to the Convention that recommendations passed by a substantial majority of the Convention should now be amended to read ‘substantial majority of the people.’ This in turn implied the holding of a referendum, which Dunraven thought should definitely be laid down in the Convention rules. The principle of who represented who was so important that Dunraven considered that the Convention should be postponed until a general election was held, or alternately, in order to gauge public opinion, a series of by-elections should be held for local bodies as well as for parliamentary seats. In the light of these circumstances Dunraven felt that the most acceptable course of action was to convene, in the first instance, a small conference that would then submit its draft recommendations for consideration by the newly constituted Convention. In his final letter to Dunraven before the convention, O’Brien expressed concern that the Convention really stood for nothing and felt, as the interested public were beginning to believe, that the Convention was meant to serve an ulterior motive, ‘doubtless England and America, for war purposes, will have influence enough to keep the show going for a few months.’¹¹ If O’Brien still hoped to dissuade Dunraven from attending, he met with little success. The scene was then set for the commencement of the Convention, or as A.M.W.¹² versified, it was got ready!

The Convention was unique both in its composition and in its function. It was made up of ninety-six members representing the main streams of Irish life though not chosen by the people whom they were supposed to represent. Its function was ‘to draft a constitution, not designed or intended to carry out self-determination.’¹³ Dunraven was present as a

9 O’Brien to Dunraven, 9 July 1917 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/16).

10 *Times*, 13 July 1917.

11 O’Brien to Dunraven, 17 July 1917 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/16).

12 *The Leader*, 4 August 1917. Lloyd George and Carson have at last/ the fixings on the stage arranged/ in Regent’s Hall the play is cast/ the great performance is displayed/ it took some time and trouble though/ collecting plant and other things/ but in the end they got the stuff/the pulleys, strings, the wires and things.

13 NAI, Childers papers, Box 1, 3/401.

government nominee, one of fifteen, which was anything but a homogeneous group, being made up of six unionists, five nationalists, two liberals and two others. While Dunraven was listed¹⁴ among the five unionists he had little in common with them and should have been included among the ‘two others’, John Pentland Mahaffy, provost of TCD and Sir Horace Plunkett, both classified as having no political affiliations. Therefore Dunraven lacked the shelter or backing of a group of like minded people and while he sometimes associated with the southern unionists, he was regarded as a loner, the sole proponent of federalism. His effectiveness was thus negligible and his impact on proceedings was minimal.

Proceedings got under way on 25 July 1917 in TCD. A committee of ten was appointed, early on, to select a chairman and after some jockeying for position within that group, Sir Horace Plunkett was chosen. Dunraven, was not a member of the committee of ten nor was he considered for the position of chairman, nor was he a member of the standing committee of twenty, later appointed to:

consult with the chairman as to general procedure to be adopted and to exercise such powers as may from time to time be delegated to it by the convention.¹⁵

The first phase of the business was known as the presentation stage, when members would consider, in broad terms, draft schemes formulated in accordance with the criteria laid down and submitted by members or other interested parties. More importantly, this segment was intended as a period when members of all shades of political sentiment would mingle with one another and develop bonds of friendship and mutual respect for the views and opinions of others, a ploy that had worked wonders in the admittedly smaller confines of the land conference. In this instance, if the Convention, from within itself, and without outside interference, could arrive at some equitable settlement, there was a reasonable chance that the moderates, outside the Convention, would rally round and so isolate the radicals on the fringes of both sides of the political divide in Ireland. This blueprint seemed set fair to achieve a favourable result, that is, if a definitive result was the desired outcome of the Convention.

The standing committee submitted seven schemes to the convention, including one

¹⁴ R. B. McDowell, *The Irish Convention*, pp 218-27.

¹⁵ TCD, Mahaffy papers, 2986-7/1-28, item 7.

from Dunraven, which was circulated¹⁶ to members with the agenda for 28 August and was intended to be considered at a later date. The chairman intimated to his fellow members that Dunraven's scheme would be introduced on the following Tuesday, 18 September, the 17th meeting of the Convention. He was most anxious that this scheme should be laid before the members as it 'differs from all others in that it is based upon the contemplation of Ireland as a unit in a federated UK, within a federated empire.'¹⁷ When Dunraven introduced his scheme,¹⁸ on 18 September 1917, he spoke of the dire necessity of establishing a democratic government in Ireland to satisfy demand from within and pressure from without. He envisaged an Irish Parliament free to make laws on all matters exclusively related to Ireland, but having no powers to make external treaties, specifically referring to the undesirability of any connection between Ireland and Germany. Despite his prolonged absences during the early years of the war, Dunraven was well aware of and feared the contact already established between the U.S. based Irish revolutionary organisation, Clan na Gael and the German Empire. Two other points from his verbal submission to the Convention may be cited. Firstly, he was adamant that minority safeguards must be written into any settlement, not that he feared intolerance, as the Irish people were a naturally tolerant race, but because 'the real cleavage has been political.'¹⁹ Secondly, he was of the opinion that Irish representation at Westminster was necessary in order to safeguard minority positions; to control foreign relations, and so that the Irish model would serve as a prototype of his vision of a fully federalised Great Britain. Some members afterwards voiced support for his ideas, though the northern unionists, as always, kept their counsel to themselves.

The Convention had now, by mid September, met on eighteen occasions, having little progress to show, and many members were becoming restive, fearing that it would degenerate into a mere talking shop and thus self-destruct through boredom or lack of progress. Up to that time, the Convention had merely spent its time considering, but not acting upon, any suggestions put before it through the vehicle of the various submissions. Dunraven felt equally frustrated as, at the end of his presentation speech, he opined that enough general discussion had taken place and that the Convention should get to grips with the problems confronting them. It was no surprise then that on 25 September, at the twentieth

16 Ibid. Dunraven's scheme, involving the federation of the U. K., is in NAI, Childers papers, Irish Convention, 1917, 3/401, Box 1. See also Mc Dowell, *Irish Convention*, pp 108-10.

17 TCD, Mahaffy papers, 2986-7/1-149, item 40.

18 NAI, Childers papers, Box 3, 3/401/6.

19 Ibid.

meeting, Dr Crozier, Archbishop of Armagh, supported an earlier motion of Baron MacDonnell [the former under secretary for Ireland] to refer all schemes to the grand committee, or standing committee. Dunraven appealed²⁰ for some consideration for those who, like himself, had laboured to produce schemes. His plea was ignored and so the seven schemes, without further discussion, were peremptorily consigned to the care of the grand committee and, ultimately, to the tender judgement of history.

On 27 September, the last day of the three-day fact finding mission to Cork, the chairman, Plunkett, summed up the position as, in his estimation, the end of the presentation stage had been reached. He analysed²¹ the attitudes of the three main groups, up to that point. The Irish party and independent nationalists were clear enough in their desire to implement the general principles of self-government. The southern unionists, including Dunraven, while in principle opposed to a government in Dublin, were willing to negotiate terms with the majority opinion, while the Ulster unionists were as intractable as ever, and their opinions, though well known, were rarely enunciated to the convention. As a further hindrance to progress, the Ulster unionists were obligated to submit any proposed scheme to an outside agency for approval. In order to make some progress Plunkett asked the grand committee to formulate a plan, based on some type of self-government. As the nationalists formed the greater part of the committee and were, in addition, desirous of a settlement, it was natural to start with a submission from that end of the spectrum. The Convention would then examine the proposals, concentrate on the main objections to it from the unionist side and see how these could be met. Pending the presentation of that document the Convention was adjourned, though a number of sub-committees met to consider relevant topics such as land purchase, franchise and electoral system, as well as defence and police. As Dunraven was not involved in any of these activities, not even the sub-committee on land purchase, his attendance was not required.

The southern unionists, who were, up to this, largely nondescript, now made a pre-emptive strike in the form of a memorandum,²² submitted to the grand committee by the earl of Midleton on 11 October 1917. This was five weeks before the nationalist scheme, prepared by Patrick O'Donnell, bishop of Raphoe, was passed to the grand committee. This strike was an important psychological victory for the southern unionists as it meant that their scheme,

20 25 September 1917, NAI, Childers papers, 3/401/6, Box 3.

21 TCD, Mahaffy papers, 2986-7/47-78, item 64.

22 TCD, Mahaffy papers, 2986-7/47-78, item 73.

rather than O'Donnell's, would be taken as the prototype for any settlement that might emerge. While Dunraven was not a formal member of the southern unionist bloc, he attended their meetings²³ and had an input into Midleton's document and he was prevailed upon to act as seconder in the event of the memorandum reaching the floor of the Convention.

After a lapse of two and a half months, the committee met for the 23rd time, on 18 December. Despite the dearth of meetings since late September there was a general feeling among members that, as the Ulster unionist position appeared to be softening, the convention was moving inexorably towards a settlement based on the premise²⁴ outlined by Midleton. As Midleton was aware that Dunraven would be an absentee for the two meetings in December, he was unwilling to prematurely disclose his plans, but got agreement that he could move his resolution on 2 January 1918. When Midleton's motion came before the Convention on the appointed day, Dunraven, in a long emotive speech, did more than formally second the motion. He explained that he had modified his already submitted and stated opinions on both federalism and control of customs and excise, the latter a huge iceberg ready to pierce and submerge the ship of the Convention. While he had always advocated that control of customs and excise should be vested in any Irish parliament, in order to protect Irish industries, he was willing to make the sacrifice, for the sake of compromise and in hope of a settlement, to sideline his personal views on this issue and allow excise only with Dublin. Noting that both the nationalists and southern unionists had in turn, made very great sacrifices, he appealed to the Ulster unionist bloc:

to put itself in the position of the other and try and consider the principles, fears, dangers and interests which affected the other and not look merely at deals, but look at facts.²⁵

23 The southern unionists, who represented just 1/10 of the population [excluding Ulster] had ten representatives (out of ninety six). Subsequently Dunraven

and Edward Henry Andrews, a Dublin businessman, joined their deliberations (earl of Midleton, *Records and reactions, 1856-1939* (London, 1939), p.

235).

24 Midleton's plan, in brief, proposed that the Irish parliament should have control of internal taxation, including excise duties, but that customs duties should remain under the control of the imperial parliament. (Confidential report of Plunkett to the king, p.55, contained in Mahaffy papers, 2986-7, item 177).

25 NAI, Childers papers, Box 4, 3/401/6, p.5.

Finally he stressed the need for a settlement that would satisfy reasonable men in Ireland, in Great Britain, in the Colonies and in the United States. An idealist could also be a pragmatist.

One single issue in Midleton's plan, that customs should remain with Westminster, overshadowed all else. Both W. M. Murphy, the influential Dublin industrialist, and Bishop O'Donnell were against it, effectively splitting the assumed nationalist consensus. The Ulster unionists, delighted with the apparent split, piled on the pressure by holding out for some form of partition, as had been suggested in the 1914 home rule act. Plunkett, the chairman, unwisely, adjourned discussion on Midleton's motion until later in January, citing the necessity of the Convention to consider the reports of different sub-committees. Not only did the adjournment destroy any impetus towards a settlement, which for a time seemed not unlikely, but it provided ample opportunity for extremists on both sides to consult with other like minds, so that when discussion was resumed, in mid January, Midleton's solution was effectively dead. Deadlock seemed inevitable. Nevertheless, on 22 January, in a question and answer session on Midleton's scheme, Dunraven, making one last effort to resuscitate the drowning corpus, made an impassioned plea²⁶ to Ulster to put its whole strength into making the Irish Parliament a success.

Lloyd George, the British prime minister, has often been accused of using the Convention as a cynical ploy to engineer the entry of the U.S. into the world war, as astutely suspected by William O'Brien before the convention first sat. If that is so, it is difficult to follow his line of thought. On 31 December 1917,²⁷ he wrote to the chairman impressing on him the urgency of a settlement, followed, on 21 January 1918, by a further letter²⁸ stating that, in the event of a break up, the Convention should not be disbanded until the leaders of the different groupings had an opportunity of conferring with members of the cabinet. Lloyd George's second letter was considered at the 36th meeting on 24 January 1918. Dunraven, speaking²⁹ on that occasion when the Convention was on the point of breaking up due to inability to reach any settlement, pointed out that if agreement had been reached to date, save for the customs issue, things would be different, but as that was not so, then the only way out now was acceptance of the prime minister's offer. When the house agreed to this

26 Ibid.

27 TCD, Mahaffy papers, 2896-7/79-115, item 84.

28 Ibid., item 96.

29 NAI, Childers papers, Box 4, 3/401/6.

proposition, the question arose as to who would travel to London. The chairman, lest this would become a contentious issue, wisely handed the decision over to the grand committee and, after an adjournment of fifteen minutes, they came up with the names of three nationalists, three unionists, as well as Dunraven, who could be regarded as an independent unionist (of the federal hue) and Baron MacDonnell of Swinford, an independent.

Following the London mission, the chairman reported on the happenings to the next meeting of the Convention on 26 February 1918. Plunkett said that Lloyd George had used a great many words to say very little;³⁰ that the cabinet was as near deadlock as the delegation from Ireland, but that the group from Ireland got the distinct impression that the government wished to set up a single parliament in Ireland. In the spirit of the PM's letter, Midleton and Dunraven gave notice of a motion they wished to place on the agenda:

That, in the event of the establishment of an Irish parliament, there shall be reserved to the parliament of the U.K. full authority for all imperial services, including the laying of customs duties, but to the above limitations, the Irish parliament shall control all purely Irish services including the judicature and police, with internal taxation and administration.³¹

The motion was not taken that day nor the following day, the chairman decreeing that the conclusions of the London visit would be discussed. Again the initiative was lost, as the Convention, instead of concentrating on points of agreement, was allowed to interminably debate old irreconcilable differences. A further happening further delayed the taking of the Midleton and Dunraven motion. Lloyd George again wrote³² to the Convention saying that the government was determined to see that some good result would come from the Convention and that the only hope of agreement was the setting up of a single legislature with adequate safeguards for Ulster and southern unionists, and preserving the integrity of the U.K. This latest missive, confirming the impression gained by the delegation to London, should have been seized upon by the chairman to drive home a settlement, based on the principle of concessions for advantages gained. Instead, the contents of the letter were added to the list of documents for general discussion. Speaking on the prime minister's letter, in

30 Ibid., 28 February 1918.

31 TCD, Mahaffy papers, 2986-7/ 79-115, item 106.

32 Ibid., item 113.

what was to be his last address to the Convention, Dunraven extrapolated a number of salient points that could be embodied in any settlement; one parliament in Ireland; customs and excise and defence and police to be reserved to the imperial parliament in the short term; an Ulster committee in parliament to safeguard the interests of all unionists, particularly those in the north-east of Ireland. On that basis he accepted the government proposals and continued, 'let us get what we can now and help in this war of right against wrong and give moral strength to the allies.'³³ He concluded by again appealing to the members to get for Ireland now the best they could by a unanimous report from the Convention that would be a great help to the government and be of much moral assistance in winning the war. It was for these reasons that he asked that there should be self sacrifice for high ideals.³⁴ He based his final appeal, as he had done on 22 January, on self-sacrifice to achieve a high ideal, in this case, the winning of the war and an equitable settlement to the Irish question.

The motion of Midleton and Dunraven, again on the agenda for Tuesday, 5 March 1918, was not taken that day. Dunraven had intimated in advance that he would not be present for the three meetings, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of that week. In point of fact, he did not again re-appear³⁵ until the penultimate meeting, the 50th, on 4 April 1918. During Dunraven's ten absences in March, the motion in the names of Midleton and himself was never taken. By 22 March, the patience of the members was running out and the chairman was instructed by the meeting to prepare a draft report, which he presented on 4 April. The document, more of an account of the proceedings than a blueprint for the future government of Ireland, was considered on that day and, on the final or 51st meeting, on 5 April, was passed by 44 votes to 29, Dunraven, voting with the majority.

The final report³⁶ of the Convention, compiled by the chairman, Plunkett,³⁷ when

33 NAI, Childers papers, 3/401/6, Box 3, 28 February 1918.

34 NAI, Childers papers, Box 4, 3/401/6, NAI.

35 During Dunraven's absence in March the report of the sub-committee on defence and police was discussed. 'The resolution of compulsory service dealt with a subject which might at any moment become a burning issue and, though it was cautiously worded and contained a hypothesis, it could be used to support the contention that the imperial parliament had not the moral right to impose conscription in Ireland.' (McDowell, *Irish Convention*, p.178). A motion by the unionists to omit it from the final report was defeated by the nationalist majority. In view of Dunraven's intense interest in the subject, his absence that day is a matter of regret.

36 This was a matter of no consequence. It was merely an account of the proceedings of the Convention (McDowell, *The Irish Convention*, pp 179-81).

37 Plunkett's performance as chairman was criticised by the earl of Midleton. Speaking presumably on behalf of the southern unionist group [in whose deliberations Dunraven participated], Midleton wrote 'the convention had occasion to rue it [Plunkett's appointment]he was discursive from the start allowed two months of speechifying . . . the visits to Cork and Belfast were a blow-off'

promulgated, also contained two lesser documents submitted by members, also confusingly called reports, as well as five notes or short commentaries, one³⁸ of which was written by Dunraven. In it he again advocated a settlement along federal lines, but as the decisions reached were not incompatible with federalism, he accepted them without reservation. He would also have liked the inclusion of a supervisory legislative sub-committee as an additional safeguard for Ulster in a single parliament.

As Dunraven had links with the southern unionists, he was also implicated with their note. This they submitted as they were unable to obtain full discussion of their presentation of 2 January 1918. Dunraven, when signing the southern unionist note, observed³⁹ that he assented to the document with the exception of paragraph one (that the legislative union between the U. K. and Ireland provided the best system of government for Ireland).

The Convention met on fifty one occasions.⁴⁰ Dunraven's attendance at thirty four seems impressive but compared to most others it was exceedingly poor. MacDonnell, who lived in London, made forty nine attendances, while the chairman of Limerick County Council, William Gubbins (the chairman of each county council had been invited to attend), made one less. In addition, several attendees were ever present. Dunraven's weakness in this regard was well known and surely was the reason why he was not nominated to any subcommittee.

In his autobiography, Dunraven commented⁴¹ on the Convention and its inevitable failure. The absence of O'Brien, and the two Healys, Tim and Maurice [both of whom were

(Midleton, *Records and reactions*, p.238). On the other hand, Dunraven, in his analysis of the failure of the Convention, laid no blame on the chairman [he did not even mention his name] but reserved it for the secretary, Francis Hopwood [later Lord Southborough] who 'was anxious that the Convention should be given the opportunity of talking as much as it pleased and as long as it liked' (Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, pp 59-61). See also Midleton, *Ireland, dupe or heroine* (London, 1932), pp 114-8, where reference is made to the 'Plunkett custom' [allowing interminable discussion at the Conference]. A spirited defence of Plunkett is made by Margaret Digby, *Horace Plunkett, an Anglo-American Irishman* (Oxford, 1949), pp 236-7.

38 Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, pp 60-1.

39 See printed report, TCD, Mahaffy papers, 2986-7/207, p. 48. Dunraven's stand here was in accord with the views that sympathetic nationalists had of him –that by then he stood firmly on the side of home rule (T. M. Healy, *Letters and leaders of my day*, ii, p.585)

40 Bodleian library, MacDonnell papers, eng. hist. c. 371, XVII, f 268. Aware of his short comings in respect of attendance at meetings, Dunraven, nominated to be a member of a parliamentary committee to consider the reform of the house of lords, wrote to the chairman, Lord Bryce [the former Irish secretary] to inquire when meetings were likely to be held; would the first two or three meeting be of a preliminary character, and admitted that attendance would cause him some difficulty as the Irish Convention (which he anticipated would have come to some conclusion or broken up within the first three months) was still sitting (Dunraven to Bryce, 11 September [1917] Bodleian library, Bryce papers, 250,ff 52-3). See also Dunraven *Past times*, ii, pp 28-9.

41 Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, pp 58-61.

sympathetic to a federal solution] meant that that idea did not get an adequate airing while, without any definite subject for discussion, many among the huge number of members, engaged in long meaningless and mostly irrelevant set speeches. It is remarkable that Dunraven directed no criticism towards the chairman, somebody with whom he was never on the best of terms.⁴² Dunraven's attendance, for him, was better than average and he approached the proceedings with a willingness to use the occasion to secure a settlement acceptable to north and south. Dunraven acquitted himself honourably and admirably during the course of the Convention and went to considerable trouble, at the beginning of the Convention, to formulate his submission. He had the potential to make a greater impact but the chairman did not always take him and his contributions, usually valuable and thoughtful, seriously. The futility of the Convention is encapsulated in the fact that on the day it sat for the last time the government announced that it proposed to introduce conscription to Ireland. The Convention was never meant to be taken seriously.⁴³

42 One of the most intriguing features of the span of years from 1890 to 1920 was the lack of collaboration between Dunraven and Plunkett. Both came from a similar background; were moderate unionists who ultimately embraced the tenets of home rule; knew each other well, and each, in his own, yet complementary field, was an innovator and reformer, Plunkett in the field of agricultural co-operation and rural social economy, Dunraven in the area of social and political reform. Both were devoted, first and foremost, to improving the condition of the country and ameliorating the lot of the ordinary people of Ireland. Trevor West, *Horace Plunkett, co-operation and politics* (Washington, 1986), pp 111-3, explores this phenomenon. West says 'that Plunkett had, in fact, an intense apparently irrational, dislike of him [Dunraven]; that he attempted to sidetrack meetings proposed by Dunraven; and threw cold water on his most significant achievement, the land conference, which paved the way for the Wyndham [Land] Act of 1903'. Plunkett's other references [in his diary] to Dunraven are unusually bitter. In 1906 he wrote 'there is nothing in him but the political game'; in 1923, 'he really has been fond of Ireland all his life, though not as fond as he is of himself', Plunkett's vituperation even followed Dunraven into his grave and beyond as, in an obituary notice he penned for Lord Monteagle (*Times*, 28 December 1926), Plunkett 'contrasted Monteagle's unassuming character with the notoriety of the late Lord Dunraven'. West concludes by offering two explanations. Firstly, Dunraven and Plunkett had crossed swords in the mid-west of America when the latter liquidated the Powder River Cattle Company in 1887, an enterprise in which Dunraven had been a backer. Secondly, Plunkett was concerned by Dunraven's overly interest in and friendship with Elizabeth, countess of Fingal, who was married to Plunkett's cousin. In the absence of Dunraven's diaries his attitude to Plunkett is unknown. The only reference to Plunkett in Dunraven's autobiography is that the former was a member of the committee, formed in London in December 1899, for the purpose of raising a corps to go and fight the Boers in Africa. (*Past times*, i, p. 226). The antipathy between Dunraven and Plunkett was apparently well-known in official circles. When the chief secretary, Bryce, was seeking somebody to chair a committee of enquiry into the working of DATI, MacDonnell wrote thus to Bryce 'if you have no other man in view what do you say to Dunraven? If he took the chairmanship he would do the business well. Plunkett [the head of the department] and Gill [the secretary] would, I fancy, not rejoice at Dunraven's appointment' (NLI, MacDonnell to Bryce, 4 March 1906, Bryce papers, 11,012 (3))

43 For a discussion on the failure of the Convention see pamphlet, *Irish peace: a test of British statesmanship* (London, n.d.), being a series of special articles together with four leading articles reprinted from the *Times* (NLI, Ir 94109, p 11, pp 13-5). One of the results of the convention was that the southern unionists departed from an alliance of thirty years with their northern brethren and were

SEEKING THE UNATTAINABLE

When the house of lords passed the Parliament Act, which limited their veto on legislative matters, on 10 August 1911, it seemed at last to open the way for the introduction of a measure of home rule for Ireland. This galvanised the Ulster unionists, buoyed up by their success during the Irish Reform Association/Devolution debacle, into a state of readiness for any eventuality. What then was the reaction of the main players in the rest of Ireland? The Irish party seemed ready to be part of any home rule proposals, dismissing the antics of the Ulstermen as mere idle threats. William O'Brien up to this had no ideas at all on the subject, having spent the last decade obsessed with the tardy implementation of land purchase proposals. Dunraven, on the other hand, had more clear cut ideas though he, like O'Brien, favoured a return to the once successful land conference idea to solve the imminent crisis looming in Ulster. While Dunraven was much concerned with the slow transfer of the land to the tenants he had moved on and widened his perspective. As far back as 1904 he was pondering on some form of administration in Dublin, call it home rule or devolution. The departure of MacDonnell from the Irish administration and the failure of the Irish Council Bill had caused him to reconsider his thinking and to abandon devolution and opt instead for some form of federal government in each of the component parts of the United Kingdom, with a parliament in Dublin as the first step. A worrying trend was the emergence of a determined and belligerent Ulster, towards which Dunraven had inadvertently played a part in the compilation and subsequent publication of the proposals of the Irish Reform Association.

Up to this Dunraven and O'Brien had worked in tandem, each mirroring the thoughts of the other but from 1911 onward a change was noticeable. During 1910 there was a sustained public discussion in Great Britain on the merits of settling the home rule dilemma under a federal banner. Dunraven inevitably got involved⁴⁴ taking the side of those who favoured granting Ireland a legislative assembly similar to that of the province of Quebec within the dominion of Canada. The support of O'Brien was canvassed, honeyed with promises of financial backing from the U.S. for the ailing AIL. This was an attractive proposition for O'Brien since he was almost entirely funding his political movement from his own (or rather his wife's) resources, but politically it was suicidal. Further pressure was

forced to face the reality of a nationalist dominated parliament in Dublin, an eventuality that Dunraven had foreseen as part of his federal solution.

44 J. V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien and the course of Irish politics*, pp 102-3.

piled on O'Brien in February 1911 when the parliament bill was introduced. Dunraven, mindful of the danger to property and the social order, abhorred the measure and made his views known to O'Brien on a number of occasions indirectly urging him to oppose the bill in the house of commons.⁴⁵ Since its passing signposted the road to home rule, O'Brien could not be seen to be impeding the inevitable. Unusually for him, O'Brien chose political reality by abstaining on the final vote. Despite the apparent differences arising between them, Dunraven and O'Brien considered the question of home rule in the first half of 1911. Dunraven was of the opinion⁴⁶ that since the Act of Union was passed without reference to the people of Ireland it never had a fair chance of success but that now any amendment of that act could not be contemplated without reference to the people of Great Britain. He also linked home rule with the constitutional question in Great Britain and, with the approval of O'Brien, was urging the opposition party, when a home rule bill was introduced, to put forward an amendment seeking 'a ballot of the people as a temporary measure until the question of the constitution of the second chamber and its powers is finally settled.'⁴⁷ Dunraven spoke⁴⁸ on the third reading of the parliament bill in the house of lords. He said that if a sound and wise home rule measure were submitted to the electors they would approve of it and accept it. As Dunraven was being rigorously boycotted⁴⁹ by the Times at that time and as other newspapers carried but short accounts of the parliamentary proceedings he was annoyed that his views were not extensively reported in Ireland. Baron MacDonnell begged Dunraven to publish his speech in full so that his views might not be misunderstood, while Dunraven had thought of condensing the speech into an open letter to O'Brien [who could then present it later for publication] and gaining publicity in that way. Once again the lack of a public platform in Ireland was proving, not only a nuisance, but also a deterrent to both Dunraven and O'Brien as they strove to create a middle of the road consensus.

With the Parliament Act on the Statute Book the government was determined to take the fight to its anti-home rule adversaries, particularly those in Ulster. Winston Churchill, in keeping with this policy, was scheduled to address a home rule rally in Belfast in early February 1912. Dunraven, generally one to give freely of his opinions when asked, shared his views with the readers of the *Daily Chronicle* on the threatened opposition to the Belfast

45 See Dunraven to O'Brien, 18, 27 May, 13 June, 28 July 1911 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/12).

46 Dunraven to O'Brien, 18 May 1911 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/12).

47 Dunraven to O'Brien, 27 May 1911 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/12).

48 *Hansard*, 5th series, vol. 9, cols. 604-12, 20 July 1911; Dunraven to O'Brien, 28 July 1911 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/12).

49 Dunraven to O'Brien, 28 July 1911 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/12). The reason for the boycott is unknown.

rally in which he attempted to ‘silence the dishonest cry of protestant unionists’ by paying tribute to the well-known tolerance of catholics in Ireland. He went on to state that therefore:

there was no reason in the world to suppose that the catholic majority would persecute the protestant minority in the event of home rule . . . as far as history was concerned catholics have never used their religion to oppress protestants . . . it was not a pleasant thing for him to say, as a protestant, that unquestionably intolerance had always come from the protestant minority.⁵⁰

He concluded that the agitation in Ulster was a very serious matter ‘though, if it was not serious, it would be comical in the extreme.’ Here we have Dunraven with a reasoned appeal to the middle ground of unionism but one hardly likely to convince or ameliorate the hard line attitude towards home rule being nurtured in Ulster. Dunraven was on firmer ground when, under the auspices of the AIL, he gave a lecture in Cork on ‘the force of sentiment’. He explained that sentiment was a beneficial agent and, that openly expressed through the medium of public opinion, it did much good ten years beforehand [he was referring to the land conference] and, if the public had the courage to express their sentiments now, much more could be achieved.⁵¹ While he was addressing an audience of nationalists and a sprinkling of moderate unionists, he was sending a message to southern unionists to be as vocal in their support of some form of federal solution as their northern brethren were in opposing any form of legislature in Dublin.

If Dunraven was hoping to wean southern unionists, both protestant and catholic, away from militant unionism then he was failing miserably. At the AGM of the County Clare Unionist Club an anti-home rule motion was passed⁵² while a public meeting in Limerick, under a unionist banner, attracted a large attendance. One of the main speakers there was a Limerick solicitor, Dr F. E. Kearney who said that ‘speaking as a unionist and a Roman Catholic he wanted to nail the lie that Carson was preaching the doctrine of religious hatred in Ireland’⁵³ and the speaker then placed himself firmly in the unionist corner by insisting that they were living in an age of consolidation and not dismemberment. If Kearney was

50 *Daily Chronicle*, 27 January 1912.

51 *CE*, 23 January 1912; Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, pp 47-8.

52 *LC*, 23 January 1912.

53 *LC*, 20 January 1912.

speaking for the better off catholic professional and business classes in the towns and cities of Ireland then whence were Dunraven and O'Brien to draw supporters for their policy of settlement by conference and consent?

Anticipating that the passing of the Parliament Act would lead to the introduction of a home rule bill, Dunraven took it upon himself, a year in advance, to issue a Saint Patrick's Day message to his compatriots in America:

That home rule will come is as certain as that the sun will rise to-morrow. But it will come, as I think, as a measure consonant with a strong, well-balanced Imperial Parliament, and framed on federal lines, and generally acquiesced in – though not necessarily universally approved.⁵⁴

Later, perhaps, than Dunraven foresaw, but in accordance with the government's commitment to the Irish Party, the home rule bill was introduced by the prime minister in the house of commons on 11 April 1912. As was to be expected the unionist people were not pleased and were prepared to 'offer it, on principle as well as on special and general grounds, the most strenuous and uncompromising opposition.'⁵⁵ The polarisation of opinion concerning the measure was correctly assessed, even in provincial newspapers. Outside of parliament it was the Unionist Association of Ireland that actively took the field against the bill, holding meetings of its supporters in major towns and cities, north and south. It was in this political climate that Dunraven attempted to spread his doctrine of conciliation and consent. For some months past, as he explained to O'Brien⁵⁶ in August, he was endeavouring to galvanise moderate unionist opinion into action. Those who were supposed to belong to it were, it was explained in the letter, not willing to speak out or act pending an assurance about land purchase, the completion of which had, in their view, to precede any form of home rule. In reality no such group existed outside the eager minds of Dunraven and O'Brien. Dunraven, as we have seen, favoured a conference on the whole constitutional question to include reconstruction of the house of lords, home rule and land purchase, but was gaining very little support. The government was not willing to budge on land purchase; Redmond felt that his very future lay in getting a home rule bill on the statute book, while the Conservative

54 *LC*, 23 March 1911.

55 Editorial comment, *LC*, 13 April 1912.

56 Dunraven to O'Brien, 22 August 1912 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/12).

opposition in parliament was hell-bent on removing the government by any means. Dunraven had consulted some of the more influential members of the almost defunct IRA in order to declare publicly for a conference but was advised that no notice would be taken of it unless new names, if possible from the commercial area, were appended thereto. In reply, O'Brien said that he, too, had prepared a manifesto seeking compromise through conference, something that a great body of Irish unionists secretly favoured, but now he felt that its publication at this time would be unwelcome to militants of all parties. He questioned the effectiveness of both Dunraven and himself to date and their inability to place Irish moderate opinion in the public domain:

What is, I think, indispensable to any future usefulness of ours is that this moderate opinion shall place itself in accord [with us] at this critical moment before the Ulster madness has completely seized upon the unionists.⁵⁷

Comparing his own boundless energy with the lethargy of Dunraven, O'Brien, not for the first time, gently remonstrated with his corroborator over the few people who were willing to sign Dunraven's proposed public declaration seeking compromise through conference. Things could be different if a combined manifesto was prepared:

Personally, I am convinced that, with proper energy, sufficient signatures could be obtained for a definite and detailed programme such as I have outlined.⁵⁸

Dunraven admitted that he was also disappointed with the response to his manifesto but that it had not been very extensively canvassed. He then alluded to what was ever his greatest handicap when dealing with Irish affairs, not want of intent but rather the means to carry it through:

It is a fact but a curious one that I have not a great many acquaintances in Ireland. I wish I knew someone who would travel the country and canvass for support but I do

⁵⁷ O'Brien to Dunraven, 24 August 1912 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/12).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

not.⁵⁹

Another difficulty curtailing their lack of progress towards a conference was that there was a general consensus, in Ireland as in Britain, that nothing could be achieved until the government was driven from office. By late August, affairs in Ulster were taking such a dangerous turn that Dunraven, as a last resort, was prepared⁶⁰ to write a letter to the press, in the nature of a *ballon d'essai*, to see which way the wind was blowing, to try and encourage any expression at all of moderate opinion in Ireland. The problem⁶¹ of getting the letter published now arose. Due to the continuing ban on Dunraven it was unlikely that the *Times*, the most suitable organ, would publish under his name. A letter in O'Brien's name would not command the same attention among unionists. A third method seemed to offer the best hope. Dunraven would write a letter to O'Brien and the latter was to consider that it was of such importance that it warranted a wider readership. On that basis O'Brien could send it to the *Times* for publication. The subject of the letter concerned covert efforts being made to organise a moderate unionist consensus as a counter weight against the militant tendency of their Ulster brethren.⁶²

More information⁶³ on the attempt to muster moderate unionist support for a conference on home rule came to light in the second half of 1912. In the previous June, Dunraven, MacDonnell, Poe and some others agreed upon a manifesto and sought support for it among like-minded unionists. As the support was miniscule the matter was then dropped. In mid-September MacDonnell wrote to Dunraven to the effect that he, Poe and some others had been reconsidering the matter and were of the opinion that the time was opportune for a public pronouncement and were seeking Dunraven's opinion. Poe sent a copy of the proposed announcement to Dunraven a few days later. Dunraven was not happy with one or two items and told Poe. The latter made the journey to Adare and satisfied his host as to the composition of the memorandum, so much so that an informal meeting of the group was fixed and the document was scheduled to be published after the signing of the Ulster Covenant. Dunraven, who was happy to work closely with O'Brien in matters pertaining to

59 Dunraven to O'Brien, 26 August 1912 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/12).

60 Dunraven to O'Brien, 31 August 1912 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/12).

61 Dunraven to O'Brien, 13 September 1912 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/13).

62 *Times*, 19 September 1912.

63 Dunraven to O'Brien, 17 September 1912 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/13).

the home rule bill, curiously did not send him a copy of Poe's manifesto or the revisions agreed upon. O'Brien did get, from a protestant sympathiser, a copy of Poe's circular and manifesto to be put to the meeting on 2 October 1912. He wrote to Dunraven warning him that:

any call for a conference conceived in the spirit of the manifesto would be rightly resented and laughed to scorn by the unionists as a transparent Liberal dodge to counteract the effect of the Ulster demonstrations . . . The condemnation of sectarianism on the one side without a word of reprobation of the triumphant sectarianism on the Devlinite side would be an outrage upon the protestants of Ulster.⁶⁴

So adamant was O'Brien on the ineffectiveness of the resolution that he strongly advised Dunraven not to be a party to any conference suggestion unless it was convened on the basis that Dunraven had laid down in his previous letter to O'Brien, i.e. acknowledging the faults on both sides, nationalist and unionist, and calling all sections equally into council. On 2 October, Dunraven did not have an opportunity to meet with Poe (to discuss the reservations expressed by O'Brien) prior to the meeting as he was immediately moved to the chair, so he did not have any chance of influencing the outcome. He was not unduly perturbed by O'Brien's admonition concerning the possible outcome of publication. Dunraven was himself quite pleased with the result and thanked O'Brien for letting him know what was disturbing him and wrote, concerning the outcome, 'I do not think you will find anything seriously objectionable in the document.'⁶⁵ Although the meeting cleared the manifesto for publication it was the third week in October before the details were made public.⁶⁶

Even as that disparate group was preparing for its Dublin meeting in early October an event was also being arranged which would show the utter futility of their efforts. An indoor meeting organised by the Limerick branch of the Irish Unionist Alliance was fixed for the afternoon of 10 October 1912 at which George Wyndham, the former chief secretary for

64 O'Brien to Dunraven, 1 October 1912 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/13).

65 Dunraven to O'Brien, 3 October 1912 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/13).

66 *LC*, 22 October 1912. The seven point document, signed by twenty four persons, called for a conference; pronounced the proposals for the creation of an Irish parliament as unsatisfactory, and dissociated itself from the fears expressed in Ulster. The grouping gave themselves no title.

Ireland, was to be the keynote speaker. The purpose of the meeting, as outlined by the chairman, Lord Massy, was to give a voice to unionists in the other three provinces of Ireland to show their determination to prevent home rule being thrust upon them and to show solidarity with their fellow-unionists in Ulster. Wyndham, in the course of a long speech⁶⁷ along expected lines, made a passing reference to the land act of 1903 but made no mention of his erstwhile confidante, Dunraven, whose absence was scarcely noticed among the large throng of over two thousand people. He was not, however, unrepresented, as among the platform party was his son-in-law, the knight of Glin, his former estate agent, Peter Fitzgerald, two staunch supporters of the land conference, James O'Grady Delmege (a former member of the Irish Reform Association) and Thomas D. Atkinson, while a former supporter of the All-for-Ireland League, Lord Barrymore (his brother-in-law) sent a letter of apology. The Limerick meeting was a bitter disappointment to Dunraven for a number of reasons. Firstly, the purpose of the meeting as enunciated by the chairman was anathema to him. Secondly, the cornerstone of the Dublin meeting of 2 October was an appeal to raise the whole question of the future government of Ireland above party or sectarian politics in order to secure an equitable and rational conclusion, yet several thousand unionists were content to follow, at least part of the way, the dubious path laid down by Carson and his Ulster cohorts. Thirdly, despite the attempts of himself and O'Brien, either separately or in unison, through the medium of the IRA, AIL, or the Dublin gathering, to put forward a reasoned and reasonable solution to cure Ireland's ills, they could never muster even a tiny fraction of those who crowded into the Theatre Royal in Limerick that afternoon. A further cause for concern for Dunraven and his band of conciliationists was that extensive rioting and damage to property took place that day when the unionists, on emerging from the theatre, were confronted by a hostile mob – an ominous omen for the future.

Early in January 1913 rumours were circulating that, as part of the home rule settlement, Ulster would be allowed an exclusion clause. Dunraven had a long talk with Carson around 10 January but, as the latter gave nothing away, Dunraven could not bring up that issue with him, 'Carson, as always, was sympathetic and charming but made no allusion to any such project.'⁶⁸ Dunraven was quite distressed at the prospect of partition though he did not believe that any such deal had been made and was prepared to meet anyone and travel even to Belfast to debate the issues involved. As the attempt at mediation and conciliation of

67 *LC*, 12 October 1912.

68 Dunraven to O'Brien, 13 January 1913 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/14).

the previous year had clearly aborted, Dunraven, once again found himself without any credible platform from which to voice his opinions. Now he opted to make public pronouncements in concert with O'Brien and the policy of the AIL. Always *au fait* with parliamentary gossip in London, Dunraven informed O'Brien that the home rule bill would not be dealt with until the autumn session and, furthermore, that it was said that 'the king has made up his mind to refuse assent unless and until every effort has been made to bring about a settlement with consent.'⁶⁹ Dunraven was either clutching at straws or hinting that further time was available for conciliation. Dunraven made a lengthier contribution than usual when the second reading of the home rule bill came to the floor of the house of lords towards the end of January 1913.⁷⁰ He spoke of the evil influence of the Ancient Order of Hibernians; said that Ireland was not disloyal to the crown but disloyal to a system of government forced upon her against her will; he referred to the danger of religious animosity breaking out in Ireland, and pointed out his objection to the break-up of the Empire.

Apart from the break-up of the union Dunraven was concerned with the survival of Ireland if and when the British subsidies ceased. He disagreed with John Redmond's assertion that after ten years the deficit on the Irish account would be eliminated as he [Dunraven] failed to see the source from which the increased volume of revenue was expected to come.⁷¹ Much of 1913 was occupied with Dunraven and O'Brien striving to overcome the continuing personal boycott on Dunraven by the *Times* [though a letter from Dunraven was published on 12 March 1913] and their consequent inability to get their activities and ideas noticed in the English press. At times they were clothed in shrouds of ineffectiveness and questioned their existence in the anti home rule struggle:

**AT PRESENT WE ARE OF NO USE TO ANYBODY UNLESS TO UNIONISTS
BECAUSE WE ARE HOME RULERS THOUGH ANTI-SOCIALISTS – USELESS TO
THE GOVERNMENT BECAUSE WE ARE ANTI- SOCIALISTS – USELESS TO
FREE IMPORTERS AND FREE TRADERS BECAUSE WE TAKE NEITHER SIDE. .
. UNTIL A MODERATE MIDDLE PARTY DEVELOPS ITSELF [IN IRELAND?] WE
WILL HAVE NO OPEN FRIENDS.⁷²**

69 Ibid.

70 *Hansard*, vol. 13, cols. 469-85, 27 January 1913.

71 Dunraven to *Irish Daily Independent*, dated 27 December 1912, cited in *LC*, 31 December 1912, commenting on an interview given by Redmond to the *IDI* on 24 December 1912. Dunraven regarded the financial clauses of the home rule bill as the most defective part of an exceedingly defective bill (Dunraven to *Times*, 12 March 1913).

72 Dunraven to O'Brien, 1 February 1913 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/14).

Another attempt to revive conciliation was planned by O'Brien in the form of a rally in Cork, on 1 March 1913, at which Dunraven was to propose the main resolution. Dunraven was conscious of the importance⁷³ of that resolution, being most anxious that, without affecting the priority of Ireland, it should be broad enough to attract the attention of supporters of conciliation in England and send a signal to them that there was a party in Ireland working for a settlement to the home rule crux by conference and consent. Therefore when O'Brien submitted a resolution to him, Dunraven amended it as he judged that a conference of Irishmen was impossible at that time and that it was necessary to involve interests in the United Kingdom. His revised resolution read:

That in the opinion of this meeting the best means of arriving at a settlement by consent of the Irish political question and of constitutional difficulties connected with it and of securing the harmonious working of any system of self government in Ireland and the permanence of friendly relations between the two islands is to be found in a convention or conference representative of all nationalists and parties in the U.K.⁷⁴

The report of the meeting was subsequently published in pamphlet form.⁷⁵ Dunraven was satisfied with the meeting, noting⁷⁶ that it was favourably reported in the Irish press with the exception of the *Freeman's Journal*. He did notice, however, that there were many errors in the report in the *Cork Free Press* that needed to be corrected before the proceedings could be published. In July Dunraven again spoke during the debate on the home rule bill in the house of lords. He said that while a great responsibility rested on the shoulders of Carson and Redmond, a much greater responsibility rested on the government and that it would be a crime against civilisation if an honest and sincere effort towards settling this question by consent with a conference was not made before the bill came up for the third time.⁷⁷

By September the exclusion of Ulster was looking more likely. O'Brien sent⁷⁸ to Dunraven a set of compromise proposals, aimed at enticing Ulster not to break from the rest of the island. Dunraven agreed with O'Brien but differed on one point, the suggestion that

73 Dunraven to O'Brien, 26 February 1913 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/14).

74 Dunraven to O'Brien, Tuesday [end of February 1913] (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/14).

75 LC, 4 March 1913; pamphlet entitled '*Industrial Ireland*,' NLI, Ir 94108 p. 36; Bodleian library, Asquith papers, 38:87, pp 3-17.

76 Dunraven to O'Brien, 4 March 1913 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/14).

77 *Hansard*, vol. 14, cols. 899-908, 14 July 1913; LC, 15 July 1913.

78 Dunraven to O'Brien, 12 September 1913 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/14).

Ulster be given double or extra representation in any Dublin parliament. Dunraven was of the opinion that that was not necessary and, though he feared that the passing of the home rule bill would cause very serious rioting and make bad blood for a generation or more, he still held that a conference could prevent the dismemberment of Ireland. While the repeated calls, by Dunraven and O'Brien, for a conference fell on deaf ears they did not go entirely unheeded in Britain. On 11 September 1913, Lord Loreburn, a former government minister, made a landmark appeal for a conference on Ireland in a letter to the *Times*. Dunraven commenting on Loreburn's appeal saw the arguments for and against the conference as identical with the conditions existing ten years beforehand. At that time the basis for the land conference was that the situation was bad and called for a remedy. Then, the sound sense of the Irish people prevailed over the obstruction offered by individuals and groups. The same should apply now.⁷⁹ Without at least the blessing of the nationalist party no conference could even be attempted.⁸⁰ Loreburn's suggestion passed into oblivion. A blast of unionist rhetoric from the pen of Lord Barrymore, chairman of the Irish Unionist Alliance, more than outweighed the plaintive calls of William O'Brien and Dunraven for the holding of a conference.⁸¹

Dunraven wrote to O'Brien in mid November 1913 to tell him that, although he had no definite information, he had the feeling that a deal was in the offing under which Ulster, or a certain number of counties (it might take the form of county councils being allowed to contract themselves out), would not come under the terms of the bill. Much would depend on the attitude of Redmond as rejection of the plan would be seen as his dancing to the tune of Dunraven's unofficial grouping and O'Brien's AIL.⁸²

Dunraven fell ill again in late January 1914 and set off for a rest-cure in Pau, not returning till the end of February. Soon he was into his stride again. The exclusion of Ulster was the subject of a letter to the *Times* in early March.⁸³ In April he wrote to O'Brien asking him to consider a federal solution to the Irish problem since:

Federalism is making headway fast. I believe some thirty or more on both sides of your

79 Dunraven to the *Times*, 19 September 1913.

80 John Redmond, speaking in Cahirciveen, rejected a conference unless Carson agreed to the principle that Ireland, like any other part of the Empire, was entitled to a local parliament subject to the Imperial Parliament (*LC*, 30 September 1913).

81 Barrymore to *IT*, 11 October 1913; O'Brien, *LC*, 7 October 1913; Dunraven, *Times*, 11 October 1913.

82 Dunraven to O'Brien, 14 November 1913 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/14).

83 *Times*, 5 March 1914. The boycott on Dunraven had been lifted.

house [house of commons] are in favour of a scheme on federal lines. It seems to me, as it always has, to offer the only alternative to partition, which is unthinkable, and will cause bloodshed which would ruin all our prospects, political and other, for half a century.⁸⁴

However strong Dunraven's abhorrence of exclusion or partition, he was coming to an acceptance of it as inevitable and was already planning how it could be turned to the advantage of a federalist like himself. He explained⁸⁵ to O'Brien that, in the event of a doomsday situation, the larger the area to be excluded the better. Better still if it embraced the nine counties of Ulster. That would be in essence the manifestation of a federal scheme whereas excluding the three predominantly catholic counties [of Ulster] would lead to permanent dismemberment of Ireland. In reply⁸⁶ O'Brien agreed that the exclusion of the nine Ulster counties would be the lesser evil but rejected out of hand any suggestion of the introduction of the federal scheme. O'Brien, brimful of ideas as usual, also sent Dunraven a rough formula to settle the impasse based on correspondence he had received that purported to speak for a great body of opinion among the covenanters of Ulster and, on the basis of which, O'Brien begged Dunraven to meet again with Carson. Dunraven, inured to O'Brien's outlandish optimism, was too much of a realist to act on such flimsy evidence. He, too, had information from Mrs Stopford Green and Sir Horace Plunkett, both having come back from Ulster, that 'the covenanters have hardened very much lately.'⁸⁷ Mrs Green made an effort to revive a familiar theme by suggesting to Dunraven that a conference of protestants in the south and west could come up with ideas that would show the covenanters to be unreasonable in the stance they were taking. Dunraven opined, as he had often done in the past, that opposing forces could be swayed by counter arguments presented to them and that, in the event of not reaching an agreement, the opposing forces would, in the court of public opinion, be summarily dismissed as being unreasonable or unwilling to listen to reason and sanity. He gave some thought to Mrs Green's suggestion but could not, in the light of his own experience and the impressive anti-home rule rallies in Limerick, Cork and other places see that anything effectual could be achieved. He confided in O'Brien:

84 Dunraven to O'Brien, 1 April 1914 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/15).

85 Dunraven to O'Brien, 2 April 1914 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/15).

86 O'Brien to Dunraven, 3 April 1914 (NLI, O'Brien papers 8554/15).

87 Dunraven to O'Brien, 22 May 1914 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/15).

To tell you the truth I do not see much chance of a conference of any kind just at present. It is too late. We are sitting on the very edge of a volcano [Dunraven was not referring to the imminent outbreak of the Great War] and unless something occurs pretty soon to avoid an immediate catastrophe I do not see what chance a conference has.⁸⁸

For the remainder of 1914, up to the commencement of the war, Dunraven was powerless to influence the course of events as the Amending bill made its way through parliament. He continued to forward his views⁸⁹ in the press but always returned to his well-worn theme of a conference. The policy of conference got an unexpected boost when King George V convened a conference in Buckingham Palace from 21 to 24 July 1914. Dunraven in writing to O'Brien expressed pleasure at what was occurring, 'well this is a sudden development of our policy – an oft-repeated desire for conference' though he was surprised that O'Brien had not been invited.⁹⁰ As nothing was achieved it retarded the whole notion of a conference as it illustrated that agreement on the home rule proposals was impossible.

The commencement of hostilities put an end to discussion on the Irish problem. With the demise of conciliation and consent [again] Dunraven hoped to embark on a different approach. What needed to be done was to proceed carefully and gradually, through the medium of the press, to endeavour to create a nucleus of opinion among unionists in the south and west of Ireland that home rule was not inevitable.⁹¹ As Dunraven spent much of 1915 and the first half of 1916 engaged in war duties he did not have occasion to implement his new policy. He was abroad at the time of the Easter Rising and when he heard that the prime minister, Asquith, was contemplating the temporary implementation of part of the home rule act, he expressed his misgiving to O'Brien, 'as far as I can judge, attempts at a temporary settlement on the lines of putting the Home Rule Act in operation, excluding six

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ *Times*, 11 March 1914; *British Review*, April 1914, cited in *LC*, 2 April 1914; *Times*, 6 April 1914; interview to the *Manchester Guardian*, cited in *LC*, 19 May 1914 (when he suggested that, apart from coercing or excluding Ulster there was a third way – to satisfy Ulster); *Times*, 28 May 1914; the second reading of the Amending bill, *Hansard*, vol. 16, cols. 617-26, 2 July 1914, col. 1114, 13 July 1914 (when he called for the suspension of the bill until a commission reported on the constitutional relationship of Ireland to the other parts of the United Kingdom).

⁹⁰ Dunraven to O'Brien, Monday [13 July] 1914 (NLI, O'Brien papers (8554/15)). For a brief comment on the conference see Dunraven *Past times*, ii, p. 50.

⁹¹ Dunraven to O'Brien, 2 May 1915 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/15).

counties, Belfast and Londonderry in Ulster, will fail.’⁹²

Dunraven’s pen was strangely quiet during the rest of 1916 and 1917. Just three major contributions may be noted, two sent to the *Morning Post* pointing out that exclusion was an injustice to the whole of Ireland and likely to inflame Irish opinion overseas and that he [Dunraven] would not object to giving Ulster a larger representation in any Dublin parliament.⁹³ With some form of convention to settle Irish affairs beckoning, Dunraven laid down some guidelines to be followed. Both the people of Ireland as a whole and Irish opinion in the United States should be satisfied and, to that end, he had put forward devolution as necessary in order to produce federalism and federalism was the only basis of a lasting settlement in Ireland.⁹⁴ In addition Dunraven explained, mainly to an English audience, the moral of the defeat of the nationalist candidate at the hands of a Sinn Fein backed independent nationalist in South Longford, when he said that the defeat of the official nationalist candidate was a protest against the Irish party in making Ireland’s interests subservient to the interests of British liberalism and against the folly of pinning Irish hopes of self government to an act so constructed that, in order to make it operative, dismemberment became necessary.⁹⁵ In respect of the victory of the Sinn Fein candidate, Eamon de Valera, in East Clare, Dunraven pointed out that while the spirit of Longford was not confined to any particular part of the country, it would be erroneous to assume that it was a triumph for secession as that could not be ascertained until the voters had to choose between secession and a reasoned measure of constitutional reform.⁹⁶ The convention occupied the attention of Dunraven from July 1917 to March 1918. From then to the general election of December 1918 Dunraven resumed normal service and put forward some thoughtful suggestions, capable of implementation, to rescue the country from anarchy and possible disaster.⁹⁷

Towards the end of 1918 Dunraven was again called upon to perform public service. Viscount French, the lord lieutenant and the Irish secretary, Edward Shortt, found themselves

92 Dunraven to O’Brien 8 June 1916 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/16). In two interesting asides to the 1916 Rising, the *Limerick Leader* noted that there was a report in London society circles that Dunraven had been shot in Dublin in a street riot and that he was mentioned as the probable successor to Lord Wimborne, if the lord lieutenant resigned over the rebellion debacle (*LL*, 3, 8 May 1916). In 1902, prior to the land conference, it was stated positively in the house of commons rumour-mill that Dunraven had been offered the same post of Irish viceroy (*LC*, 26 July 1902).

93 Cited in *LC*, 22 June, 4 July 1916.

94 *Times*, 30 April 1917.

95 *Times*, 14 May 1917.

96 *Times*, 13 July 1917.

97 *Times*, 17 April, 23 November 1918.

yet again in serious conflict, this time over the establishment and purpose of the viceroy's advisory council.⁹⁸ French saw that the future of Ireland lay not in the granting of home rule but in the reconstruction of the country – a return to the theory and practice so admirably put into effect by A.J. Balfour, the Irish secretary, in the late 1880s, and so he appointed seven persons, amongst whom was Dunraven, and including some catholics, to his advisory council.⁹⁹ French intended that the council would be a means of seeking information and advice from reliable residents as to local conditions in different provincial districts in Ireland.¹⁰⁰ The first meeting was held on 10 October 1918 when the lord lieutenant addressed the council on the lines indicated above. He was followed by Shortt and a memorandum was then read out on behalf of Walter Long, a member of the government and sometime Irish secretary, who acted as adviser to the government on Irish affairs. Both Shortt and Long hoped to develop the council into an alternative to an Irish home rule government by conferring on it legislative and administrative powers. Dunraven, who was next to speak noted, without expressing any personal preference, that Shortt and Long envisaged advancing the function of the council, and went on to say that he failed to see what assistance the council would be to anyone if it remained purely advisory without access to official documents, more especially in matters relating to government policy. He instanced the thorny matter of conscription for Ireland, arguing that the council would be in the dark deciding on its merits or otherwise if the government had already made a firm decision one way or the other.¹⁰¹ The marquis of Londonderry agreed with Dunraven but French countered by saying that members would have three weeks notice of meetings and that, when in London, members could get all information through the Irish Office.

The agenda for the next meeting on 7 November was circulated in advance. Dunraven had submitted a memorandum on fishing while other items to be discussed included agriculture, cattle breeding, minerals, police report, teachers' salaries, the impending general election, reconstruction and administration of the local government act. He was an absentee for that meeting – the bug-bear that curtailed his effectiveness on such bodies. He was present at the third meeting on 28 November when a report of the sub-committee on reconstruction was considered. Dunraven made a number of inconsequential interjections or sought

98 Eunan O'Halpin, *The decline of the union*, pp 170-01.

99 *Times*, 29 November 1918.

100 Imperial War Museum, French papers, 75/46/10, JDPF 8/5.

101 Minutes of meeting (Imperial War Museum, French papers, 75/46/10, JDPF 8/5).

clarification on some minor points but it was clear, understandably, that he had lost touch with the drift of the proceedings.¹⁰² Because of the emphasis on reconstruction the advisory council was perceived in the public eye as being the new reconstruction committee. *The Times*, in a report from a correspondent, referring to the advisory council as the Kildare Street committee, called the whole business a muddle:

The country's chief hope of peace depends on a sound policy of industrial development . . . such should be well organised, skilfully controlled and carefully sheltered from the attacks of class jealousy and political prejudices . . . all [the appointees to the council] belong to the landed class (with one exception) and none can be described as an expert in industry. The functions of the council remain obscure¹⁰³

Under the welter of such criticism and general confusion, Shortt easily succeeded in outmanoeuvring French. Yet, the Irish secretary, for some reason, then determined that the advisory council would not get any statutory executive role in the Irish government, and so the whole business was quietly dropped.¹⁰⁴ The next meeting of the advisory council scheduled for 9 January 1919 was never held.

102 Minutes of meeting (Imperial War Museum, French papers, 75/46/10, JDPF 8/5); Eunan O'Halpin, *The decline of the union*, pp 173-4.

103 *Times*, 13 December 1918.

104 Eunan O'Halpin *The decline of the union*, pp 174-6.

Towards National Independence

If the 1916 Rising was a seminal moment in Ireland's history then the general election of December 1918 was no less momentous. The sweeping victory of Sinn Fein changed the political landscape. In one fell swoop the Home Rule Act became redundant, exclusion became a non issue, as Sinn Fein, buoyed up by electoral success and the conception that the outcome of the world war was bestowal on small nations of a right to determine their own form of government, opted for separation from the United Kingdom. For Dunraven the new order meant the end of the grand alliance with William O'Brien, who, sensing the wind of change, had consigned himself to political oblivion by declining to contest the general election. Since 1903 they had endeavoured to shape public thinking; to unite Irishmen of disparate political views and creeds, and to guide parliamentary politics along the road leading to a degree of autonomy for Ireland, though within the framework of the UK. Dunraven, now in his late seventies, continued the task he had begun many years beforehand, that of seeking remedies for the many ills of Ireland. But he, like O'Brien, was a discredited politician, ignored by the lawmakers in Westminster, while his background and tradition made his opinions less relevant in the new Ireland then painfully emerging. It was too late for the plaintive pleadings for a conference to settle outstanding issues, rather was it time to salvage from the wreckage of government mismanagement and miscalculations such items as would be beneficial to the emerging country.

During the course of 1919 Dunraven wrote six important letters to the *Times*.¹ On each occasion his deep concern for Ireland is evident as he pleaded with the government to take the Irish question seriously and begin the process of reconciliation and ultimate settlement. On 7 April, under the heading 'The Irish Tangle' he suggested the substitution of some form of colonial government instead of the 'Dublin Castle' system and the possibility of referring the political question to some external authority. Later that month, he asked that a policy based upon a fair compromise between Ireland's claims and the necessities of Great Britain and of the Empire be devised to save England from a discreditable situation. On 12 June, he begged for relief for Ireland, as she was very sick and the symptoms required, not a cold iron fist but a human hand, warm and firm. By mid year, Dunraven took up the peace and

¹ Dunraven to the *Times*, 7, 24 April, 12 June, 15 August, 20 September, 12 November 1919.

settlement theme of the *Times* but suggested that any settlement should be on a federal basis with permission for Ulster to contract out of the new Irish constitution should she so decide having tried the experiment of home rule. On 20 September, again under the heading of ‘The Irish Tragedy’, he said that to the best of his ability he increasingly endeavoured to impress upon those, who ought to be interested and certainly are responsible, the necessity of offering Ireland a large measure of self government. This letter inspired a leading article in which the *Times* pointed out that coercion encouraged outrage and both had the effect of undermining the good relations established between Great Britain and the United States, which the late war had built up. In November, in a letter entitled ‘The Next Step’, Dunraven suggested that it was time that the government held an informal meeting with representatives of Sinn Fein, initiated by negotiators who would not be tied down by loyalties to either side.

They were indeed strange times when the ultra British London *Times*, consistently and strenuously, pressed for a settlement in Ireland on most generous terms. As Dunraven searched around for an equitable solution to the Irish impasse, he was aware that a settlement was made more difficult by the inevitable consequence of Ireland’s conduct during the war, which stiffened the attitude of those whose only policy was the maintenance of the union at all costs. Realising that something needed to be done, he urged that, as democracy had ceased to exist in Ireland, a scheme for the better government of the country should be placed before the people. If it was refused then Ireland should be governed and administered in trust for the people until such time as they were prepared to take over government themselves. In a settlement, Dunraven was even willing, despite his outspoken reservations, to allow Ulster to opt out, in the realisation that, sooner rather than later, the folly of its position would become clear. By November Dunraven, too, had come to the conclusion, as did Lord Southborough, that an informal meeting between representatives of the government and Sinn Fein was the best means of starting the inevitable process of settlement.²

Much was expected in the promised government response to the new situation in Ireland. That measure, the government of Ireland bill, eventually appeared in March 1920 and contained, in Dunraven’s initial estimation, two fatal flaws – the attempt to create a small protestant enclave by the vivisection of Ulster (as well as relieving the northern parliament of

² Dunraven to the *Times*, (LC, 13 Nov. 1919). Southborough was the former Sir Francis Hopwood, an English civil servant, who was appointed secretary to the Irish Convention of 1917-18. During the Convention, in November 1917, he was created a peer.

its poorest and most necessitous counties) and the insufficient powers granted to Ireland.³ Nonetheless Dunraven saw the measure as an honest attempt to give Ireland a large measure of autonomy, operating through two legislatures and eventually through one parliament. He did feel, however, that confining the northern area to six counties, rather than the entire province, was an unnecessary concession to the Ulster covenanters.⁴ As Dunraven was generally resident in London at that time, he consented to act as president of the Government of Ireland Bill Amendment Group (acting of behalf of the Dublin based Unionist Anti-Partition League) and was mandated to preside over all the activities in parliament while the bill was going through the committee stage. The objects of the group were generally in accord with Dunraven's own views, which he reduced to two demands. The powers of self-government conferred on Ireland under the bill must be enlarged and the essential unity of Ireland must be more clearly recognised and harmonious action and mutual interaction between north and south must be, in greater measure, facilitated.⁵ Dunraven, like the group, abhorred the very notion of partition but he was quite comfortable with the dual system of government (the establishment of two parliaments was the only chance open to achieve eventual unity) as being the lesser of two evils.

In June 1920 Lord Monteagle introduced a bill into the house of lords endeavouring, under the auspices of the Dominion League, to seek dominion status for Ireland. Dunraven opposed⁶ this both in the house and in letters⁷ to the press. As the dominions had gradually evolved from small British colonies and since Ireland was never a colony then no analogy could be drawn between Ireland and the dominions. In order to reach a wider audience Dunraven published his views, as given in letters and in the house, in a pamphlet entitled *The Crisis in Ireland, Federal Union through Devolution*. The contents were also addressed to the government castigating them for postponing the government of Ireland bill to the Autumn session as the delay of four months would cause the situation in Ireland to rapidly deteriorate, a dire scenario which he succinctly put in maritime terms:

The breakers were visible and the ship driving towards them. Those responsible for her safety had been wrangling about the position, and had done nothing to avert calamity in full sight. She was on the rocks, in danger of breaking up, and nothing but prompt

3 Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, p.63.

4 Dunraven to *Times*, 29 March 1920. Other letters from Dunraven on the same topic were published on 24, 27 March.

5 *Times*, 29 April 1920.

6 *Hansard*, 5th series, vol. 40, cols. 1222-7, 1 July 1920.

7 *Times*, 20, 21, 22 July 1920.

action could save her.⁸

In the pamphlet Dunraven elaborated, with his usual clarity and knowledge, on the root cause of Ireland's discontent – dissatisfaction with the origin of the law. He instanced the success of the Sinn Fein courts and the manner in which the law, as laid down by the *de jure* government in Dublin, was being disobeyed in rural Ireland. He went on to point out that the old Tory or Unionist policy of 'killing home rule by kindness', a doctrine to which he had subscribed in the past, was no longer of much use, for while it did solve, in the past, most of Ireland's material grievances such as tithes, land ownership, local administration, etc., it failed to satisfy the sentiment and national pride of the Irish people. Emboldened by the example and spirit of the 1916 men and having been deceived so often in the past by government subterfuge and manoeuvres, the Irish people, under the guidance of the successors of the heroes of the Rising, had opted for complete separation. Secondly, he dismissed as nonsense the argument that political reform, through negotiations, could not be contemplated in a country racked with anarchy and that law and order must be restored first. Again, using a medical analogy this time, he argued that the assertions of the 'do-nothing brigade' were 'equivalent to telling a physician he must not remove the cause of disease or prescribe until the patient is well.'⁹ In any event disorder sprang from definite grievances, which, over time, could be eliminated or ameliorated.

At that time Dunraven felt obliged to reply to O'Brien's charge, on reading the pamphlet, that any negotiations or proposals for settlement were futile in the extreme. Dunraven was still hopeful of a settlement as the majority in England and the majority of the minority in Ireland, convinced as they were that coercion (and the policy of reprisals) was senseless and leading nowhere, would bring pressure to bear on the government to grant the greatest autonomy possible. As he neared his eightieth birthday, Dunraven concluded his letter by saying that he did not have much time left but still 'hoped to see, though not to enter, the promised land.'¹⁰ In addition to the political stalemate Dunraven was concerned with the state of lawlessness in the country. He agreed, in a letter to the *Irish Times*, with that newspaper's view that the proposal to raise a civilian force to aid the police and military in

8 Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, p. 67.

9 Dunraven, *Crisis in Ireland* (London, 1920), p.11.

10 Dunraven to O'Brien, 13 September 1920 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/17). O'Brien, having read the pamphlet, wrote thus to Dunraven, 'in the present state of things peace negotiations of any kind are absolutely futile. If any body is to move it must be the English and then with some guarantee that her promises will not end in the usual perfidy the moment Irish pressure is relaxed'. O'Brien to Dunraven, 31 August 1920 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/17).

restoring law and order was a highly dangerous experiment. As if some special importance attached to him, Dunraven concluded, 'I should fail in my duty if I did not add a word of personal warning to the view so admirably expressed in the *Irish Times*.'¹¹

In keeping with what he considered his duty, Dunraven, in further letters to the *Times*, kept the British public informed of the problems in Ireland and how they could be resolved.¹² Despite the protestations of Dunraven and the efforts of the amendment group [the Unionist anti-Partition League] the government could not be induced to alter the terms of the Government of Ireland Bill. Left with no alternative Dunraven and his group determined to move for the rejection of the bill when the second reading was before the house of lords on 23 November 1920, when Dunraven moved the following amendment:

That this house declines to proceed with a bill which meets with no support from the great majority of the Irish people and offers no prospect of any permanent settlement.¹³

Dunraven's proposal [for which he was rebuked by the lord chancellor for changing his mind on the bill] was lost by 164 votes to 75. The government subsequently paid no heed to the group's further amendments requesting greater financial autonomy, a single judiciary and a second chamber for all Ireland, and the measure became law in December.

Dunraven then dealt fully with the government's failure to deal adequately with the Irish problem in a long letter to the *Times*.¹⁴ He was ill in Pau from 8 February to 19 March 1921 and missed the opening of parliament in mid February when much interest centred on the condemnation, by the archbishop of Canterbury, of the government policy of reprisals, which led inevitably to counter reprisals. Not long after his return Dunraven again took up where he left off. On 22 April he reviewed, as it were, the position of Ireland since the passing of the Government of Ireland Act and the happenings in the country up to that time.

11 Cited in *LC*, 23 September 1920.

12 *Times*, 7 October, 3, 12 November 1920. As Dunraven always felt that the impasse in Ireland was as much an English as an Irish problem, he considered that there was an obligation on him to keep the English public informed of happenings in Ireland and possible solutions, hence the many letters to the *Times*.

13 *Hansard*, 5th series, vol. 42, col. 449, 23 November 1920.

14 The letter was published in two portions, on 5 January 1921, under the heading 'Restoration of a Kingdom, a fruitless duality', and on 6 January 1921, under the heading 'Fiscal and Financial control, the test of sincerity'. The letter is given in full in Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, appendix IV, pp 193-200. See also *Past times*, ii, pp 69-70 for Dunraven's own synopsis.

A number of things gave him some hope for the future – the admission by the government that efforts up to then had failed to restore order; that administration of the law, as carried out by undisciplined forces of the crown, had stirred the conscience of Great Britain, and that there was an almost universal desire to preserve some of the remnants of prosperity and to rescue the country from anarchy and complete ruin. He went on to comment on the conditions necessary for a successful outcome to discussions between the warring factions and on terms of truce and settlement, saying that both sides must meet on equal terms and, as far as possible, with clean hands.¹⁵ Later that month he commented on the forthcoming elections, north and south, to be held in compliance with the 1920 act. He advocated the postponement of the election in the south (and by inference the establishment of the southern Irish parliament) as it would increase the difficulty in arriving at a truce, settlement and peace. The position of Sinn Fein should be recognised as they had emerged triumphant in the 1918 election and the coming election should be fought on the real issue, republican independence or compliance with the 1920 act.¹⁶ Notwithstanding demands for postponement, the election did go ahead in the south in the following month resulting in an overwhelming victory for Sinn Fein candidates.

In June 1921, Dunraven was one of sixteen nominated by peers and privy councillors to serve as senators in the upper house of the southern parliament. Nineteen new senators, including Dunraven, aware that the Sinn Fein MPs were not going to function in the lower house of the Dublin parliament, addressed a memorial to the government, making two points. Firstly, that at the earliest possible time, steps must be taken to recast the act and secondly, that they were unwilling to exercise any functions in connection with any body nominated by the lord lieutenant to replace the failed lower house¹⁷ [this was a throw-back to French's advisory council of November 1918].

On 21 June 1921, Dunraven spoke in the house of lords to a motion in the name of Lord Donoughmore asking the government to explain how they intended to terminate the deadlock in Ireland. He ranged over the rebuttal of attempts he and the earl of Midleton had made to amend the Government of Ireland Bill and then went on to say that deliverance could only come about by amendments to the act, especially in the financial clauses.¹⁸ In reply, the

¹⁵ *Times*, 22 April 1921.

¹⁶ *Times*, 27 April 1921.

¹⁷ *LC*, 18 June 1921; Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, p. 73.

¹⁸ *Hansard*, 5th series, vol. 45, cols. 675-8, 21 June 1921; Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, Appendix V, pp 201-5.

lord chancellor gave no intimation that any intention of deviating from the policy of the government was contemplated. Racked with despair and sensing that he could take his protests no further Dunraven sang his ‘swan-song’, as far as Ireland was concerned, in the columns of the *Times*. He regretted that, even at the eleventh hour, the government had not acceded to some departure from their policy of oppression and begged them to give an interchange of views between themselves and Sinn Fein one final chance.¹⁹ Unknown to Dunraven, however, moves were already in train to progress matters along his desired course.²⁰

When the terms of the proposed treaty were published on 7 December 1921, Dunraven said that a great wave of relief spread throughout the country. The following day a signal honour was accorded to him. Despite the fact that he had lambasted the government on their Irish policy over many years, he was invited to second, in the house of lords, an address to the king, which was, in effect, a motion to ratify the articles of agreement of the treaty. Speaking to the motion Dunraven said that he had always done what he could to help forward an Irish settlement and now, that it was almost accomplished, Ireland would need the help of all her friends.²¹ At the same time, aware that the debate on ratification of the treaty in Dail Eireann was turning acrimonious, he wrote to O’Brien:

I do not know whether you approve the articles of the agreement. If you do, would it not be well, in view of your commanding position as a nationalist in Ireland to make your views public. Ps. surely Ireland will not be mad enough to once again destroy herself.²²

The narrow acceptance of the treaty in Dail Eireann filled Dunraven with amazement as he anticipated that it would be approved by acclamation and without discussion. While he said that it was not all that he could desire, he accepted it as it gave Ireland distinct

19 *Times*, 25 June 1921. In editorial comment on his ‘swan-song’ Dunraven was paid a handsome tribute. ‘He has long preserved an individual and independent view in Irish politics, though it has taken time to prove him, as time has proved him, to have been mainly in the right’.

20 On 22 June 1921, when opening the Northern Parliament, King George V made an appeal for a satisfactory solution to the age-old Irish problem. Two days later the government issued an invitation to Sinn Fein to engage in talks. This was not made public until two days later, Sunday, 26 June. When Dunraven addressed his letter, dated 24 June, to the *Times* he was unaware of any moves towards a settlement.

21 *Hansard*, vol. 48, cols. 10-15, 14 December 1921; Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, pp 82-9.

22 Dunraven to O’Brien, 15 December 1921 (NLI, O’Brien papers, 8554/18). O’Brien was not in favour of the treaty and in the mid 1920s publicly supported the defeated republican cause.

individuality and responsibility for her own destiny through complete control over her own finances. He was quite fearful, yet prophetic in his closing remarks, 'if we are to begin by fighting each other, the future will be imperilled,'²³

Dunraven attended a meeting of southern unionists in Dublin, in January 1922, to show support for the new Irish administration. Though the earl of Mayo called the meeting Dunraven was given the honour of proposing the main resolution:

That we, the unionists of the south and west of Ireland, recognising that a provisional government has been formed, desire to support our fellow countrymen in the government, in order that peace may be brought about and the welfare of the country secured.²⁴

In the course of a long address Dunraven said that he approved, perhaps more than many others, the terms of the treaty. Even if he disapproved of them he would consider it his duty to put his own views to one side and to do everything in his power to support the provisional government, which alone stood between them and chaos. During the following months Dunraven gave ample proof of his interest in the future of Ireland and his fervent desire that the new government would gain the support of its entire people. In March 1922, he was present when the Irish Free State (Agreement) Bill was before the house of lords²⁵ when he urged his fellow-peers not to introduce amendments that would have the appearance of altering the terms of agreement. Dunraven went on to remind the house of the difficulties facing the provisional government both from supporters of an independent republic and from the want of resources to establish some measure of control. He was unable to be present at a meeting in Limerick, specifically called on his behalf by J. B. Barrington, to condemn outrages in Belfast against the catholic population.²⁶ On 6 July 1922 the provisional government of the IFS issued a proclamation to the men of Ireland. Dunraven, in what could be seen either as an extremely brave or foolhardy gesture, fully endorsed its sentiments:

The Irish government have done their duty to the citizens . . . and have a right to expect the citizens to do their duty to them. The defeat of the spirit of anarchy and the

23 Dunraven, *Past times*, ii, pp 90-3. When the postscript to *Past times*, (ii, pp 155-76), was completed on 31 July 1922, the civil war had already begun. See also *Past times*, pp 159-76 for what Dunraven called Mr de Valera's 'extraordinary political gymnastics' during and after the treaty debates, as well as the course of the civil war up to 19 July 1922.

24 *Times*, 20 January 1922; *LC*, 21 January 1922.

25 *Hansard*, 5th series, vol. 49, cols. 738-41, 22 March 1922.

26 *LC*, 4 April 1922.

establishment and maintenance of constitutional government . . . is the only alternative to utter destruction and must appeal to all who love their country. . . the object is to put down crime from whatever source it springs and to give the security to life and property that is essential if Ireland is not to become an industrial and social wreck.²⁷

By June 1922 Dunraven, then in his eighty-second year, was no longer considered as a spokesman for the southern unionists. For instance he was not one of four who, following negotiations with the provisional government, expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of real safeguards for the unionist minority in elections to the new second chamber or senate.²⁸

Notwithstanding his age Dunraven was nominated as a member of the senate by the president of the executive council, W. T. Cosgrave. Some time previously Dunraven was in a position to nominate persons to the senate and wrote to Baron MacDonnell in London asking to be allowed to nominate him.²⁹ MacDonnell replied by return pointing out that he was ineligible for membership as he was neither a ratepayer nor a taxpayer in Ireland nor did he have a residence there and that, in any event, 'it is as well that I am compelled to remain outside at all events for the present.'³⁰ One could question Dunraven's own commitment to the senate as he was not present when forty-five senators were sworn in on 12 December 1922 though he subsequently subscribed to the oath on 10 October 1923.³¹

Dunraven contributed little to public affairs after 1923. The following year he made a novel suggestion as to how the destruction of the last few years could be speedily repaired. As part of his contribution to a new year's message by prominent men in the IFS, Dunraven

27 *IT*, 11 July 1922. It was indeed a brave man who would make such a forthright declaration in favour of the Free State at that time. The civil war had already commenced and Dunraven was vulnerable both in his property at Adare and in his person. Though he lived mostly in London (where Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson had been assassinated by members of the Irish Republican Army on 22 June 1922) at that time, his place of residence was well known from his numerous letters to the press. Adare Manor had already been raided for arms (with a threat to set it on fire) on 28 August 1920 (*LC*, 31 August 1920). See O'Brien to Dunraven, 31 August 1920 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/17) and Dunraven to O'Brien, 13 September 1920 (NLI, O'Brien papers, 8554/17) when Dunraven acknowledges O'Brien's message of sympathy and explains the circumstances of the raid. Dunraven's island retreat, Garinish, off Sneem, was also raided in September 1922 (NAI, Dunraven papers, N/1/7). For the wilful destruction of property belonging to members of the senate from 6 December 1922 to 26 March 1923, see Donal O'Sullivan, *The Irish Free State and its senate* (London, 1940), pp 102-8. See also W. G. Fitz-gerald (ed.) *The voice of Ireland* (Dublin, n.d.[1923], pp 12-3) where, in an article entitled 'My Advice to Ireland', Dunraven made a number of salient points. Traditional hatred of England must play no part in the future of Ireland; the permanent partition of Ireland is unthinkable, and the IFS must demonstrate to the world that her people are capable of self government.

28 *IT*, 16 June 1922; Donal O'Sullivan, *The Irish Free State and its senate*, pp 78-82.

29 Dunraven to MacDonnell, 18 May 1921 (Bodleian Library, MacDonnell papers, eng. hist. c. 350, f 163).

30 MacDonnell to Dunraven, May 1921 (Bodleian Library, MacDonnell papers, eng. hist. c. 350, f 45).

31 Senate Debates, ii, 10 October 1923. He did not speak that day and left for London shortly afterwards.

suggested that a patriotic fund should be raised, to which Irish people, by birth or descent, would be asked to subscribe £2 per head. If he were twenty years younger, he said, he would travel to the United States, to the Dominions and wherever Irish people were to be found to bring his idea to fruition.³² During that year he wrote two letters protesting at the refusal of the Ulster parliament to nominate a representative to serve on the Boundary Commission. If partition had to be, he argued, then the only way the boundaries could be ultimately and amicably settled was by agreement between the leaders of north and south – a return to his old philosophy of a friendly conference. In the second letter he criticised the northern leaders for non-participation in the commission as the surest hope that the area assigned to them in 1920 would be left intact. On the other hand he strongly sympathised with the frustration being experienced by the government of the free state, as the delay in setting up the commission added to the difficulties being experienced by them as they attempted to quell anarchy and maintain stability. In what was Dunraven's final suggestion on the better government of the country he put forward the idea of an all-Ireland council. Not only would it produce a tendency towards unity but also it would provide opportunities for informal discussion on matters individually affecting both legislatures. Like all his constructive suggestions in the past he felt that it, too, would be unheeded, 'the prospect is not hopeful but it is not hopeless.'³³

Dunraven resigned³⁴ his seat in the senate on 27 January 1926, which brought an end to the most unproductive part of his public life. His analysis of Ireland's ills and his many sensible suggestions, some of which were capable of implementation, or at least of being tried out, were hardly given a hearing either at home or across the English Channel. Whatever misgivings Dunraven had about the fundamental change in Ireland since 1919, he adapted to the new order of things. Once the provisional government came into being he supported it as vehemently as he had formerly advocated Ireland's continued presence in the United Kingdom:

The Free State is not my ideal and I hold no brief for it. The Free State government have had to deal with difficulties of an unparalleled character – a demoralised people,

32 *Times*, 2 January 1924. From Dunraven's record this was an unlikely happening.

33 *Times*, 14 May, 30 September 1924.

34 Senate debates, vol. vi, col. 289, 27 January 1926; Donal O'Sullivan, *The Irish Free State and its senate*, p. 599. The vacancy was filled by the election of Samuel L. Brown, KC, who defeated D. P. Moran, editor and proprietor of the *Irish Leader*, and one of Dunraven's foremost tormentors in the 1900s and 1910s. The senate records show that Dunraven neither took his seat or addressed the house.

internal dissension, a devastated country, and with very scant means at their disposal for restoration. They have made the law respected, have to a large extent reconstituted the country, and have administered it with strict impartiality towards minorities.³⁵

Yet the achievements of that government, like those of Dunraven himself, have been largely forgotten.

³⁵ Letter to the *Times*, 18 September 1924.

THE FINAL EPILOGUE

Dunraven died at his London home on 14 June 1926 after a short illness. As befitted a seafaring man his remains were taken aboard his own yacht, *Sona*, from Southampton to Foynes and then by road to Adare. The interment took place on Wednesday, 23 June in the family mausoleum attached to the protestant church [the former Augustinian or Black Abbey] at Adare. Among the large and representative gathering were Kevin O'Higgins, minister for justice, Lord Monteagle, and William O'Brien, ex MP. President Cosgrave was represented by Colonel O'Reilly. Many tributes were paid to the late earl, none more eloquent than that of Lord Askwith, a friend for thirty years and the barrister who had defended him at the *Valkyrie-Defender* America's Cup inquiry in New York in 1895. Askwith lauded the late earl under four headings, which, in a sense, encapsulated his life-work. Firstly, he loved Ireland with a devotion that nothing could excel, secondly, he was a sportsman with unbeatable pluck, thirdly, he loved writing and wrote very well in lucid, well composed phrases on many topics, but chiefly in articles dealing with Ireland, fourthly, he was a staunch friend. Askwith concluded by saying that in him Ireland had lost a remarkable man and one of the most devoted of her sons.¹ The will of the late earl was published in July.²

1 *Times*, 17 June 1926. For further obituary notices see the vast collection of news cuttings from all over the world, including a personal memoir by T. P. O'Connor, nationalist MP for the Scotland Division of Liverpool, as well as newspaper photographs of the funeral (NAI, Dunraven papers, N/2/9).

2 *LC*, 6 July 1926. He left all his unsettled property (acquired during his lifetime), including Garinish Island, his yacht and racehorses to his only surviving child, Aileen, viscountess Ardee (later countess of Meath). All the settled property, which included Adare Manor and other properties there, as well as Dunraven Castle estate and several valuable coal mines in south Wales, which were said, a few years previously, to be producing an income of £80,000 per annum, was left to his successor, his cousin, Col Windham Henry Wyndham-Quin, the second son of the second earl's second son, who became the fifth earl of Dunraven.

CONCLUSION

After more than twenty years service to the cause of Ireland Dunraven ended up a marginal and slightly ridiculous figure. His vision of Ireland remaining as an integral part of the United Kingdom coloured his every action and was grist to the mill of his detractors and they were many. In the part of Ireland he most loved, after his fashion, his ideas met with complete rejection and in the final days of his public career he witnessed, for him, the irony of history - the part of Ireland and the people he least loved remained part of the United Kingdom while his part of the country succeeded in gaining a measure of autonomy that exceeded his own concept of federalism or devolution.

Dunraven's much professed love of Ireland,¹ whatever his motives, was both sincere and long standing. It first surfaced in the county council election of 1899 and reached its zenith in 1923 when he bravely, but perhaps foolishly, publicly endorsed the call, to the men of Ireland, to support the government of the Irish Free State. Yet his commitment to Ireland was open to question. While he was from the country he was not of the country. While he strove in many different ways to raise the material profile of the country, he never fully understood the depth of Irish national feeling in the ordinary people, in particular their attitude to recruiting and the later threat of conscription during the Great War, and could not foresee that a time was coming when they would not be disposed to submit to English influences. Like many another he failed to comprehend the influence and the rise of Sinn Fein after the rising of 1916. Yet, nobody but a fool or a true lover of Ireland could have

1 As far back as 1902 Dunraven set before himself a number of principal points that would lead to an improvement in the material welfare of the country. These included the abolition of landlordism and the settlement of the land question; the provision of higher education so that all Irishmen should have equal opportunities, and the desirability of establishing some form of parliament or assembly in Dublin (speaking at a UIL rally in Limerick on 8 July 1910 and reported in the *Limerick Chronicle* of the following day). He went on to say that there was a spirit and a temper all over the country that enabled any Irishman, whatever his creed might be, whatever his class, to help his country. It was in that spirit that he decided to press ahead with his programme of reform. By 1913 the reality of life in Ireland disconcerted Dunraven, particularly the negative reaction of the leaders of the Irish Party to his devolution proposals which prompted him, at a UIL rally in Cork on 1 March 1913, to vindicate his actions, and those of his colleagues, up to that point. He said on that occasion 'some of us, landlords and ex-landlords and other disreputable people of that kind, got together anxious to help to do in the matter of home rule as we had helped to do in the abolition of landlordism. How were we treated?, we, men who had formerly been identified with anti-home rule opinion . . . John Redmond said 'with the help of such men home rule is inevitable'. What encouragement was given to us? Everything was done to discourage us. Can a man work for Ireland without the permission of John Dillon? Must a man, before he dare call himself an Irishman, have a pass from Mr [Joseph] Devlin? If my presence is obnoxious I will step off this platform. I will go home and breed horses and look after my cattle and grow tobacco and smoke it. I will undertake not to say another word about Irish politics'.

endured the rebuttals, misrepresentations, abuse and ridicule hurled at him for over twenty years and, at the end, rise up again to propose yet another well meaning and often times practical solution to the ills of the country of his birth. He was irrepressible in seeking solutions to very real problems.

The land conference was the highlight of his life and for all its apparent success it was his undoing. His sense of perspicacity, which stood him in good stead in later times, deserted him on that occasion as he failed to comprehend that the willingness of landlords to embrace the terms of the land conference and subsequent land act was not necessarily acceptance of a new, yet undefined, vision of the future, and that the dormancy of militant unionism indicated a willingness to tolerate a change in Ireland's relationship with the United Kingdom. In addition the land conference and subsequent land act bought Dunraven no dividend in political terms. The farmers he helped to liberate became too interested in their own affairs to bother with such extraneous matters as political involvement, while the landlord class, who rejoiced in their good fortune, pocketed the money and remained aloof from the worthwhile programme of the Irish Reform Association. No commentator has attempted to explain where the concept of conciliation (or reaching mutual understanding through consultation), which was the guiding principle of Dunraven and O'Brien for many years, came from, whether it was the brainchild of one person, either Dunraven or O'Brien, or whether it was a spontaneous meeting of minds. If Dunraven was the originator then the moment of inspiration can be readily pinpointed. At the end of the penultimate session of the land conference when the heads of an agreement had been hammered out, Dunraven said 'God save Ireland' to which O'Brien added 'God save the king'. If the old 'hillsider' and militant land agitator was so moved by an understanding reached after reasoned though sharp debate and if he represented the thinking of those whose interests he had fought for in the past, then, in conjunction with grateful landlords, a new era in Ireland seemed to beckon.

Conciliation was a noble but impractical aspiration, as outlandish, as time would demonstrate, as the claims that hundreds, nay thousands, of former landlords were only waiting to join hands with Dunraven and with O'Brien and his unseen band of followers to march on together to secure the future of Ireland, within the United Kingdom of course. If conciliation ever existed outside the fertile imagination of O'Brien and the visionary conceptualisation of Dunraven then it surely died following the unexpected though understandable reaction of northern unionists to the devolution proposals, which unleashed

the forces of militant unionism. To persist with the notion of conciliation and its close ally, conference, after 1906, was foolhardy and it diminished the effect of many of the useful remedial suggestions put forward, particularly after 1914, by Dunraven.

Had Dunraven lived in a more enlightened age or had he chosen his principal ally more carefully (or had someone other than the one chosen allied himself to him) then the course of Irish history in the early decades of the last century might well have been different. When Dunraven became aware of the efficacy of the policy of conciliation, his natural ally was John Redmond, a landlord who was partial to landlordism and who, in 1899, attempted to secure election for landlords to a number of county councils. Shortly after the conference issued its report, Redmond, fearful of splitting the recently united Irish Party and unwilling to cross swords with John Dillon, broke off correspondence with Dunraven, which in the weeks prior to the land conference was both warm and constructive. In the vacuum thus created Dunraven became closer to William O'Brien, a recent convert to the doctrine of conciliation but one who, by his temperament and hostile attitude to landlordism in the past, was quite unsuited to adopt the role of chief apostle of conciliation. In some respects O'Brien and Dunraven were opposites, the former by nature impetuous, energetic and volatile, the latter cautious, circumspect, and enthusiastic on occasions but seemingly lethargic when precise action was needed. In truth, Dunraven suffered bouts of debilitating illness a few times each year which necessitated going abroad for a cure or lying low at home. This curtailed sustained action on any front and made him unfit to lead any organisation, something he admitted, though offering different reasons.

Dunraven's vision of Ireland was to him natural and straightforward – the prosperity and well being of his native land, the preservation of the United Kingdom as a single political entity and the welfare of the British Empire. All his actions up to 1920 were predicated on these essential objectives. The first was the area in which he was most successful. Whether he was charting the future of the horse-breeding industry; the freeing of tenants from the shackles of landlordism; the provision of higher education for the Roman Catholic youth of Ireland; the promotion of tobacco culture to provide employment for many and as a valuable source of income for the new farmer-owners, he entered the fray with enthusiasm and, if the end result did not always match the desired effect, it was invariably due to factors outside his sphere of influence. While Dunraven was born in Adare and while he always regarded himself as an Irishman, he was, by outlook and disposition, decidedly British, best

exemplified by his desire to preserve the Act of Union and the integrity of the empire. In political matters Dunraven often showed a serious lack of judgement. He followed too closely the doctrine of progressive or constructive unionism, not that he was obsessed with it, but because it seemed the right and natural course to follow.

Dunraven was destined to achieve little in the Ireland of his day. He moved in a rarefied world, far removed from those he represented on Limerick County Council and farther still from those he aspired to represent in the wider Ireland. While he had a political vision, whether acceptable or not to the majority of his fellow countrymen is immaterial, he was without the means of attaining it. He had no political base and few followers and so was always forced to sell his ideas to others, all of whom had their own interests to serve. He was supported by no newspaper and had to rely on the letter columns of the *London Times*, in a vain attempt to influence and educate English public opinion, when, perhaps, he would have been better served by appealing to Irish unionists in the columns of the *Irish Times*. His long absences from Ireland made him unaware of the subtle changes coming over the population, influenced by the national awakening, in the early years of the 20th century. His support for constitutional and peaceful methods to achieve his idea of Irish freedom effectively sidelined him after the 1916 rising. It is one of the ironies of history that his chief tormentor, John Dillon,² for the same reason, virtually shares the same obscurity as Dunraven.

For all his failure to achieve any of his political goals Dunraven left a remarkable legacy after him. He was a man long before his time. He saw that the settlement of the land question was a necessary prelude to any type of political solution. The happenings in Zimbabwe in recent years, where white-owned farms were invaded by black so-called war veterans, has plunged that country into a deep and continuing economic crisis and shows the folly of the reverse policy of the Irish Party at that time – that home rule should be the first priority of any right thinking Irishman, then all else would follow. Once the land issue was apparently settled, following the land act of 1903, Dunraven was free to direct his attention to Ireland's position within the United Kingdom. His conversion, from virulent enmity to home rule in the 1880s and 1890s [he declared that home rule was dead as late as 1894] to a

2 In recent times Alvin Jackson, commenting on what he calls 'one of the most striking and richly complex initiatives in the entire political history of Ireland' (the new policy of conciliation as taken up by Dunraven and O'Brien) which was dashed by John Dillon in Swinford on 25 August 1903, feels that Dillon's objections are worth elaborating because there is a danger that the counter arguments, proffered by the centrists, Dunraven and O'Brien, in their literary assault in a stream of publications, prevail without a contest. Jackson avers that the main theme of Dillon's critique was the preservation of his party's unity. See Alvin Jackson, *Home rule, an Irish history 1800-2000* (London 2003), pp 89-93.

preference for the devolution of certain administrative powers to a Dublin assembly in 1904, was truly remarkable, a feat unacknowledged by nationalist Ireland as a manifestation of his earnestness to be part of the new Ireland. The devolution proposals he advocated for Ireland have now being implemented in the United Kingdom with the setting up of devolved assemblies in Northern Ireland as well as in both Scotland and Wales, a process Dunraven would refer to as 'devolution all round'. Dunraven abhorred the notion of partition in Ireland and felt that once it was established it would be virtually impossible to nullify it. The calls of both Dunraven and O'Brien for a friendly conference in an attempt to assuage Ulster fears fell on deaf ears at the time. It is only in recent years that dialogue between the two parts of Ireland is bearing some fruit.

Dunraven's attempts to improve the material welfare of evicted tenants, of farmers, labourers and rural dwellers by means of the tobacco industry, by initiating a scheme of scholarships for the youth of Limerick City, by facilitating the sale of the town of Croom to the local rural district council, by proposing the necessary reforms for the better government of Ireland under the aegis of the Irish Reform Association, were all worthwhile ventures many of which were capable of being supported or improved upon if, for instance, they were backed by the Irish Party. In the final analysis Dunraven achieved little by way of tangible results but neither did John Dillon, his chief antagonist and tormentor, during the first two decades of the last century. Despite their closeness to the Liberal Government the Holy Grail of home rule proved as elusive for the Irish Party as the reforms of the Irish Reform Association proved for Dunraven.

Where does Dunraven stand in the hagiography of Irish patriots? This can only be judged by comparing him with his contemporaries, Redmond, Dillon and O'Brien. For all its dominance, from 1900 to its demise in 1918, the Irish Parliamentary Party (controlled by the first two) achieved little, despite the fact that it was in virtual partnership with the Liberal government for periods. It could claim credit for some constructive legislation such as the improvement of rural and urban housing and protection for town tenants but it failed spectacularly to obtain home rule or prevent the sundering of Ireland. O'Brien, on his own, accomplished little of a practical nature between the years 1902 and his disappearance from the political scene in 1918. Dunraven, on the other hand, had a formidable list of achievements after 1900, most of them, admittedly, in the non-political arena. He demonstrated that public service, at local level, was the duty of all, whether nationalist or

unionist; he played a part in the resolution of some of Ireland's most intractable problems - land, university and evicted tenants; he produced detailed plans for the better government of Ireland in 1904; he gave practical assistance to the advancement of scientific education and promoted Irish made goods and, in the vain hope that something good might come from it, participated in the Irish Convention of 1917. Why then did he not achieve greater acceptability? His wealth and his background, his propensity, like all of his class, to employ Englishmen or protestants in positions of trust on his estate [this was judged as a visible sign of his lack of commitment to people and things Irish], the suspicion that his pauline conversion to Ireland was a sham, the danger that his desire to be part of the new Ireland was merely a ploy to gain some measure of control in order to copper-fasten British influence in Ireland, all made him susceptible to suspicion, something that was sustained and fuelled by his detractors on the nationalist side. Dunraven was no chameleon. He was sincere in his desire to ameliorate the lot of Ireland, politically and materially. If others put constructions to suit themselves on his words and actions he was not to blame. Following the foundation of the provisional government of the Irish Free State, he pledged to it the same loyalty as he had earlier given to king and empire.

What if the Irish Party, under the new inspirational leadership of John Redmond, who knew Dunraven's motives better than anyone else in Ireland, had accepted the sincerity with which Dunraven put forward his views, and was prepared to listen to his message? In the end it was the Irish Party that demolished whatever good he was capable of doing. Whatever may be said about the subtleties of the political climate of the time, it was a mean response to a life generously lived for Ireland and a response that indicated how little Ireland could afford to lose either his passionate commonsense, his splendid gift of writing and, most crucially of all, his clear-sightedness and independence of mind.

Dunraven, in his lifetime or since, has never been given due recognition as a patriot, innovator and thinker. This dissertation marks the beginning of a process of acknowledgement of his contribution to the emerging Ireland at the beginning of the 20th century.

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