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Theobald Wolfe Tone and Irish Nationalism

George Lawrence Stone

Eastern Illinois University

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THEOBALD WOLFE TONE

AND IRISH NATIONALISM

(TITLE)

BY

GEORGE LAWRENCE STONE

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PREFACE

Perhaps no political force in history had a greater impact on the life of the common man than the French Revolution. For centuries the authority of most European nations had been vested in a monarch who was usually supported by a corrupt aristocracy. Strong attachment to the nation and patriotic wars were considered to be the exclusive rights of the monarch and his nobles. The great mass of people were thought to be incapable of such attachment. Such loyalty as the masses had was supposed to be centered in a monarch, who in turn was to represent the nation as he saw fit.

The French Revolution shattered all these preconceptions. The people were elevated to a degree of political consciousness unknown in previous generations. The nation was considered to be above the idea of a single monarch and was made synonymous with the people. Since the people embodied the nation, it followed in theory that they had the right to rule the nation as they saw fit. This concept swept aside the theory of divine right of kings and rule by the aristocracy which in many cases was more interested in perpetuating itself than in providing national leadership.

Next to France, perhaps no other country was as much affected by the principles of the Revolution as Ireland. Ruled in theory by the king of England, Ireland for several hundred years had been ruled in fact by the English Parliament. A small oligarchy controlled the

Irish Parliament and in co-operation with England ruled the Irish nation. The population as a whole was prevented largely on religious grounds from having any voice in the government. The grievances of the masses had been denied a hearing in the Irish Parliament for over a hundred years. The seeds of the French Revolution fell on fertile ground in Ireland. Irish nationalism taken from the French Revolution grew to be a powerful force in the nation and eventually aroused the masses to attempt to throw off the yoke of political tyranny. This paper concerns one man in particular who attempted to utilize the principles of the French Revolution in leading the Irish people to freedom. His name was Theobald Wolfe Tone.

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Any errors are entirely my own.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROTESTANT ASCENDANCY IN IRELAND

The period from 1691 to 1800 is known in Irish history as the Protestant Ascendancy. In order to understand fully what is meant by the term, it is necessary to refer to the Treaty of Limerick concluded in 1691. The agreement at Limerick marked the end of the struggle between the Catholics under the leadership of James II and the Protestants led by William of Orange.¹ The original purpose of the Treaty of Limerick was to honor William's pledge of generous peace terms to the defeated Catholics. The articles in the treaty guaranteed the Catholics the same rights they had enjoyed under Charles II, and granted those in the military service of James a full pardon and undisputed ownership of their lands and possessions. These provisions were also extended to those persons who were connected in some way with the Catholic forces, such as their wives and children. The privileges were considerably reduced in the final draft of the treaty, either through accident or intent.² Despite the best efforts of William III, neither

¹Robert Dunlop, Ireland from the Earliest Times to the Present Day (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), pp. 128-129.

²Billy Lawless, The Story of Ireland (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1898), pp. 296-297.

the English nor the Irish parliaments ratified the Treaty of Limerick, which became for all practical purposes a dead letter.³

The Protestants of the established church had only recently regained political supremacy in 1691. They were determined that the Catholics should never again threaten the existing order. In order to keep the Catholics of Ireland in a permanent state of political and social subservience, a series of laws were passed in the Irish Parliament over a period of years which became known as the "Penal Code."⁴ Under the penal laws the Catholics were restricted in property rights, education, and choice of occupation. They were not allowed to vote in parliamentary elections or to hold seats in the Irish Parliament. If any member of a Catholic family became Protestant, he could, if an eldest son, take possession of his father's estate. If a wife became Protestant, she was enabled under the law to gain a large measure of control over the property of her Catholic husband.⁵ Other enactments forbade Catholics from marrying Protestants, from carrying arms, engaging in manufacturing, and still others prescribed the practice of their religion.⁶ While historical authorities differ as to how rigidly these laws were enforced, it is clear that the

³ Edward Curtis, A History of Ireland (London: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1950), pp. 267-277.

⁴ Dunlop, op. cit., pp. 431-432.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

political system of Ireland became for all practical purposes a caste system.⁷ It should be noted that the penal laws discriminated against the majority of the nation, for the Catholics numbered approximately two-thirds of the population.⁸

The Irish political system was completely dependent upon England for support. The Church of Ireland was an extension of the Anglican church in England. Its members comprised a small minority of the nation who nevertheless held the reins of political power in the Irish Parliament. This was achieved through joint co-operation between the English and Irish Protestants who operated a system of "rotten boroughs" and political bribery similar to what existed in the English Parliament. The small clique of Protestant families who ruled Ireland were a minority even of the Protestants and were known as the "Undertakers", the "Castle", or the "Ascendancy."⁹ In order to consolidate their hold upon the nation and deal with the Catholics as they wished, the Ascendancy surrendered control over the government's budget to England. This concession actually gave England complete control over the Irish government.¹⁰ The Irish Parliament was also restricted by Poyning's Law, a statute dating back to 1494. This

⁷ Robert Dunlop claims that the Penal Code was rigorously enforced, whereas Emily Lawless feels that this is not the case. Based on his own readings, the author tends to agree with Dunlop.

⁸ Lawless, op. cit., pp. 301-306.

⁹ Curtis, op. cit., pp. 290-294.

¹⁰ Dunlop, op. cit., pp. 131-132.

law gave England the power to approve or disapprove of any legislative measure passed by the Irish Parliament.¹¹ In other words, no legislative measure could become law in Ireland without the approval of England. The same law also limited the Irish Parliament as to when it could convene and what items it could consider.¹²

Political dependence on England meant commercial dependence as well. England reserved the right to interfere in the commercial affairs of Ireland if she thought there was a threat to her own economic supremacy. In 1699, due to the pressure of English woolen interests, a law was passed through both parliaments which forbade the export of Irish wool. Such an act put an end to a profitable Irish industry and the resulting economic distress added to the popular discontent and general lawlessness so prevalent among the people at this time who bitterly resented the economic restrictions by England which were crippling Irish commerce.¹³ Other acts put an end to the export of cattle and any large scale manufacturing.¹⁴ Through these and other acts, Ireland became a country with virtually no foreign trade.

In the matter of land tenure and the agricultural system in general, Ireland was little more than an enslaved country. Most of the

¹¹ Curtis, op. cit., pp. 295-296.

¹² Carl Stephenson and Frederick George Marcham (eds.), Sources of English Constitutional History (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1937), p. 30.

¹³ Lawless, op. cit., pp. 307-310.

¹⁴ Dunlop, op. cit., pp. 133-135.

farm land in Ireland was owned by absentee landlords, who in turn sub-leased to various tenants. Often the land was subleased several times over, much to the misery of the peasant farmer or "cottier" who found himself exposed to the extortions of numerous middle men.¹⁵

Another complaint among the Irish peasants was the tithes system which supported the Church of Ireland. Although the tithes varied in amount from county to county, the major portion of the burden fell on the Catholic peasants. Such a tax was disliked intensely by the peasantry since they were being required to support a religious establishment that was of no benefit to them.¹⁶

Within Ireland itself, cattle raising still enjoyed a certain amount of prosperity. Since English commercial enactments virtually forbade the export of corn, an enclosure movement was initiated by the large landholders and smaller tenant farmers to turn former corn land into pasture.¹⁷ The peasants retaliated by forming organizations to fight the enclosure movement. One of the most famous of the organizations was the "Whiteboys" who derived their names from the white sheets they wore to conceal their identity.¹⁸

The enclosure movement caused no end of suffering among the lower class farmers, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. In 1729, according to

¹⁵William Edward Hartpole Lecky, A History of England in the Eighteenth Century (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1891), Volume IV, pp. 337-362.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Dunlop, op. cit., pp. 132-133.

¹⁸Lecky, op. cit., Volume IV, pp. 337-362.

one estimate, there were approximately thirty-five thousand people reduced to the status of beggars by the enclosure movement.¹⁹ It was almost inevitable that such changes would be resisted by force, and from 1761 on, the "Whiteboys" grew in power and numbers. In areas such as Munster, Limerick, Cork, and Ennis, they established a reign of terror and attained a greater influence than the law itself. Enclosures were destroyed in certain areas and tithe collectors, Catholic as well as Protestant, were often the subject of violent attack by bands of peasants. While such property damage was committed, murder and physical atrocities were rare, though sufficiently frequent to inspire a good deal of terror among small farming villages in the threatened areas.²⁰ It is difficult to determine, however, how much the Whiteboys were to blame for the violence which took place during this period. A loosely knit organization such as the Whiteboys undoubtedly included common criminals within its ranks as well as angry peasants. The Irish government preferred to blame the outbreaks of violence on religious animosities and labeled the Whiteboy organization as part of a "popish plot." The real cause, however, was economic misery on the part of the lower class of farmers and even the government was forced to admit this later on. The nonsectarian character of the movement is revealed by the fact that violence was levied against Catholics who supported the

¹⁹Dunlop, op. cit., p. 133.

²⁰Lacey, op. cit., Volume IV, pp. 337-362.

existing order as well as Protestants. Priests who opposed the organization were driven out of their parishes. Catholic landowners who enclosed their land were victims of retaliation as well as their Protestant counterparts.²¹ The fact that the organization was mainly composed of Catholics is attributable to the fact that the most oppressed class of farmers were predominantly Catholic. The government adopted severe measures in 1765 to deal with the problem and for a time achieved some success, though the movement was never completely suppressed and continued to be a source of trouble.²²

The Protestant Dissenters were another group which had been victimized by the Ascendancy. Though not as unfortunate as the Catholics, the Protestant Dissenters had originally been subjected to some occupational and political restrictions, though these inequalities had been reduced considerably by English intercession on their behalf through the years.²³ A large segment of Dissenters consisted of Presbyterians, who for the most part engaged in manufacturing. They resented the economic restrictions levied on Ireland by England and their resentment grew as the restrictions increased.²⁴

From 1690 to 1750, Ireland was in a state of quiet political suppression despite the grievances of the majority of the country.²⁵

²¹ Ibid., pp. 360-372.

²² Ibid., pp. 368-273.

²³ Curtis, op. cit., pp. 292-296.

²⁴ Lawless, op. cit., pp. 334-336.

²⁵ Curtis, op. cit., pp. 292-296.

Along with the Irish borough owners, Ireland was also governed by the English Parliament through a "Lord Lieutenant," who helped "manage" Irish affairs to suit England.²⁶ Both groups used political bribery and corruption to gain their ends and though they occasionally fought over the spoils, a system of co-operation usually prevailed between them.

Such a system, however, did not go unchallenged during this period. In 1698, William Molyneux wrote his famous work, The Case of Ireland Being Bound by Acts of Parliament in England, Stated. In polite terms, he condemned the political authority which the English Parliament held over Ireland as violating the sacred rights of the Irish constitution. Molyneux's book was termed seditious by the English Parliament and burned by the common hangmen.²⁷ In order to settle all disputes concerning its authority, the English Parliament in 1719 passed the Act of 6 George I which gave it absolute authority to make laws for Ireland.²⁸ In 1720 the political system in Ireland was once again challenged, this time by Jonathan Swift. Whatever his private motives may have been, Swift was fully aware of the injustices of the Ascendancy which he attacked with unequalled satire in his Drapiers Letters.²⁹ Such attacks only make the English Parliament more determined than ever to keep such "seditious" writings from being distributed. The

²⁶Dunlop, op. cit., p. 136.

²⁷Lawless, op. cit., pp. 311-319.

²⁸Dunlop, op. cit., pp. 133-135.

²⁹Lawless, op. cit., pp. 311-319.

small reform efforts by Swift and Molyneux were powerless to prevent the Ascendancy from continuing, and the power of borough owners supported by inflated civil lists and the dominance of England continued to be the order of the day.³⁰

³⁰Dunlop, op. cit., p. 136.

CHAPTER II
ISSUES OF REFORM IN THE 1760'S

In the 1760's the subservience of the Irish Parliament to vested interests both at home and abroad was becoming a matter of national concern. Under the Ascendancy, the Irish Parliament remained unrepresentative of any form of popular opinion. For the first time, however, a reform party came into existence. Attempts were made by the reformers to limit the duration of the parliament in the hopes of giving public opinion a greater influence in it. The Ascendancy successfully resisted all such attempts. The pension lists and other forms of political bribery reached a new high in 1767.¹ At the same time, however, the 1750's and 60's witnessed a new era in public opinion and political awareness on the part of the Irish people. In light of these developments, the corrupt alliance of Irish and English borough owners found it necessary to court popular opinion or at least avoid the outright defiance of it.²

The growth in importance of public opinion led to the first serious division in the Ascendancy between a faction known as the "undertakers" and the English Parliament which wanted complete control

¹Lecky, op. cit., Volume IV, pp. 395-399.

²Ibid.

of Ireland in the interests of England. In the early 1760's, a "Septennial Bill" was proposed in the Irish Parliament by the reform party to limit the duration of the parliament. Surprisingly enough, the Undertakers, who controlled the parliament, allowed it to be passed, knowing that the English Parliament would reject it and take upon themselves the brunt of popular opinion. The bill was rejected by England in 1761, but the English Parliament was now determined to bring the Undertakers completely under their control so that such a situation would not happen again.³ On the other hand, the Irish Parliament, dominated by the Ascendancy, was equally determined to regain the budgetary control which they had surrendered to England.⁴ The Ascendancy could hardly be called a democratic reform group, but in this struggle public opinion, such as it was, strongly supported them.⁵

The problems created by the Penal Code were rapidly becoming a matter of concern. It had long been a feeling among the reform party and even by certain members of the Ascendancy, that the great mass of Catholic subjects had proven their loyalty and that some change of the penal laws was long overdue.⁶ The restrictions on land leases plus the

³Dunlop, op. cit., p. 137.

⁴Curtis, op. cit., pp. 301-305.

⁵Dunlop, op. cit., pp. 136-137.

⁶Ibid., pp. 132-133.

absentee rent system had caused a good deal of specie to leave the country and this loss was beginning to have serious economic consequences.⁷

The reform party was benefitted by the rise of two of the greatest political figures Ireland has ever known: Henry Flood and Henry Grattan. Throughout his career, Flood was a strong believer in an independent parliament, free from English control.⁸ Grattan, like Flood, believed in parliamentary reform but attached great importance to the English connection. The great difference between the two political leaders was in the matter of Catholic reform. Flood, while he wished to restrict the power of the borough interests, was adamant against any enfranchisement of the Catholics. This was not the case with Grattan, who was convinced that any reform in the parliament must include Catholic representation.⁹ Reformist aims could then be summarized as the following: a more representative parliament, an independent parliament free from English control, and some reform of the penal laws. There were considerable differences of opinion, however, as to the extent to which each of these reforms ought to be carried.

In 1767, Lord Townsend became Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. During his tenure, Townsend became involved in political struggles against the Undertakers and the reformists. The English Parliament had not

⁷Curtis, op. cit., pp. 304-306.

⁸Lewless, op. cit., pp. 320-327.

⁹Lecky, op. cit., Volume VI, pp. 349, 562-563.

forgotten how the Undertakers had forced them into rejecting the Septennial Bill and they instructed Townsend to crush this faction. Another aim of Townsend was to get a supply bill passed in the Irish Parliament for increasing the English army in Ireland.¹⁰ In the hopes of gaining support from both the Ascendancy and the reformers, Townsend proposed an "Octennial Bill" to limit the duration of the parliament. Such a proposal coming from the Lord Lieutenant was virtual assurance that the English Parliament would support the measure if the army supply bill was passed. The Undertakers, however, refused to support Townsend unless special concessions were made to them. Townsend now engaged in a massive campaign of political bribery in order to obtain complete mastery over the parliament and by this action lost any chance for co-operation with the reformers whose aid could have been valuable to him.¹¹ The supply bill was carried, but Townsend was now faced with the opposition of the reformers led by Henry Flood. The reform faction demanded independent budgetary control, a claim Townsend refused to recognize.¹² The parliament was dissolved and Townsend, in an attempt to purchase a more compliant legislature, resorted to methods unparalleled even in the political history of Ireland.¹³ Such activity sacrificed his popularity which had been high at the beginning

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 402-433.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Lawless, op. cit., p. 325.

¹³ Lecky, op. cit., Volume IV, pp. 402-433.

of his tenure. Townsend's personal intentions were of the best, but his instructions and lack of co-operation from the English Parliament put him in an untenable political position from which he was forced to resign in 1772.¹⁴ The reformers had accomplished little during Townsend's residence, but for a brief moment they had held the balance of power in the Irish Parliament. Had Townsend appealed for their co-operation in the beginning of his tenure he might have been able to achieve his aim with much less embarrassment to himself. The reformers realized the temporary advantage they had held and were determined to take advantage of any divided political situation if it should occur in the future.

¹⁴Dunlop, op. cit., p. 137.

CHAPTER III

IRELAND FROM 1772 TO 1782

The most important event in the tenure of Lord Lieutenant Harcourt, who held office from 1772 to 1776, was the American Revolution. While the Irish Parliament reluctantly voted funds to England for the war, the population as a whole was strongly in favor of the American cause. Sentiment in favor of America was especially evident in northern Ireland among the Presbyterians, who were showing strong republican leanings by their support of the colonies.¹ An army bill for the sending of four thousand troops from Ireland to America was passed in the Irish Parliament only after bitter debate.² The cost of military supplies plus increased embargo restrictions on trade with the colonies brought the Irish treasury near financial exhaustion. The situation was not helped by Harcourt, who continued to increase the civil lists and pensions at Irish expense.³

Lord Buckinghamshire, the new Lord Lieutenant in 1776, found the government on the verge of bankruptcy due to economic pressures and war contributions.⁴ Realizing the urgent need of financial reform, he

¹Lecky, op. cit., Volume IV, pp. 464-474.

²Ibid.

³Curtis, op. cit., pp. 309-310.

⁴Lecky, op. cit., Volume IV, pp. 478-486.

appealed to the English Parliament for removal of some of the restrictions on Irish commerce. However, the pressure of English manufacturers against such a move was so great that the proposal was abandoned.⁵

The American Revolution plus the hostilities with France and Spain had strained the regular English armed forces to the limit, and Ireland was left virtually defenceless.⁶ The harassment of the Irish coast by French and American privateers was a great source of anxiety to many people including the government authorities, who feared a full scale invasion of Ireland. In 1779, the Irish Parliament attempted to form a militia, but was unable to do so because of the expense.⁷ When it was realized by the people that the government was unable to provide protection, the "Volunteers" suddenly came into existence. The movement first began in the town of Belfast, where a group of influential citizens formed a local armed force for the protection of the town. "The example of Belfast proved contagious and in an incredibly short time Ireland saw herself provided with a military force composed entirely of Protestants and absolutely independent of Government."⁸ The Irish government viewed the movement with some

⁵Dunlop, op. cit., pp. 139-140.

⁶Lacky, op. cit., Volume IV, p. 520.

⁷Lawless, op. cit., pp. 335-336.

⁸Dunlop, op. cit., pp. 139-140.

relief mixed with apprehension. It was realized that for the first time, Ireland was independently armed and despite the many proclamations of loyalty to the Crown, such a force constituted a potential threat to English supremacy. The government, however, could not deny its citizens the right of self-protection and reluctantly began to assist in arming the various groups.⁹

The reform group in the Irish Parliament was quick to realize the political value of the Volunteers and under the leadership of Flood and Grattan, demanded a removal of the trade restrictions on Irish commerce.¹⁰ To bring further pressure on England, the Irish adopted nonimportation agreements and boycotts on English manufactured goods.¹¹ This combination of circumstances was more than the English Parliament could resist and in 1780 a "free trade" bill was passed.

. . . . The Acts which prohibited the Irish from exporting their woolen manufactures and their glass were wholly repealed, and the great trade of the colonies was freely thrown open to them. It was enacted that all goods that might be legally imported from British settlements in America and Africa to Great Britain may in like manner be imported directly from those settlements into Ireland, and that all goods which may be legally exported from Great Britain into these settlements, may in like manner be exported from Ireland. . . .¹²

⁹Lacky, op. cit., Volume IV, pp. 520-530.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Dunlop, op. cit., pp. 139-140.

¹²Lacky, op. cit., Volume IV, p. 541.

There remained, however, some restrictions on trade with England and the East Indies.¹³

These were generous concessions considering the past treatment of Irish requests by England, and some reformers were quite satisfied. However, Grattan and Flood and a number of other reformers were determined to push for further concessions. This group felt that the subtle threat of armed force created by the presence of the Volunteers could be used to gain parliamentary independence for Ireland. A number of Volunteer "conventions" were held, and military parades and drills became prominent as the Volunteers gained popular support for their aims.¹⁴ In a series of speeches before the Irish Parliament, Grattan argued powerfully for parliamentary independence. England at this time had offered America parliamentary independence in the hope of maintaining the English connection with the colonies. Referring to this development in one of his speeches, Grattan asked if England would refuse loyal Ireland what she had already granted America in rebellion.¹⁵ Lord Carlisle, the English Lord Lieutenant at this time, had made a better effort to understand Ireland than most of his predecessors and strongly favored Grattan's reform efforts as being in the interests of both countries. In his many letters to the

¹³Danlop, op. cit., p. 140.

¹⁴Lecky, op. cit., Volume IV, pp. 526-530.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 550.

government of Lord North in England, Carlisle stated his convictions only to have them ignored.¹⁶ The government of Lord North continued to resist all concessions until it fell from power in March of 1782.¹⁷

The new government realized the urgent need for reform and acted accordingly. On May 27, 1782, the Act of 6 George I was repealed and Ireland was given the power of independent legislation. Most of Poyning's Law was also repealed.¹⁸ Grattan was quite satisfied to let the issue rest at this point, but Flood wished to push the matter further. Flood and a large number of Volunteers placed little trust in the recent concessions regarding parliamentary independence. Flood now demanded that the English Parliament guarantee that it would not interfere with the legislative power of the Irish Parliament. In response to this pressure, England passed the Act of Renunciation which confirmed the absolute right of Ireland to legislate for herself. Such reforms were a great achievement in Irish political history and became known as the "revolution of 1782."¹⁹

The achievements of 1782, however, did not put an end to English influence. The borough connection between the Ascendancy and England continued with a Lord Lieutenant still being chosen by England for the

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 580-588.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Dunlop, op. cit., pp. 140-142.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 142-143.

Irish government.²⁰ But the Volunteers maintained their existence, aided by the support of the reform faction in the Irish Parliament. While many moderate reformers hoped that the Volunteers could be used to gain further concessions, there was concern lest the organization become a revolutionary force and overthrow the entire government.²¹

In 1783 it was clear that the legal independence of the Irish Parliament from England could not in itself guarantee a responsible and democratic government. The borough system by which both England and the Ascendancy retained their influence would have to be eliminated if any reform was to be effective.²² The reformers, however, differed on the corrective measures which should be applied to the situation. Some reformers felt that the Catholics should be given the right to vote, but this proposal was strongly opposed by Henry Flood.²³ Henry Grattan felt that since legal independence had been attained by the Irish Parliament, the parliament itself would in time correct what political abuses remained. Flood, more of a political realist in this respect than Grattan, felt that further reform measures should be adopted and wanted to use the Volunteers to help achieve his goal.²⁴

²⁰Ibid., p. 143.

²¹Lacky, op. cit., Volume VI, p. 330.

²²Ibid., pp. 335-342.

²³Ibid., pp. 342-343.

²⁴Dunlop, op. cit., p. 144.

An important officer in the Volunteers, Flood was able to rally support behind a reform bill for the elimination of the borough system. The bill was first presented to the Irish Parliament in 1783. Flood, however, offended a number of reformers including Grattan by his ostentatious display of the Volunteers in military parades and the emphasis he placed on his own connection with them.²⁵ The Irish government was able to take advantage of the difference of opinion between the two great leaders of reform and defeated Flood's bill on the numerous occasions on which it was presented.²⁶

The years 1784 to 1790 were quiet years for Ireland, politically speaking. In the early 1780's the economy was slow to recover from the depressed state in which it had been, but laws passed affecting agricultural and industrial enterprises ultimately proved to be of benefit, though their immediate effect was slight.²⁷

The temporary state of distress in the Irish economy in 1785 was seen as an opportunity by William Pitt, the Younger, of England. Pitt, who had come to power in 1783, disliked the relative independence of Ireland from England and hoped to bind the two nations together once again. He proposed a plan to the Irish government whereby commercial concessions were to be given Ireland in return for committing a certain

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Lecky, op. cit., Volume VI, pp. 343-346.

²⁷ Dunlop, op. cit., pp. 144-145.

amount of her revenue to affairs of the British Empire.²⁸ The plan was not without benefits to both countries but the amending of various details of the proposal caused its ultimate rejection by both the Irish and English parliaments. This attempt by Pitt for a closer union of Ireland and England reveals his personal feelings toward the revolution of 1782, feelings which were to have a profound effect on Irish history in future years.²⁹

Henry Grattan decided in June of 1789 to bring the loosely knit reform party in the Irish Parliament closer together by forming a regular opposition party, similar to that which existed in the English Parliament.³⁰ Accordingly, a "Whig Club" was formed by Grattan and a number of parliamentary reformers.³¹ The general purpose of the club was to maintain the parliamentary independence won in 1782 and to promote a program of moderate reform within the parliament itself. While the Whig Club did not as a whole endorse Catholic reform, Henry Grattan was known to be a proponent of political and social emancipation for the Catholics.³²

Some relaxation of the Penal Code had been attained for the Catholics in 1778. They had been given rights for longer leases on land, equality in matters of land inheritance with Protestants, and

²⁸Curtis, op. cit., pp. 326-327.

²⁹Lecky, op. cit., Volume VI, pp. 389-403.

³⁰Frank Macdermot, Theobald Wolfe Tone, a Bibliographical Study (London: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1939), p. 39.

³¹Lecky, op. cit., Volume VI, p. 458.

³²Ibid.

increased rights in the law courts.³³ The Dissenters had also received some benefits when the religious test clause was abolished, thus making them eligible for political office.³⁴ While such concessions by no means eliminated all the disqualifications of the Penal Code, they were of great benefit and did much to stimulate business enterprise on the part of the Catholics.³⁵

The years from 1786 to 1790 were years of rapidly rising prosperity for a large segment of the Irish population. The benefits of commercial freedom plus the encouragement of infant industries by the parliament led to a gradually increasing foreign trade and a steady reduction in the national debt.³⁶ In general terms, these years were probably the most prosperous of the century for Ireland. However, serious problems remained. Parliamentary corruption continued to increase as the Ascendancy tightened its political hold upon the nation. The rise of Edward Fitzgibbon to power was also not a good sign for reform hopes. Fitzgibbon was rapidly becoming a leader of the most conservative members of the Ascendancy, who were absolutely opposed to any reform in the Penal Code or the borough system.³⁷

³³Ibid., pp. 516-519.

³⁴Curtis, op. cit., p. 310.

³⁵Lecky, op. cit., Volume VI, pp. 433-439.

³⁶Curtis, op. cit., pp. 319-321.

³⁷Lecky, op. cit., Volume VI, p. 429.

During this time, religious animosities seemed to be disappearing among the middle and upper classes of the population. However among the lower class peasants, there were ominous beginnings of a religious war between Catholic and Protestant.³⁸ Much had been accomplished in this period, both economically and politically. But, events in future years were to make reforms even more necessary if serious conflict were to be avoided.

³⁸Ibid., p. 450.

CHAPTER IV
IRELAND IN 1791

The impact of the French Revolution upon Ireland has been a subject of much debate by historians. However different some of their conclusions are, most authorities agree that almost from the beginning of the Revolution, the French republic and its customs became a model of perfection to the Volunteer groups. Volunteer uniforms were made to resemble the military uniforms of France and political declarations were issued in what was assumed to be the style of the new republic.¹ The Revolution, however, had a much deeper effect upon the political situation of Ireland than mere surface imitation. Catholic and non-Catholic reform groups came to the realization that only by combining their efforts could a thorough reform of the government take place, as it had in France.² Such a political union could only be accomplished by combining the issues of Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform. This now became the aim of the reformers. The Ascendancy viewed such a union as a serious challenge to its supremacy. The fears of the ruling faction were summarised by Westmoreland, the

¹Lecky, op. cit., Volume VII, pp. 1-5, 21.

²Arthur O'Connor, State of Ireland (London: John Cleave, 1843), pp. 44-45.

current Lord Lieutenant, when he stated, "The language and bent of the conduct of these Dissenters is to unite with the Catholics, and their union could be very formidable. That union is not yet made and I believe and hope it never could be."³ Westmoreland's hopes received a rude shock in August of 1791 when a political pamphlet appeared which was to have a most profound effect on Irish history. The title of the pamphlet was An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland and the author wrote under the title of "A Northern Whig."⁴ The pamphlet's effect upon public opinion was widespread and approximately ten thousand copies were sold.⁵ The author preached a union of Catholic and Protestant to achieve parliamentary reform and a truly national government for Ireland:

The misfortune of Ireland is that we have no National Government, in which we differ from England and from Europe. . . . What is our Government? It is a phenomenon in politics, contravening all received and established opinions: it is a government derived from another country, whose, so far from being the same with that of the people, directly crosses it at right angles.⁶

The author argued forcefully for the complete independence of the Irish Parliament and expressed contempt for the revolution of 1782.

³Dunlop, op. cit., p. 147.

⁴Rosemond Jacob, The Rise of the United Irishmen, 1791-94 (London: Harrap, 1937), pp. 55-56.

⁵Lecky, op. cit., Volume VI, pp. 463-466.

⁶Jacob, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

The moderate reforms of that year were described as "the most bungling, imperfect business that ever threw ridicule on a lofty epithet by assuming it unworthily. . . ." ⁷

Who of the veteran enemies of the country lost his place or his pension? Who was called forth to station or office from the ranks of the opposition? Not one! The power remained in the hands of our enemies again to be exerted for our ruin with this difference -- that formerly we had our distresses, our injuries and our insults gratis at the hands of England, but now we pay very dearly to receive the same with aggravation through the hands of Irishmen. . . . ⁸

The author also made a plea in the pamphlet for the rights of Catholic Irishmen, stating that their subjugation was without equal in the history of the nation and that they must be given the political and social rights which every Irishman had a right to claim. ⁹ In this one pamphlet, the aims of many of the reformers were summarized. The Catholic Committee, the organized reform group for the vast majority of Catholics, immediately sought the identity of the author who had espoused their cause so well. ¹⁰ The "Northern Whig" proved to be Theobald Wolfe Tone, a young unknown lawyer, and a man whose political

⁷Lecky, op. cit., Volume VI, p. 463.

⁸Macdormot, op. cit., p. 78.

⁹Ibid., pp. 81-83. See Appendix A.

¹⁰Sean O'Faolain, The Autobiography of Theobald Wolfe Tone (London: T. Nelson and Sons Limited, 1937), pp. 37-39.

influence on Ireland would dwarf even the notable influence of his first major political pamphlet.¹¹

In his autobiography, Tone states that he was born in Dublin, Ireland, in the year 1763.¹² His father was a coach maker of rather modest means. In his early life, Tone was a member of the established church. However, he later became a member of the Presbyterian church and throughout his life considered himself a member of this dissenting sect. Tone was above average in ability, and his father made great sacrifices to send him to Trinity College in Dublin for an education in the classics. However, the declining economic situation of his father's family, plus his own marriage and increased responsibilities, forced him to quit his education in the classics and enter into the more lucrative law profession.¹³ Tone soon developed an intense dislike for the law practice and lawyers in general, and he decided to enter the field of politics. He was soon employed by the moderate reform faction known as the Whig Club and wrote his first political pamphlet for their cause, A Review of the Last Session of Parliament.¹⁴ In this pamphlet, Tone praised

¹¹The pamphlet also provoked a number of replies from political foes, such as an Argument on Behalf of the Romanists Reconsidered Being Observations on a Pamphlet Entitled Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland Signed a Northern Whig (Dublin: G. Draper, 1792), pp. 2-3, 9, 15.

¹²William Theobald Wolfe Tone (ed.), Life and Adventures of Theobald Wolfe Tone Written by Himself (Glasgow: Cameron and Ferguson, n.d.), p. 13.

¹³Ibid., pp. 13-29.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 29-30.

and defended the reform program of the Whig Club and strongly supported the connection of the English Crown with Ireland, though no mention was made of any parliamentary connection.¹⁵ Shortly after this time, Tone severed political connections with the Whig Club because he felt their proposed reforms were far too mild to be of any real help to the Irish people, and also because he felt ignored by them and was not given any chance for political advancement.¹⁶ In July of 1790, Tone wrote a second pamphlet, An Enquiry How Far Ireland is Bound as of Right in the Impending Contest on the Side of Great Britain.¹⁷ This time Tone wrote under the name, "Hibernicus," and argued for neutrality if the current hostilities between England and Spain should lead to war between the two countries.¹⁸ Shortly after his break with the Whig Club, Tone came to new realizations:

. . . . I made speedily what was to me a great discovery, though I might have found it in Swift and Molyneux, that the influence of England was the radical vice of our government; and consequently that Ireland would never be either free, prosperous or happy until she was independent, and that independence was unattainable whilst the connexion with England existed. . . .¹⁹

¹⁵Macdermot, op. cit., pp. 45-46.

¹⁶Tone, op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁷Macdermot, op. cit., pp. 45-46.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Tone, op. cit., p. 31.

Only by a union of all Irishmen, he felt, could reform come to Ireland:

To subvert the tyranny of our execrable government, to break the connexion with England, the never-failing source of our political evils, and to assert the independence of my country — these were my objects. To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishmen in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter -- these were my means. . . .²⁰

It was for these reasons that Fene wrote the pamphlet, An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland, in which he said:

. . . . the object of which was to convince them that they and the Catholics had but one common interest, and one common enemy; that the depression and slavery of Ireland was produced and perpetuated by the divisions existing between them and that consequently to assert the independence of their country and their own individual liberties; it was necessary to forget all former feuds, to consolidate the entire strength of the whole nation, and to form for the future but one people.²¹

From his early writings and statements in his autobiography, it is probably fair to conclude that Fene was a moderate in his political views. That he desired to break the parliamentary connection with England is beyond doubt, but this was also the aim of the Whig Club, which he claims to have detested later on, because it lacked a

²⁰Ibid., p. 48.

²¹Ibid., pp. 48-49.

bold reform program. Tone, similar to many other Irish reformers, was dissatisfied with the reform efforts of the Whig Club whose members seemed to ask for little and gain nothing in the way of concessions from the triumphant Ascendancy faction. In his first political pamphlet he stated his strong loyalty to the English Crown and the connection of the Crown with Ireland. It was not until 1794 that he expressed his views in favor of a complete separation from England, by forcible means if necessary.

Although his first two pamphlets had attracted little notice, Tone's pamphlet on behalf of the Catholics made him a political celebrity almost overnight and earned him the acquaintance of some of the leaders of the Catholic Committee such as John Keogh, Edward Byrne and Thomas Braughall.²² It was also due to this pamphlet that he was elected an honorary member of the Belfast Volunteers, who now had become a political reform group working with the Catholics.²³

The futile efforts of the Whig Club convinced a number of Irishmen that a more militant reform group was needed.²⁴ The political clubs of France were looked upon as a model in this respect, and it was hoped that Catholic and non-Catholic reformers could be united in their

²²O'Faolain, op. cit., pp. 37-39.

²³Tone, op. cit., pp. 49-50.

²⁴Macdarmot, op. cit., pp. 68-70.

political aims through this means.²⁵ William Russell, a close friend of Tone, and well acquainted with the Belfast Volunteers, wrote to Tone for advice on the formation of such an organisation. Tone replied, stating in his letter several resolutions which he thought should be the purpose of such a group:

- (1) That the Constitution of Ireland exists only in theory, inasmuch as the people are deprived of their natural weight in the scale of Government, because they are not duly represented in Parliament, and, therefore, that a more general extension of the elected franchise is indispensably necessary.
- (2) That the weight of English influence in the Government of this country is so great as to require a cordial union among the people to maintain that balance which is essential to the preservation of our liberties and the extension of our commerce.
- (3) That, satisfied as we are that the true greatness and happiness of Ireland can arise solely from the internal union of all her people, we lament that mistaken policy which has so long divided them, and that we shall heartily co-operate in all measures tending to the abolition of distinctions between Irishmen equally invidious and unjust and which have been uniformly the source of weakness and misery and disgrace to the country.²⁶

²⁵Pieces of Irish History Illustrative of the Conditions of the Catholics of Ireland of the Origin and Progress of the Political System of the United Irishmen and of their Transactions with the Anglo-Irish Government (New York: Published by William J. Mac Neven, Bernard Dornin, 1807), p. 15. Hereafter referred to as Pieces of Irish History.

²⁶Maedermot, op. cit., pp. 68-70.

Along with the resolutions, Tone also submitted a preface which stated:

We have no National Government. We are ruled by Englishmen and the servants of Englishmen, filled as to commerce and politics, with the short-sighted and ignorant prejudice of their country; and these men have the whole of the power and patronage of Ireland as means to seduce and subdue the honesty and the spirit of her representatives in the legislature.²⁷

In a separate letter to Russel which accompanied the resolutions, Tone stated his personal belief as to what the ultimate cure for the problems of Ireland would be:

My unalterable opinion is that the base of Irish prosperity is in the influence of England. I believe that influence will ever be extended while the connection between the countries continues. Nevertheless, as I know that opinion is for the present, too hearty, though a very little time may establish it universally, I have not made it a part of the resolutions; I have only proposed to set up a reform parliament as a barrier against that mischief, which every honest man that will open his eyes must see in every instance overbears the interest of Ireland. I have not said one word that looks like a wish for separation, though I give it to you and your friends as my most decided opinion that such an event would be a regeneration of this country.²⁸

Such sentiments would seem to indicate that Tone was fully committed to complete separation from England at this time.²⁹ Yet when questioned about

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Lecky, op. cit., Volume VI, pp. 466-467.

this letter by the Irish government, he maintained that he wished only for a complete separation of the two parliaments. He also stated in his autobiography that his sentiments at this time were not those of complete separation from England:

. . . . For my own part, I think it right to conclude that, at this time, the establishment of a republic was not the immediate object of my speculations. My object was to secure the independence of my country under any form of government to which I was led by a hatred of England so deeply rooted in my nature, that it was rather an instinct than a principle.³⁰

On October 11, 1791, Tone and William Russell set out for Belfast. Three days later at a secret meeting of the Belfast Volunteers, the Society of United Irishmen was formed.³¹ According to Tone's memoirs, he helped frame the opening declaration of the club, which stated that English domination in the Irish Parliament must be eliminated if Ireland was to achieve liberty, there must be a more democratic representation in the Irish Parliament, and that the Irish Parliament should represent the interests of all of the people.³²

A pledge of membership was adopted which stated:

I.A.B. in the presence of God do pledge myself to my country, that I will use all my abilities and influence in the attainment of an impartial and adequate

³⁰Tone, op. cit., p. 51.

³¹Jacob, op. cit., pp. 54-67.

³²Ibid., p. 72.

representation of the Irish nation in parliament; and as a means of absolute necessity in the establishment of this chief good of Ireland, I will endeavor, as much as lies in my ability, to forward a brotherhood of affection, an identity of interests, a communion of rights, and an union of power among Irishmen of all religious persuasions, without which every reform in Parliament must be partial, not national, inadequate to the wants, delusive to the wishes, and insufficient for the freedom and happiness of this country.³³

An interesting physical description of Tone came from a man who attended one of the meetings of the United Irishmen:

Tone was a slight, effeminate-looking man, with a hatchet face, a long aquiline nose rather handsome and genteel-looking, with link, straight hair combed down on his sickly red cheek exhibiting a face the most insignificant and mindless that could be imagined. His mode of speaking was in correspondence with his face and person. It was polite and gentlemanly, but totally devoid of anything like energy or vigor. I set him down as a worthy, good-natured flimsy man, in whom there was no harm, and as the least likely person in the world to do mischief to the state.³⁴

In December of 1791 a circular letter was issued to all Irishmen to aid in securing democratic reforms in the parliament. In the early years of their existence, the United Irishmen were interested in

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Macdarmot, op. cit., p. 88.

political reforms within the general framework of Anglo-Irish relations. While strongly supporting an independent parliament free from English control, the organisation did not advocate violent revolution or complete separation from England.³⁵ From almost the beginning of its formation, however, a growing admiration of the French Revolution was clearly evident.³⁶

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Thomas Addis Emmet, Memoirs of the Irish Union (n.p.: n.d.), pp. 1-23, also Belfast Politics -- Collection of Debates, Resolutions in Years 1792, 1793 (Belfast: Henry Jay, 1794), p. 84.

CHAPTER V
WOLFE TONE AND CATHOLIC REFORM
1792-1793

The issue of Catholic emancipation became increasingly important in the 1790's. For years, the Catholics had continued to labor under the disadvantages of the Penal Code, which continued to be a great hardship on them despite the fact that it had been modified to some extent. The part of the Penal Code which perhaps aroused the most hostility was the electoral disqualifications which prevented Catholics from holding seats in the Irish Parliament and voting in parliamentary elections. The majority of Catholics had endured these grievances in silence for many years. At various times Catholic reformers had presented an occasional address for relief to succeeding Lord Lieutenants, who had contemptuously ignored such efforts.¹ The last unsuccessful attempt by the Catholics had been in 1790, when they were unable to find a single member of the Irish Parliament to present their petition for them.²

The revolution in France had a regenerating effect on Catholic political opinion. The reform efforts of France, a predominantly Catholic country, could not fail to be observed by a country whose

¹Tone, op. cit., pp. 44-45.

²Ibid., p. 47.

population likewise belonged to the Catholic faith. In his observations on the effects of the French Revolution and on the politics of England and Ireland, Tone stated that the writings of Edmund Burke were a major factor in promoting the hostility of England to France.

But matters were very different in Ireland, an oppressed, insulted and plundered nation. As we well knew experimentally what it was like to be enslaved, we sympathized most sincerely with the French people, and watched their progress to freedom with the utmost anxiety; we had not, like England, a prejudice rooted in our very nature against France. As the revolution advanced, and as events expanded themselves, the public spirit of Ireland rose with a rapid acceleration. The fears and animosities of the aristocracy rose in the same, or a still higher proportion. In a little time the French Revolution became the test of every man's political creed, and the nation was clearly divided into two great parties, the aristocrats and the democrats (epithets borrowed from France), who have ever since been measuring each other's strength, and carrying on a kind of smothered war, which the course of events, it is highly probable may soon call into energy and action.³

Tone himself became an enthusiastic supporter of the French Revolution:

It is needless, I believe, to say that I was a democrat from the very commencement; and as all the retainers of government, including the sages and judges of the law were of course on the other side, this gave the coup de grace to any expectations, if any such I had, of my succeeding at the bar, for I soon became pretty notorious. . . .⁴

The events in France encouraged the more educated members of the

³Ibid., p. 41.

⁴Ibid.

Catholics to attempt more militant efforts at reform. However, there was also a division of aristocrats and democrats among the Catholics, the landed gentry being largely under the influence of the Ascendancy.⁵ Encouraged by the Ascendancy, sixty-eight of the most influential Catholic gentry, led by Lord Kenmare, published a petition, disavowing themselves from any action which the Catholic reform groups might take, and stated that they would be content with whatever reforms the Irish government would grant.⁶ It was the hope of the Irish government that such a secession of influential gentry would bring the reform efforts of the Catholics to a halt.⁷ Such hopes were doomed to disappointment for in the ensuing struggle for power, the democratic reformers were victorious and the gentry lost whatever influence they had possessed.⁸

The new attitude of the Catholics was demonstrated in 1790, shortly after the abortive efforts to present a petition to the Irish Parliament. In the summer of that year, Lord Lieutenant Westmoreland was visiting southern Ireland and hinted that a demonstration

⁵ James Gordon, A History of Ireland from the Earliest Accounts to the Accomplishment of the Union with Great Britain (Dublin: John Jones, 1805), Volume II, pp. 323-326.

⁶ Macdormot, op. cit., p. 90.

⁷ An Address From the General Committee of Roman Catholics to Their Protestant Fellow Subjects and to the General Public (Dublin: P. Byrne, 1792), p. 61.

⁸ Pieces of Irish History, pp. 18-19.

of Catholic loyalty to the Irish government was in order. An address stating the loyalty of the Catholics to the Irish government was presented, but the Catholics also had the courage to state in their address the hope that their loyalty would be rewarded by some positive action on the part of the government. Westmoreland returned the address with the demand that the part which mentioned reform should be struck out. The response to such a demand in former days would have been one of subservient compliance, but now the Catholics refused to comply with the demand and withdrew their address completely.⁹

The Catholic Committee, which was the official organization of the democratic reformers, now sought support from England. In order to avoid the imputation that they were associated with the French Revolution, and hoping to make use of the influence of an important member of the English Parliament, the Catholics chose Richard Burke, son of Edmund Burke to act as an agent for them.¹⁰ Edmund Burke had recently written Reflections on the Revolution in France and the Catholics thought that their connection with Burke would testify to their loyal intentions. Richard Burke had none of the political acumen of his father, however, and repeated efforts to present effectively a petition before the Irish Parliament came to nothing.¹¹

⁹Gordon, op. cit., Volume II, p. 329.

¹⁰Tons, op. cit., p. 57.

¹¹Ibid.

In 1792 Richard Burke returned to England and Tone, due to the fame of his pamphlet on their behalf, was appointed "assistant secretary" of the Catholic Committee on the recommendation of John Keogh, leader of the group.¹²

The English government, realizing the urgent need for reform, now put pressure on the Irish government to yield to the inevitable and grant some measure of relief to the Catholics. Westmoreland and his secretary, Hobart, strongly resisted such efforts and continually portrayed the Catholics as destructive revolutionaries, bent on the complete destruction of the Irish government and the English connection.¹³ The English government was not impressed by Westmoreland's arguments and strongly urged a number of reforms including removal of some of the restrictions on voting for members of the Irish Parliament.¹⁴ A relief bill was proposed in 1792 by Sir Hercules Langrische, who was given strong support by Edmund Burke in England.¹⁵ Despite strong opposition from the Irish government, the relief bill was passed and became a law in 1792. Several concessions had been made by the Ascendancy, but the issue of electoral reform was

¹²Lecky, op. cit., Volume VI, pp. 485-500.

¹³Maedermot, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

¹⁴A Letter From the Right Honorable Edmund Burke to Sir Hercules Langrische on the Subject of Roman Catholics of Ireland and the Propriety of Admitting Them to the Elective Franchise (Dublin: P. Byrne, 1792), p. 72.

¹⁵Lecky, op. cit., Volume VI, p. 503.

ignored. Occupations which had previously been closed to Catholics were opened, such as attorneys, notaries, and solicitors, and they were allowed to practice at the bar, though limited as to the positions they might hold in this capacity.¹⁶ Catholics and Protestants were allowed to intermarry and the restrictions on the number of apprentices a Catholic tradesman might employ were removed. Schools were now allowed to open without a special license from a Protestant Bishop.¹⁷ Catholics were also allowed to send their children abroad for education if they so desired.¹⁸ It was ironic that the very corruption which both the Catholics and United Irishmen attacked in the Irish Parliament had been responsible for the success of the Langrishe bill, for the English Parliament had utilized its system of political influence in order to see that the measure was carried.¹⁹ The same parliament which passed the bill, however, angrily rejected two petitions presented by supporters of the Catholic Committee which requested that the Catholics be given voting rights in parliamentary elections.²⁰

¹⁶ Macdermot, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Lecky, op. cit., Volume VI, pp. 517-520.

¹⁹ Macdermot, op. cit., pp. 92-95.

²⁰ Some thoughts on the Present Politics of Ireland in a Letter to Robert Sims from Theobald McKenna (Dublin: J. Chambers, 1792), p. 19.

Such concessions, though substantial, only made the reform element more determined than ever to gain voting privileges for the Catholics. It was realized that if Ireland was to have a truly national government, free from corruption, representation would have to include Catholic as well as Protestant.²¹ The Ascendancy, supported by the conservative Catholic gentry had accused the Catholic Committee of not being representative of the wishes of the majority of the Catholics. As Tone noted in his memoirs, it would have been fortunate for the Irish government if it had not pressed this point so hard. Such attacks made the Catholic Committee determined to vindicate its position as spokesman for the Catholics of Ireland and brought Catholic public opinion to its support.²²

The Catholic Committee decided to settle the issue beyond all doubt and hold a convention which would be representative of the Catholics from all areas of Ireland.²³ Tone, in his position of secretary, helped supervise the plans for elections of members to the convention. The reaction from the supporters of the Ascendancy was violent. Grand juries met throughout Ireland and passed resolutions stating that such a meeting was illegal and should not be allowed to convene. Tone secured the advice of Simon Butler and Beresford Burton, two well known lawyers, who certified that such a convention could be legally

²¹Tone, op. cit., p. 56.

²²Pieces of Irish History, pp. 26-27.

²³Tone, op. cit., pp. 57-62.

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held.²⁴ Large numbers of pamphlets circulated from opponents and supporters of the convention, Tone supplying his own efforts as a writer for the Catholic cause.

The political union of Catholic and non-Catholic reform groups was proceeding rapidly. Catholics were freely admitted to membership in the United Irishmen, and John Keogh, leader of the Catholic Committee, was in frequent attendance at United Irish meetings.²⁵

The union of the two reform groups was also symbolized by Tone, one of the founders of the United Irish movement and an important member of the Catholic Committee. Bastille Day was an event which was conspicuously celebrated in certain areas where sympathy for France was strong, especially in Dublin and Belfast.²⁶ In July, 1792, the event was celebrated at Belfast with a meeting of various reform groups which included members of the Catholic Committee, Volunteers, and United Irishmen. Wolfe Tone in an address to the people of Ireland which he read to the assembly stated that "no reform, were even such attainable, would answer our ideas of utility or justice, which should not equally include all sects and all denominations of Irishmen."²⁷

The union of Protestant, Catholic, and Dissenter, however, was

²⁴ Lecky, op. cit., Volume VI, pp. 539-540.

²⁵ Walker's Hibernian Magazine or Compendium of Entertaining Knowledge (Dublin: Joseph Walker, n.d.), p. 94.

²⁶ Mauderlot, op. cit., p. 100.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 101-103.

by no means an easy matter for the reformers to accomplish. For several years an intermittent religious war had raged over several counties of Ireland between the Catholic "Defenders" and the Protestant "Peep O' Day Boys." Such violence was much to the satisfaction of the Ascendancy, which blamed the fighting on the Catholic Committee and the United Irishmen and stated that these groups were revolutionary movements dedicated to the violent overthrow of the Irish government.²⁸ Several trips were made by Tone and his friends to northern Ireland where serious fighting had occurred. The purpose of these missions was to convince both warring factions that only by a political union of both religious faiths could a thorough reform program be forced upon the Irish Parliament.²⁹ Such efforts were often exasperating to Tone, who found problems in persuading educated men to his view as well as peasants.³⁰ In one area of County Down known as Rathfriland, fighting had been particularly severe. A group of Catholics and Presbyterians including Tone were dispatched to the area in hopes of settling the dispute. However, conditions continued to deteriorate and on a second visit Tone and his companions found themselves in personal danger and were forced to abandon the area.³¹

²⁸ O'Faolain, op. cit., pp. 46-61.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Macdermot, op. cit., pp. 101-103.

³¹ Ibid.

Several other counties were visited by Tone and his friends in an effort to bring the fighting to an end.³² On a visit to Connaught Tone and his companion, Thomas Braughall, were stopped by four or five men who tried to detain them from their mission:

. . . . We had two cases of pistols in the carriage, and we agreed not to be robbed. Braughall, who was at this time about sixty-five years of age, and lame from a fall off his horse some years before, was as cool and intrepid as man could be. He took the command, and by his orders I let down all the glasses, and called out to the fellows to come on, if they so were inclined, for that we were ready; Braughall desiring me at the same time 'not to fire till I could touch the scoundrels.' This rather embarrassed them, and they did not venture to approach but held a council of war at the horses' heads. I then presented one of my pistols at the postillion, swearing horribly that I would put him instantly to death if he did not drive over them, and I made him feel the muzzle of the pistol against the back of his head; the fellows on this took to their heels and ran off, and we proceeded on our journey without further interruption. . . .³³

In areas where reform sentiment was strong, such as Belfast, the union of reform groups was more successful as Tone noted:

All parties were now fully employed for the ensuing session of parliament. The government though the organ of the corporations and grand juries opened a heavy fire upon us of manifestoes and resolutions. At first we were like young

³²Tone, op. cit., pp. 60-61.

³³Ibid., p. 61.

soldiers, a little stunned with the noise; but after a few rounds we began to look about us, and seeing nobody drop with all this furious cannonade, we took courage and began to return the fire. In consequence wherever there was a meeting of the Protestant ascendancy, which was the title assumed by the party (and a very impudent one it was), we took care that it should be followed by a meeting of the Catholics, who spoke as loud and louder than their adversaries; and as we had the right clearly on our side, we found no great difficulty in silencing the enemy on this quarter. The Catholics likewise took care, at the same time that they branded their enemies to mark the gratitude of their friends, who were daily increasing, and especially to the people of Belfast; between whom and the Catholics the union was now completely established.³⁴

In December of 1792 the Catholic convention was held in Dublin.³⁵

The meeting place was in Taylor's Hall in Black Lane, a place which had been used by the United Irishmen for their meetings.³⁶ The Catholics avoided open acknowledgement of their connection with the United Irish, upon the advice of a number of influential friends, including Edmund Burke, who feared that such a connection with a group which was falling rapidly under the influence of the French Revolution, would damage the Catholic cause.³⁷ Some three hundred twenty five delegates were present, including a few members of the Catholic

³⁴Locky, op. cit., Volume VI, pp. 544-545.

³⁵Maodermot, op. cit., p. 108.

³⁶Sir Richard Bourke, Charles William and Earl Fitzwilliam (eds.), Correspondence of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke (London: Francis and John Rivington, 1844), Volume II, p. 27.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 59-60.

higher clergy who had opposed the activities of the United Irishmen at times. Despite these former disagreements, the prelates were received with great respect and the meetings were conducted in an orderly, courteous manner.³⁸ One of the main purposes of the convention was to draw up a petition to the King of England to be presented personally by a Catholic delegation. In this way the Ascendancy would be bypassed, and the English government, which was known to be sympathetic to the Catholic cause, could be approached directly. After reciting a list of grievances composed by Tone and Keogh, the convention proceeded to select delegates to go to England. Tone accompanied the delegation in his position as secretary.³⁹ The orderly procedure and conduct of the Committee had impressed a number of English statesmen, who were convinced that timely concessions were in order if the mass of Catholics were not to be alienated and seek more radical means to accomplish their ends.⁴⁰

In the same month that the convention was held, the delegation traveled to England where they were well received by Pitt and his assistant, Dundas, and conducted to a personal interview with the King. Tone recorded his impressions of the interview in his diary, mentioning the favorable impression which the Catholic Committee had made:

Their appearance was splendid and they met with what is called in the language —

³⁸ Macdermot, op. cit., pp. 108-109.

³⁹ Bourke, William and Fitzwilliam, op. cit., Volume IV, pp. 59-60.

⁴⁰ Macdermot, op. cit., pp. 109-110.

of the courts a most gracious reception -- that is His majesty was pleased to say a few words to each of the delegates in his turn. In those colloquies the matter is generally of little interest, the manner is all; and with the manner of the Sovereign the delegates had every reason to be content.⁴¹

It was less than two years since the Catholic petition had been spurned by the Irish Parliament and the change must have been painfully apparent to the Ascendancy. In Ireland, the Catholics were given strong support by Henry Grattan, who had employed Wolfe Tone as his agent of communication between the Catholic Committee and himself. Grattan communicated his support for the Committee in their mission to London and stated, "They ought to ask for everything or nothing and that now is their only time to get it."⁴²

In London, the Catholics were told that reforms would be undertaken, though there was no specific mention as to what these reforms would be. There were some separate interviews with John Keogh and a certain Mr. Nepean of the Home Office in London at this time.⁴³ Some members of the Catholic Committee also interviewed Major Hobart, secretary to Lord Lieutenant Westmoreland. The full details of these meetings were not revealed, but apparently in their anxiety to gain at least some concessions for their cause, the leaders of the Committee, principally Keogh, committed the blunder of stating that they thought

⁴¹Ibid., p. 109.

⁴²Ibid., p. 111.

⁴³Pieces of Irish History, pp. 40-41.

the Catholics would be satisfied with something less than complete electoral reform.⁴⁴ As a result, the English government removed its pressure on the Irish Parliament for a full scale reform bill and the Ascendancy responded accordingly.⁴⁵

On January 10, 1793, the Irish Parliament convened to discuss the issue of Catholic relief. Sentiment in the parliament was overwhelmingly in favor of reform, though the differences of opinion as to how far this reform should go were many.⁴⁶ Most members of the Irish Parliament considered a reform bill of some kind necessary if the loyalty of the Catholics to Ireland was to be maintained, and the Jacobin horrors then going on in France were to be avoided.⁴⁷ After an extended debate which took place over a period of several months, the bill was finally passed. The property disqualifications which had long plagued the Catholics were eliminated. They were allowed, with certain restrictions, to retain arms and to hold all military and civil positions except those to which they were excluded by law. Catholics were now officially allowed in the universities and were permitted to hold degrees. However, there were a number of provisions ennumerating

⁴⁴ Macdonald, op. cit., p. 111.

⁴⁵ W. H. Curran, The Life of the Right Honorable John P. Curran (New York: Redfield, 1855), pp. 153-154. John Curran recorded these sentiments as he sat in the Irish Parliament at this time as a member of that body.

⁴⁶ A Full and Accurate Report of the Debates in the Parliament of Ireland in the Session of 1793 on the Bill for Relief of his Majesty's Catholic Subjects (Dublin: J. Jones, 1793), p. 42.

⁴⁷ Lecky, op. cit., Volume VI, pp. 587-588.

the offices to which Catholics were forbidden. Almost all the important civil and government posts were reserved for Protestants and the educated Catholics were thereby restricted from holding any important office.⁴⁸ The part of the bill which was the most controversial was that section which allowed Catholics to vote in parliamentary elections but did not allow them to hold seats in the Irish Parliament.⁴⁹ A more absurd provision could hardly be imagined; the Catholics were given the elective franchise but prevented from electing those most able to represent their views. The Ascendancy had been able to take advantage of the uncertainty of the Catholic leadership. Tone quickly saw that the Ascendancy had gained more by the concessions they had withheld than those they had made. On January 21, 1793, shortly after the disastrous interview with Hobart, Tone met the leaders of the Catholic Committee and recorded the following in his diary:

In the Sub Committee Sir T. French, Byrne, Keogh and McDonnell dispatched to Hobart to appraise him that nothing short of unlimited emancipation will satisfy the Catholics. They returned in about an hour, extremely dissatisfied with each other, and, diverse mutual recriminations, it appears by the Commission, they had done directly the reverse; for the result of their conversation with the Secretary was that he had declared explicitly against the whole measure and

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Macdermot, op. cit., pp. 111-113.

they had given reason to think that the Catholics would acquiesce in a half one. Sad, sad! I am surprised at Sir T. French, as for merchants, I begin to see they are no great hands at revolutions.⁵⁰

Subsequent efforts by the Committee to repair their mistake failed, and several months later the bill was officially passed. Though some reformers such as Grattan thought the bill was a step in the right direction, Tone regarded the measure as a defeat for Catholic reform.⁵¹

by their exclusion from the two Houses of Parliament the whole body of the Catholic gentry of Ireland, a high-spirit race of men are insulted and disgraced, thrown down from the level of their fortune and their talents and branded with the mark of subjugation, the last relic of interested bigotry. This is the radical defect of the Bill. If the Catholics deserve what has been granted, they deserve what has been withheld; if they did not deserve what has been withheld, what has been granted should have been refused. There is an inconsistency not to be explained in any principle of reason for justice in admitting the alleged ignorance and bigotry in number of the Catholics into the pale of the Constitution and excluding all the birth, rank property and talents. By granting the franchise and withholding seats in parliament the Catholic gentry are at once compelled and enabled to act with effect as a distinct body and a separate interest. They receive a benefit with one hand and a blow with the other and their rising gratitude is checked

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

by their just resentment; a resentment which in the same moment they obtain the means and the provocation to justify. If it was not intended to emancipate them also, they should have been debarred of all political power. Will they not say that they have received just so much liberty as will enable them to serve the interests of others, to be useful freeholders and convenient voters artificers of the greatness and power in which they must not share, subaltern instruments in the elevation of those who their honest pride tells them are no better than themselves?⁵²

For the moment, the Ascendancy had been able to frustrate partially reformist aims. In doing so, they were sowing the seeds of their own destruction. In a few short years, the luxury of refusal would become a choice between reform or revolution.

⁵² Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

TREASON

The case of William Jackson in 1794, and the Fitzwilliam affair in 1795, mark a turning point in the history of Ireland. William Jackson was a clergyman of the establish church in Ireland who had a taste for politics and adventure for which he was entirely unfitted by temperament. The affairs in Ireland had been watched with interest for some time by the French government which had been at war with England since 1793. The French believed that Ireland might be the weak point in England's defense, and they employed Jackson, who was in France, as an emissary to Ireland to sound out the Irish on the possibility of an invasion of that country.¹

Errors marred the enterprise from its very inception. Jackson, on his way to Ireland, stopped off in London to confer with a certain William Stone, who was related by marriage to Hamilton Rowan, an important member of the United Irishmen.² It was at this time that

¹Jacob, op. cit., pp. 227-228.

²Parley Rex Syndergaard, "Ireland and the French Revolution 1789-1800" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of History, Saint Louis University, 1951), pp. 108-109. Hereafter referred to as Thesis.

Jackson renewed his acquaintanceship with an old friend, a lawyer by the name of Cockayne. Jackson exposed the nature of his plans to Cockayne, who almost immediately informed the English government. Cockayne was employed as an informer by the English, and on a pretext accompanied Jackson to Ireland.³

In Ireland, Jackson and Cockayne conferred with Hamilton Rowan, who was in Newgate prison on charges of libel by the Irish government. Cockayne was given assistance in his activities by Leonard McNally, a Dublin lawyer who had access to the highest councils in the United Irishmen and like Cockayne was a government informer.⁴ Rowan, in 1792, at the time the Catholic convention was being held, had been one of the men responsible for the adoption by the United Irishmen of a French insignia with republican implications. The decision was a rash one on the part of the United Irishmen, for it enabled the Ascendancy to label them as French Jacobins, though the United Irish were probably guilty of nothing more than exaggerated worship of the French republic. A National Guard had also been formed by Rowan which had been quickly suppressed by the government.⁵ Such actions were characteristic of Rowan's impulsive nature and he quickly agreed to Jackson's proposal

³Macdermot, op. cit., p. 133.

⁴Lecky, op. cit., Volume VII, p. 28.

⁵Macdermot, op. cit., pp. 109-110.

of military aid, not knowing he was falling into a trap laid by the English and Irish governments.

Wolfe Tone was now contacted and the plans were made known to him in the talks at Newgate prison. Jackson had previously been informed that a French invasion of Ireland would only unite the diverse political groups of that country into a common front to oppose the French, and he asked Tone about the truth of such an estimate. Tone replied that such a union might take place in England under threat of an invasion, but not in Ireland and he supplied a written memorandum to Jackson in which he gave his views on the political situation in Ireland. Since Tone's writings are very scarce in the years 1793 to 1794, the memorandum he supplied to Jackson in April of 1794 provides a valuable clue to the change which had taken place in his political opinions. The main theme of his memorandum was the disparity in political circumstances between England and Ireland. Tone wrote that in England the government was based on the will of the people which made it a truly national one. In Ireland the government was based on the will of the established church and the Ascendancy. The great mass of the population which included the Catholics and Protestant Dissenters, were ardently devoted to the French Revolution and were looking forward to the day when a democratic government could be formed in Ireland. Tone felt that if armed aid from outside Ireland was sufficient, the majority of Irishmen would rise in revolt and overthrow the Irish government. He felt that any idea that the aristocrats dominated by the Ascendancy would reform the government of their own accord was doomed to

disappointment. Tone emphasized in his memorandum that armed aid must be of sufficient quantity if a mass uprising was to take place on the part of the people.⁶ The rest of the memorandum gave detailed advice on military tactics and how best to secure the loyalty and aid of the people. From these statements, it is clear that Tone's opinions had advanced to a point where he was willing to use violent revolution to accomplish separation from England. His disgust with the reform efforts of 1793 no doubt played an important part in his decision. He now felt that a truly national government for Ireland was only possible by the complete severance of the tie which bound England and Ireland, including the Crown connection. Tone was not alone in these convictions. In 1794, the United Irishmen had changed from a mere reform organization to the beginnings of a revolutionary body.⁷ The change was also evident in the Catholic Defenders, who were rapidly changing from a lower class agrarian movement aimed at the Peep-o'-Day Boys to a revolutionary organization which plotted the overthrow of the Irish government.⁸

Whatever his sentiments may have been at the time of his writing the memorandum, Tone became more cautious in his dealings with Jackson and later extricated himself altogether, to his own good fortune.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 137-139. See Appendix B.

⁷ Lacey, op. cit., Volume VII, pp. 29-31.

⁸ Pieces of Irish History, pp. 66-71.

He was shocked at the careless way the business was discussed in Rowan's cell, virtually under the noses of the government authorities. He probably also came to the realization that he was taking part in an activity which could be considered treason and which could have the most disastrous consequences to himself, his family, and the Catholic emancipation movement which he was supporting. Tone also had his suspicions regarding Cockayne and attempted to conduct business in such a way as to keep him from knowing its exact content.⁹ Shortly after he gave the memorandum to Jackson, Tone asked that it be returned which it was.¹⁰ However, several days later, Tone was disturbed to find that Rowan had given several copies of the paper to Jackson, having added or subtracted portions of it to suit himself.¹¹

The Irish government now closed in on the men and Jackson was arrested, several copies of the incriminating memorandum falling into the hands of the authorities. Cockayne made himself known as a witness for the prosecution, but McNally was too valuable to expose in this fashion, and continued as an informer. So unsuspected was McNally that he was retained by Jackson for his defence at the trial.¹² The situation

⁹Tone, op. cit., pp. 76-77.

¹⁰Jacob, op. cit., pp. 227-228.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Macdermot, op. cit., p. 104.

for Tone was critical. Cockayne had no evidence against Tone directly, but Jackson might have been able to save his own life by revealing incriminating evidence against Tone. This he apparently did not do, for no doubt the government would have proceeded against Tone had he done so.

Tone, despite the urging of his friends, did not take flight, though Rowan did flee to France, making a spectacular escape in a small boat despite determined efforts to apprehend him.¹³ Tone, however, stood his ground and disdained any efforts to escape. Several factors were working in his favor. The intervention of the Beresford family was a powerful aid in preventing his prosecution. Tone had first met Marcus Beresford in 1792 in his travels into Northern Ireland to compose the feuds between the Peep-O'-Day Boys and the Defenders and gather support for the Catholic Convention.¹⁴ Beresford's influence was now exerted on his behalf, the Beresford family being a powerful political force in the Irish government. Tone was also indirectly aided by John P. Curran, who along with McNally participated as defence counsel for Jackson. Curran made the point that in England treason convictions had to be obtained by at least two witnesses, whereas in Ireland the prosecution was attempting to prove treason on the testimony of Cockayne alone.¹⁵ Cockayne proved to be an extremely

¹³Lacky, op. cit., Volume VII, p. 29.

¹⁴Madernot, op. cit., pp. 142-158.

¹⁵Thesis, pp. 111-112.

unco-operative witness, for he had not realized the full implications of the bargain he had made with the English government and feared reprisals because of his actions. Thus, it appeared that the English and Irish governments would have their hands full convicting Jackson alone. A "compromise" was arranged between Tone and the Irish government in which Tone made a public confession, though it mentioned no names and did not supply any evidence which the Irish government did not already have. He also made known his willingness to leave the country, which the government required him to do several months later.¹⁶ Tone's relatively light punishment prompted some criticism that he had made special concessions to the Irish government. However, three of Tone's fellow reformers knew of the intimate details of his negotiations with the Irish government which made the possibility of any corrupt bargain extremely unlikely. Several months later, the trial of Jackson was held and he was convicted. Jackson cheated the gallows by taking poison and died an agonizing death in the court room on the day he was to be sentenced.¹⁷

Despite the fact that Tone had been seriously implicated in the Jackson affair, the Catholic Committee retained him as secretary against the advice of Grattan, who had broken all connections with Tone and felt that his retention would taint the Committee with

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 76-77.

¹⁷ Tone, op. cit., pp. 77-83.

treason, harming their reform efforts.¹⁸ The fact that Tone was retained was a sign of the increasingly militant attitude of the Catholics. The Jackson affair had moved Irish opinion one step further on the road to revolution. The Fitzwilliam affair would complete the cycle.

In 1795, the so called "Fitzwilliam Crisis" occurred. In England, the year 1794 had seen a change in the political balance of power and William Pitt had been forced to form a coalition cabinet in order to maintain himself and his party in office. The leader of the Whig group which joined the Tories was the Duke of Portland, who had been Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1782, and had recommended the famous reforms of that year.¹⁹ One of Portland's political associates who also entered the cabinet was Lord Fitzwilliam. Portland and Fitzwilliam and their fellow Whigs who formed the coalition held liberal views in regard to Ireland, particularly the issue of Catholic emancipation.²⁰ The full story and its details may never be known but to obtain their support, Pitt apparently promised the Whigs authority to govern Ireland as they pleased. On this understanding, Lord Fitzwilliam agreed to become Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, replacing Westmoreland.²¹ Pitt, however, decided to withdraw his pledge of complete authority over the

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁹ Lecky, op. cit., Volume VII, pp. 32-33.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Gordon, op. cit., Volume II, p. 339.

affairs of Ireland, much to the consternation of the Whigs, though Pitt was eventually able to persuade Portland to his way of thinking.²²

The European situation in 1794 looked critical for the coalition of nations facing France. French armies had taken the offensive once again and both the Austrian and Prussian Armies were in full retreat.²³ The Irish Parliament continued to support the English war effort despite the burden of an increasing national debt.²⁴

These factors no doubt weighed heavily on Pitt's mind and he did not wish to change a political system in Ireland which, whatever its faults, had proven to be a reliable support for his government in time of war. Fitzwilliam was told that if he accepted the position of Lord Lieutenant, he must not allow any changes in the government, which meant that the issue of Catholic reform must be avoided. Fitzwilliam agreed to accept the post on these conditions.²⁵

On July 4th, 1795, Lord Fitzwilliam arrived in Ireland to assume the position of Lord Lieutenant. It took only a short time for him to see that discontent and revolution were rampant in Ireland and reform was a necessity if civil war were to be averted. The liberal views of the Whigs were well known, and reform groups all over Ireland

²² Lecky, op. cit., Volume VII, pp. 40-50.

²³ Ibid., p. 62.

²⁴ A. T. Selley, England in the Eighteenth Century (2d ed.; London: Adam and Charles Black, 1949), pp. 270-271.

²⁵ Dunlop, op. cit., pp. 150-151.

considered Fitzwilliam's promotion a victory for reform and Catholic emancipation. A full emancipation bill for the Catholics was expected and Fitzwilliam realized that it would be suicidal for the peace of Ireland to attempt to avoid the issue as he had been instructed. In a number of letters to England, Fitzwilliam strongly urged that he be allowed to support an emancipation bill. A long silence from England was interpreted by him as permission to proceed with his plans. He opened negotiations with Grattan, who was sufficiently encouraged by the course of events to bring forward a Catholic relief bill for consideration by the Irish Parliament.²⁶

While the negotiations with Grattan were taking place, Fitzwilliam had been engaged in a fierce power struggle with the Ascendancy, whose members thought they knew the circumstances behind his mission and bitterly contested his authority. Shortly after his arrival, Fitzwilliam replaced John Beresford who held the post of Commissioner of Revenue. Beresford was a man with strong parliamentary connections and was the father of Marcus Beresford, who had interceded on behalf of Tone in the Jackson treason trial. Fitzwilliam's actions aroused the most intense hostility on the part of the Beresfords and Edward Fitzgibbon, the leader of the Ascendancy. Pressure was now brought to bear on Pitt to replace Fitzwilliam.²⁷ Fitzwilliam, in the meantime, moved ahead

²⁶ Lecky, op. cit., Volume VII, pp. 56, 70.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 57-63.

with his plans for the emancipation program and gave Grattan his support. Pitt and Portland now wrote to Fitzwilliam both protesting strongly against the actions he had taken and urging him to drop all ideas of Catholic emancipation.²⁸ Fitzwilliam replied to his critics, relating the possibility of a French invasion and stating that such attacks could only be resisted by a united and loyal people. Such loyalty could only be achieved if an emancipation bill was carried; if it was not, he would not answer for the consequences.²⁹ There was great fear on the part of the gentry that if an emancipation bill was not passed by the parliament, the loyalty of the lower class Catholics would be alienated from their aristocratic leaders and social revolution would result.³⁰ Even the ultraconservative gentry led by Lord Kenmare revealed to Fitzwilliam that there was no other way of retaining Catholic loyalty. In Northern Ireland, full scale war had already broken out between the Peep-O'-Day Boys and the Defenders.³¹

When the news reached England that Grattan had obtained permission from Fitzwilliam to introduce an emancipation bill in the

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 73-74.

²⁹ Francis Plowden, An Historical Review of the State of Ireland From the Invasion of that Country under Henry II to its Union with Great Britain (Philadelphia: William F. McLaughlin, 1806), Volume IV, pp. 178-179.

³⁰ James Carty, Ireland: A Documentary Record (Dublin: C.J. Fallon Limited, 1957-1958), Volume II, pp. 106-107.

³¹ Lecky, op. cit., Volume VII, pp. 52-54.

Irish Parliament, Fitzwilliam was notified that he was being recalled. His departure from Ireland on March 25, 1795, was marked by general gloom throughout the country, especially in Dublin where stores were closed and a crowd drew his carriage through the streets on the way to his ship.³²

The complete explanation for Pitt's actions remain a mystery to this day. Some critics have accused him of purposely provoking an Irish rebellion in order to force Ireland into a legal union with England.³³ Pitt was not in favor of the comparative freedom which Ireland had won in 1782, and the revenue controversy in 1785 clearly revealed his attitude. Possibly more important than Pitt's personal feelings was the fact that he relied on a number of the Ascendancy, particularly Edward Fitzgibbon, for support. The war with France made this support even more important and Pitt was no doubt hesitant about offending a political regime which had made valuable contributions to the war effort, monetary as well as political. Fitzgibbon had also employed his influence with the King and evidently convinced him that it would be against his coronation oath to concede equality of suffrage to the Catholics.³⁴ Probably a combination of these factors had an influence, though which was the most important to Pitt will probably remain a mystery.

³²Thesis, p. 127.

³³Jacob, op. cit., pp. 240-241.

³⁴Macdermot, op. cit., pp. 144-149.

The departure of Fitzwilliam was the signal for revolution in Ireland. The United Irishmen and their newspaper, the Northern Star, had been suppressed by the government in 1794 on the charge of sedition. They now became an organisation of a secret nature, devoted to the formation of a republic and forcible separation from England.³⁵ The new mood of Ireland was well stated by Thomas Addis Emmet:

The active republicans and new United Irishmen were not sorry that the fallacy of ill-founded political hopes had been so speedily exposed, and they rejoiced that the agitation and controversies which were springing up would so entirely engross the attention of their opulent, interested and ambitious adversaries, as that they and their proceedings would pass unnoticed. They well knew that in the midst of disputes for power, places and emoluments, neither the great nor their connections would condescend to bestow a thought upon despised malcontents, or the advances of an obscure system. They therefore, not unwillingly, assisted in keeping the attention of government, and of the higher ranks, occupied with party contests; and even themselves yielded to that indignation, which disinterested spectators naturally feel, at the commission of perfidy and injustice.³⁶

One of the "disputes for power" resulted in the promotion of Fitzgibbon to a peerage and he now became known as the Earl of Clare. From this time on, Fitzgibbon was the real ruler of Ireland.³⁷ He was

³⁵ Emmet, op. cit., pp. 1-6.

³⁶ Jacob, op. cit., pp. 241-242.

³⁷ Dunlop, op. cit., pp. 151-152.

assisted by Earl Camden, the new Lord Lieutenant, who was savagely attacked by a mob on his arrival in March, 1795, and found it necessary to use military force to clear the streets of Dublin.³⁸ Camden soon came under the total influence of Fitzgibbon, who ruled Ireland indirectly through the Lord Lieutenant. In his many letters to the government of England, Fitzwilliam had stressed that the majority of Protestants with the exception of the Ascendancy minority, were in favor of Catholic Emancipation.³⁹ His statements were now confirmed as protests by the thousands were delivered to the Irish Parliament by Protestants who supported Catholic emancipation.⁴⁰ The Ascendancy, however, continued to resist all such efforts.

During this time, Wolfe Tone had not been inactive. When Fitzwilliam had first arrived there was even the possibility that he might be offered a government position. His participation with Jackson counted heavily against him, however, plus the fact that Grattan who had a great deal of influence with Fitzwilliam, considered Tone a political liability because of his connection with Jackson. Although Tone had shown some interest in obtaining a position, his son states that he later decided against it, as it might compromise his political

³⁸ Jacob, op. cit., p. 242.

³⁹ Lecky, op. cit., Volume VII, pp. 68-71.

⁴⁰ Jacob, op. cit., p. 242.

principles.⁴¹ The Catholic Committee, which had been inactive since their failure in 1793, took advantage of the excitement of public opinion and used it to support a full emancipation program in the Irish Parliament. Petitions amounting to more than half a million signatures reached the Irish Parliament in support of emancipation.⁴²

A second mission to London was undertaken by the Catholic Committee to petition the King personally. This time, however, the delegation found themselves without official support and were forced to return to Ireland.⁴³ A meeting was held by the Catholic delegation upon their return from England, which included a number of reform leaders such as John Keogh. The delegation had taken Tone along as their secretary, probably an unwise move under the circumstances, but also a subtle threat, revealing that these peaceful petitions were approaching a limit. The Committee now expressed their gratitude to Tone,

for the Readiness with which he accompanied our Deputies to England, and the many other important services he had rendered to the Catholic Body in their pursuit of Emancipation; Services which no Gratitude can overrate, and no remuneration can overpay. . . .⁴⁴

The Committee also reaffirmed the belief that Ireland must not only

⁴¹Tone, op. cit., pp. 85-86.

⁴²Locky, op. cit., Volume VII, p. 88.

⁴³Macdarmot, op. cit., pp. 114-119.

⁴⁴Pieces of Irish History, p. 113.

retain its legal independence from Britain but that determined efforts should be made to increase its absolute independence from England.⁴⁵

Shortly after the arrival of Camden, Tone was notified by the government that he should leave the country. Before his departure, Tone met with a number of his friends, including Robert Emmet and William Russell. He told the little gathering that once he had left the country, he considered any obligation he had to the existing regime in Ireland to be at an end. Tone had been allowed to exile to America and he revealed his intentions to contact a French minister in Philadelphia and offer his services to France in any way that would further the emancipation of his own country.⁴⁶ His friends agreed with his scheme, and Tone made preparations for the voyage to America, leaving Ireland on June 15, 1795, and arriving in Philadelphia in August of the same year.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 113-114.

⁴⁶ Tone, op. cit., pp. 87-89.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 89-93.

CHAPTER VII

WOLFE TONE AND THE REVOLUTION

After his arrival in America, Tone journeyed to Philadelphia where he arrived in August of 1795. There he met several fellow exiles such as Dr. Reynolds and Hamilton Rowan. Tone revealed to them his plan to seek French aid. Supplied with introductory papers by Rowan, Tone called upon Citizen Adet, the French minister, and at his request supplied Adet with a "memorial" describing the political situation in Ireland.¹ Tone was doubtful about how much success his efforts had accomplished for the Irish cause but decided that he had done as much as he could and began to make preparations to settle himself and his family on a farm near Princeton, New Jersey. In the midst of these preparations, an event occurred which made him change his mind:

In this frame of mind I continued for some time, waiting for the lawyer who was employed to draw the deeds, and expecting next spring to move to my purchase, and to begin farming at last, when one day I was roused from my lethargy by the receipt of letters from Kagh, Russell and the two Sims's wherein, after professions of the warmest and sincerest regard, they proceeded to acquaint me that the state of the public mind in Ireland was advancing to republicanism faster than even I could

¹Tone, op. cit., pp. 93-94.

believe, and they pressed me in the strongest manner, to fulfill the engagement I had made with them at my departure, and to move heaven and earth to force my way to the French government, in order to supplicate their assistance. . . .²

After consulting with his family, Tone decided to leave for France.

On January 1, 1796, with a coded letter from Citizen Adet, Tone sailed for Havre de Grace.³

In February of 1796, Tone arrived in France and at his insistence was able to present himself and his letter before the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Charles Delacroix. After a discussion with Delacroix, Tone was referred to a man named Nicholas Madgett, an Irishman who had connections with the French government and a strong supporter of French aid to Ireland.⁴ Most of Tone's contacts while he was in France were with Madgett. During the seven months of negotiations which took place with the French government, Tone stressed the need of a sufficient force of approximately twenty thousand men to insure the success of any insurrection. Madgett appeared doubtful whether a force of that size could be obtained. After some discussion of various generals for the expedition, the choice fell on General Hoche, one of the most famous

²Ibid., p. 95.

³Ibid., p. 97.

⁴Thesis, p. 152.

generals in the French army.⁵ On February 24, Tone, who was somewhat doubtful of his progress with Madgett, called on Lazare Carnot, a high ranking official of the French Directory. The interview was generally favorable and topics of military and political importance were discussed.⁶ After the interview, Tone stated in his diary:

. . . . What am I to think of all this? As yet I have met no difficulty nor check, nothing to discourage me; but I wish with extravagant passion for the emancipation of my country and I do so abhor and detest the very name of England, that I doubt my own judgment, lest I see things in too favourable light. It is a bold measure; after all, if it should succeed, and my visions to be realized -- Huzza! Vive la Republique! I am a pretty fellow to negotiate with the directory of France, pull down a monarchy and establish a republic; to break a connexion of 600 year's standing and contract a fresh alliance with another country.⁷

Despite these optimistic statements, Tone was appalled at times by the ignorance of Irish affairs by French officials and wondered if the expedition to Ireland would ever take place.⁸ In discussions with the French, Tone continually emphasized that it was the aim of Ireland to form an independent republic, but to accomplish this end, military aid must be

⁵Tone, op. cit., pp. 101-103.

⁶Ibid., pp. 103-106.

⁷Ibid., p. 107.

⁸Ibid., pp. 113-114.

sufficient. Madgett promised aid that would be equal to the occasion. Tone, in one of his many memorials to the French government, made a dramatic plea for military intervention:

. . . I submit to the wisdom of the French government that England is the implacable, inveterate, irreconcilable enemy of the Republic, which never can be in perfect security whilst that nation retains domination of the sea; that, in consequence, every possible effort should be made to humble her pride, and to reduce her power; that it is in Ireland, and in Ireland only, that she is vulnerable -- a fact of the truth of which the French Government cannot be too strongly impressed; that by establishing a free republic in Ireland they attach to France a grateful ally whose cordial assistance in peace and war she might command, and who, from situation and produce, could most essentially serve her. . .⁹

In his diary, Tone also made the point that an alliance between France and Ireland would be between two independent nations and that under no circumstances would the yoke of England be exchanged for that of France.¹⁰ Considerable aid was promised Tone by the French: about ten thousand men and numerous arms.¹¹

In June, 1796, Tone was informed that in accordance with his request, he was to be employed by the French as a member of the

⁹Thesis, pp. 162-163.

¹⁰Tone, op. cit., p. 125.

¹¹Ibid., p. 126.

French army and to accompany the expeditionary force to Ireland.¹²
 Tone also conferred with General Hoche, commander of the expedition. Besides military matters, a discussion of a future government of Ireland took place and Tone repeated his assurances that Ireland wished only to be an independent republic.¹³

At last, after a period of nearly seven months in France, Tone traveled for Rennes and then for Brest, where preparations for departure were taking place. On December 17, 1796, the expedition departed for Bantry Bay, Ireland. The expeditionary force consisted of forty-three ships and approximately fourteen thousand men on board.¹⁴ Problems plagued the expedition from the start. There had been a series of delays in the original departure date due to mismanagement of one sort or another. There was also rivalry between the French army and the Ministry of Marine which did much to impair the unity necessary for the success of the expedition. Hoche, at one point, stated in exasperation, "The next thing I expect to hear is that there's not enough water in the sea."¹⁵ Before the expedition had even reached the ocean, one ship had been lost in a narrow passage

¹² Ibid., p. 132.

¹³ Ibid., p. 137.

¹⁴ Patrick Brandon Bradley, Bantry Bay, Ireland in the Days of Napoleon and Wolfe Tone (London: Williams and Norgate, 1931), p. 32.

¹⁵ Carty, op. cit., Volume II, pp. 82-83.

at the Bay of Bourges. Once they reached the ocean, a series of storms separated the ships of the fleet including that of the commander, Hoche. Only a fraction of the original fleet reached its destination at Bantry Bay, where the recurrent storms continued.¹⁶ On December 26, Tone stated in his diary:

. . . . We have lost two commander-in-chief; of four admirals not one remains; we have lost one ship of the line that we know of, and probably many others of which we know nothing; we have been now six days in Bantry Bay, within five hundred yards of the shore without being able to effectuate a landing; we have been dispersed four times in four days; and at this moment, of forty-three sail of which the expedition consisted, we can muster of all sized but fourteen. There only wants our falling in with the English to complete our destruction; and to judge of the future by the past, there is every probability that that will not be wanting. . . .¹⁷

On December 29, the expedition was forced to turn back due to its losses of ships and men, plus the storm which prevented an effective landing being made.¹⁸ Tone carried with him a message to the Irish people to have been distributed in case the expedition landed. These papers clearly reveal his determination for an independent republic:

Without being too much of an enthusiastic visionary, I think I may say I see a new order of things commencing in Europe. The stupendous revolution which has taken

¹⁶ O'Faolain, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-205.

¹⁷ Tone, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-166.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-168.

place in France, the unparalleled succession of events, which have, in defiance of the united efforts of all the despots of Europe, established that mighty republic on the broad and firm basis of equal rights, liberties and laws . . . I do not look upon the French revolution as a question subject to the ordinary calculation of politics, it is a thing which is to be, and as all human experience has verified that the new doctrine finally subverts the old. . . . I am firmly convinced, the doctrine of republicanism will finally subvert that of monarchy, and establish a system of just and rational liberty, on the ruins of the thrones of the despots of Europe. The alternative which is now submitted to your choice, with regard to England is, in one word, union or Separation! You must determine, and that instantly, between slavery and independence, there is no third way. I have done, my countrymen, and I do earnestly beseech you, as Irishmen, as citizens as husbands, or fathers, by everything most dear to you, to consider the sacred obligation you are called upon to discharge, to emancipate your country from a foreign yoke, and to restore to liberty yourselves and your children, look to your own resources, look to liberty yourselves and your children, look to those of your friends, remember you must instantly decide; remember that you have no alternative between liberty and independence, of slavery or submission, remember the wrongs you have sustained from England for six hundred years.¹⁹

The people in the area where the attempted invasion had taken place had shown little indication of any mass uprising of the kind Tone had anticipated. How much of a deterrent factor the storm in that area may have been is not known. Thomas Addis Emmet in his statements

¹⁹T.W. Tone, An Address to the People of Ireland on the Present Important Crisis (Belfast: 1796), pp. 2-3, 27.

to the Irish government said that communications between the United Irish and the French republic were poor and that the organization did not know where the expedition would land; thus, they were unable to rally support in the invasion area.²⁰ Nevertheless, Edward Fitzgibbon, now Chancellor of Ireland, in a speech before the Irish Parliament seized upon this lack of revolutionary fervor as proof that his administration had endeared itself to the people.²¹ Fitzgibbon's opinion was not held by all Irishmen. Several Irish exiles stated that had an effective landing been made, the expedition would have had the overwhelming support of the people in the area.²²

Ireland moved rapidly toward revolution in the years 1796 and 1797. As previously mentioned, a turning point in reformist thinking had taken place with the departure of Lord Fitzwilliam in 1795. Many reformers, particularly those of the United Irishmen, were convinced that revolution was the only alternative to a political system which refused to concede social reform.²³ The United Irishmen had been dissolved by government action in 1794, but now they reorganized themselves into a secret organization which included members of both

²⁰ Esmet, op. cit., p. 17.

²¹ Speech of the Right Honorable John, Earl of Clare, Lord High Chancellor of Ireland in the House of Lords of Ireland, 1796 (Dublin: John Milliken, 1796), p. 44.

²² Miles Byrne, Some Notes of an Irish Exile of 1798 Being the Chapters from the Memoirs of Miles Byrne relating to Ireland (Dublin: Maunsell and Co., n.d.), pp. 3, 5, 27.

²³ Esmet, op. cit., pp. 4-6.

moderate and republican principles.²⁴ The Irish government countered with the Insurrection Act, which included the death penalty for those who took secret oaths in such organisations.²⁵

A new element was introduced into the rapidly deteriorating political situation in 1796 with the activities of the so-called "Orange" men. The Orange faction was mainly composed of fanatical anti-Catholics and was an apparent successor to the Peep-~~S~~-Day Boys among the lower class Protestants. The movement was made even more formidable by the fact that the government tacitly supported it, hoping to keep the religious factions divided and warring against each other. From the county of Armagh, the Orange movement spread rapidly into the Catholic areas of Ireland. Thousands of Catholic families were driven from their homes by the Orange men.²⁶ The United Irishmen claimed that the government never punished the Orange men for crimes, but proceeded with great severity against the Defenders, the Catholic counterpoise to the Orange movement. While it was probably true that the religious conflict was largely to the advantage of the Irish government, Thomas Addis Emmet claimed that the Orange system was a great advantage to the United Irishmen, who were able to swell their ranks with Defenders who joined forces with them to fight the Orange

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Dunlop, op. cit., p. 152.

²⁶ Lecky, op. cit., Volume VII, pp. 308-310.

faction.²⁷ Though the Orange men impaired the unity of Catholic and Protestant, they hastened the union of Catholics and United Irishmen. The beginnings of a military organization was formed by the United Irishmen and organized in such a way as to minimize the possibility of detection. Efforts by the United Irish were made to win over the militia being rapidly formed by the government but these attempts had little success.²⁸ At the end of 1796, both the government and the United Irish had made preparations for military conflict.

In March of 1797, General Lake, who was in charge of the government militia and English troops, issued a proclamation demanding the surrender of all arms to the government and information leading to the arrest of those engaged in treasonable activities.²⁹ The Habeas Corpus Act was suspended by the government and the militia was allowed a free hand in dealing with the population. Under General Lake, cases of brutality and severe atrocities grew to such an extent that even loyal elements of the population were alienated and became potential rebels. English officials on the scene strongly protested against the cruelty perpetrated by the government. However, Fitzgibbon and Camden were complete masters of the situation and the needless atrocities continued with official sanction.³⁰ Such happenings set the stage for the tragic rebellion of 1798.

²⁷ Ibid., op. cit., p. 6.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 11-13.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

³⁰ Dunlop, op. cit., pp. 153-154.

In 1797, Wolfe Tone was attached as secretary to General Hoche, who traveled to Holland to discuss the possibility of a second expedition to Ireland. In the negotiations with the Dutch, Tone was asked a familiar question:

. . . . A member of the committee, I believe it was Van Leyden, then asked us, supposing everything succeeded to our wish, what was the definite object of the Irish people. To which we replied categorically, that it was to throw off the yoke of England, break for ever the connexion now existing with that country, and constitute ourselves a free and independent people. . . .³¹

On September 21, Tone recorded in his diary the death of General Hoche, a great blow to the hopes of Ireland for effective military aid. On October 11, 1797, a Dutch expedition bound for Ireland was defeated and captured by the English. Tone felt that the defeat was an unnecessary one, caused by such gross carelessness as to be little short of treason.³² From various sources Tone soon learned of the arbitrary action being taken by the government in Ireland, including the mass arrests of leaders of the United Irish movement. He felt that some aid must come to Ireland soon if it was to be of help to his comrades.³³ On June 30, 1798, Tone first received the news that

³¹Tone, op. cit., p. 179.

³²Ibid., pp. 187-188.

³³Ibid., pp. 188-189.

indicated the French were considering a third expedition to Ireland:

Having determined to set off for Paris, in consequence of the late news from Ireland, I got leave of absence for a fortnight, from General Kilmaine. My adjoint, Citizen Favory, called on me the next morning after my arrival, to inform me that the Minister of War had despatched an order for me to come to Paris in all haste. I waited upon him in consequence. He told me it was the minister of Marine who had demanded me, . . .³⁴

The United Irish leaders, after failure of the second French expedition, decided they must attempt an uprising without French aid. The decision was a desperate one, but the activities of the Irish government had so impaired the organization in 1797 that it felt to wait much longer would eliminate all hope of an effective uprising taking place. The government, through its spy system, was well informed of these plans. An insurrection was planned by the United Irish but the government arrested Lord Edward Fitzgerald, the leader of the plot, and the uprising did not take place.³⁵ Despite these efforts by the government, rebellion did break out in May of 1798. Continued arrests by the government deprived the rebellion of its key leaders, however, and as a result the rebels, mostly peasants, were poorly armed and poorly led.³⁶ The government easily succeeded in

³⁴Ibid., p. 200.

³⁵Flower, op. cit., Volume IV, pp. 318-319.

³⁶Dunlop, op. cit., pp. 154-155.

crushing the uprising in places such as Dublin where trouble had been expected. However, in the county of Wexford, an area known for its obedience to the government, the brutal activities of the government militia practically forced the inhabitants into rebellion to fight for their lives. In this area Protestants and Catholics joined forces, the Protestants under command of a man named Bagenal Harvey, Catholic forces under the leadership of a priest, Father John Murphy. Unfortunately a good deal of religious killing by both sides hindered effective co-operation. Murphy won several surprising victories but was finally forced to retreat to Vinegar Hill where he surrendered. Murphy's surrender put an end to any organised resistance within Ireland itself.³⁷

Meanwhile, Tone had been in Paris urgently negotiating with the Directory for a third expedition to Ireland. However, Napoleon Bonaparte's influence was now supreme in France and he wished to send only a small expedition to Ireland, concentrating most of his forces for an attack on Egypt. Napoleon was able to win the Directory to his way of thinking.³⁸ Some authorities consider Napoleon's decision on this matter to be one of his greatest mistakes. Had France responded to Irish requests as she did in 1796, the results might well have been a smashing victory over the English.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Tone, op. cit., pp. 203-204.

³⁹ Arthur Rowland Buffinton, The Second Hundred Years War, 1689-1815 (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929), pp. 89-92.

Three small expeditions were now sent to Ireland. The first expedition under command of General Humbert arrived with less than two thousand men in August of 1798 and succeeded in routing an English force of superior size at Castlebar.⁴⁰ Eventually, Humbert was forced to surrender to a superior force of twenty thousand men under Lord Cornwallis. A second expedition under Maffer Tandy failed to accomplish a landing. A third expedition consisting of eight small ships with approximately three thousand men sailed for Ireland in October of 1798, accompanied by Wolfe Tone. It was intercepted by an English Squadron of superior numbers under Sir John Borlase and after a fierce battle, was forced to surrender. At first Tone was not recognized, for he was dressed in French regimentals and had the general manner of a French officer. However, he was subsequently recognized and taken prisoner.⁴¹

In November of 1798, Theobald Wolfe Tone was brought to trial. He offered no defense and merely requested that he be allowed to read a statement before the court. He was not allowed to read all of his statement, certain parts being considered "inflammatory."⁴² The following statements were read before the court:

Mr. President, and Gentlemen of the Court
 Martial: I mean not to give you the trouble
 of bringing judicial proof to convict me,

⁴⁰Gordon, op. cit., Volume II, pp. 471-472.

⁴¹Dunlop, op. cit., pp. 157-158.

⁴²Sir J.F. Maurice (ed.), The Diary of Sir John Moore (London: Edward Arnold, 1904), Volume I, p. 328.

legally, of having acted in hostility to the government of his Britannic Majesty in Ireland. I admit the fact. From my earliest youth I have regarded the connexion between Ireland and Great Britain as the curse of the Irish nation; and felt convinced that, whilst it lasted, this country could never be free nor happy. My mind has been confirmed in this opinion by the experience of every succeeding year, and the conclusions I have drawn from every fact before my eyes. In consequence, I determined to apply all the power which my individual efforts could move, in order to separate the two countries.⁴³

At this point Tone was interrupted, but allowed to proceed with a reduced portion of his statement:

As to the connexion between this country and Great Britain, I repeat it, all that has been imputed to me, words, writings, and actions, I here deliberately avow. I have spoken and acted with reflection, and on principle, and am ready to meet the consequences. Whatever be the sentence of this court, I am prepared for it. Its members will surely discharge their duty; I shall take care not to be wanting to mine.⁴⁴

Tone made one other request to the court concerning the method of execution. He asked that he be shot as a soldier and offered papers to the court, proving that he had a commission in the French army.⁴⁵

⁴³Tone, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 219.

His claim was denied by the court, however, and he was sentenced to be hanged as a traitor.⁴⁶ John P. Curran, Tone's defense counsel, now attempted to obtain a writ of habeas corpus on the claim that the military court which had tried Tone had no authority to do so, since he was not a member of the English armed forces. The writ was granted, but at that moment it was learned that Tone had attempted suicide in prison by inflicting a deep wound in his throat. He subsequently died from his wound.⁴⁷ For Theobald Wolfe Tone, the struggle was over, but for many Irishmen the struggle to gain independence from English control had just begun.

The nationalism of the French Revolution stressed two main ideals which were adopted by Tone and his fellow patriots. The first ideal stressed the basic equality of all men and the inherent right of the great mass of people to rule the nation through a government representative of their wishes. The French Revolution rejected the tenet that the sole authority of the nation resided in the monarch or in any privileged class. The Irish revolutionaries led by Tone also refused to accept the belief that a corrupt aristocracy

⁴⁶ Thomas J. Howell (ed.), A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors from the Earliest Period to the Year 1783 (London: T.C. Hansard, 1818), Volume XXVII, p. 622.

⁴⁷ E. Neville Williams (ed.), The Eighteenth Century Constitution 1688-1815 Documents and Commentary (England: Cambridge University Press, 1960), pp. 388-389.

which monopolized all political power was representative of the Irish nation. As was the case with the leaders of the French Revolution, Tone believed that a government which represented all the people was the only way the nation could be united within the legal boundaries of the state.

Another theme stressed by the Revolution was the supremacy of the nation over the wishes of the individual. The French Revolution preached the obligation of the individual to the state. The state, however, was to represent individual wishes as much as possible. This meant that the state had to be independent from the control of other states as well as special interest groups. Tone transferred the French belief of national independence to Ireland and dedicated his life to the emancipation of his country from English control. Leaving the safety and security of a comfortable exile, he undertook a perilous mission to France and on several missions to Ireland attempted to bring effective armed aid to the people. In all his actions Tone was a living example of modern Irish nationalism inherited from the French Revolution. Theobald Wolfe Tone has won a permanent place in Irish history as the founder of modern Irish nationalism.

Theobald Wolfe Tone was a man who sincerely believed that Ireland's destiny and future happiness lay in complete separation from England. Unlike Henry Grattan or Edmund Burke, who believed that reform within the Anglo-Irish framework would be sufficient, Tone saw with a greater clarity that only independence would bring justice to Ireland. Time has justified his claims. Some Irishmen considered it their duty

to maintain a political system based on religious and social inequality; some Irishmen considered it their duty to maintain the system of another country over their own. To Wolfe Tone, Ireland came first; all other loyalties were secondary. Perhaps no better conclusion has been given on Tone than that stated by P. Brandon Bradley when he said of Tone, "With his republicanism was a satisfying faith, and on the altar of his beliefs he sacrificed with a sustained devotion his energies, his prospects, his friends, his family and finally his life. In a word, Wolfe Tone was Ireland's supreme exponent and apostle of the republican creed. . . ."⁴⁸ Thus lived and died Theobald Wolfe Tone, one of Ireland's greatest patriots.

⁴⁸Bradley, op. cit., p. 201.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Tone's pamphlet by "A Northern Whig:"

It will be said that the Catholics are ignorant and therefore incapable of liberty, and I have heard men of more imagination than judgement make a flourishing declamation on the danger of blinding them by suddenly pouring a flood of light upon their eyes which for a century have been buried in darkness. . . . we plunge them by law and confine them by statute in gross ignorance, and then we make the capacity we have created an argument for their exclusion from the common rights of man! We plead our crime in justification of itself. If ignorance be their condemnation, what has made them ignorant? Not the hand of nature, for I presume they are born with capacities pretty much like other men. It is the iniquitous and cruel injustice of Protestant bigotry which has made them ignorant; they are excluded by law from the possibility of education; for I will not call the liberal connivance of the heads of our university, who suffer, perhaps by a strain on their strict duty, a few to smuggle a little of that learning which is contraband to an Irish papist -- I will not, I say, allow that to be such an education as every Irishman has a right to demand. . . . If Irish Catholics be bigots to their religion, if that bigotry which makes them dangerous results from ignorance, surely it is the duty of the conscientious legislature to labour by every means to remove the cause, and the effect will of itself cease. But it is not the policy of their oppressors to part with an argument of which they make so excellent use. I have hitherto considered the case of the Catholics in view of expediency as with reference to the Protestants. I have done so because I

confess I was afraid of the lengths to which reason would inevitably lead me if I were to take it up as a question of mere right and with reference to the feelings of the Catholics themselves. They have remained now for above a century in slavery; they may have lost the wish for freedom; and, at any rate, I am not very sure that the man is their friend who points out to them their misery and degradation at a time when it is not physically certain that their complete emancipation shall not immediately follow. Perhaps even this feeble attempt on their behalf may prejudice the cause which it is meant to defend. What answer could we make to the Catholics of Ireland if they were to rise and with one voice demand their rights as citizens and as men? What reply justifiable to God and to our conscience? None. We prate and babble and write books and publish them filled with sentiments of freedom and abhorrence of tyranny and lofty praises of "the rights of man"! Yet we are content to hold three millions of our fellow-creatures and fellow-subjects in degradation and infamy and contempt. . . . On what chapter of The Rights of Man do we ground our title to liberty in the moment that we are riveting the fetters of the wretched Roman Catholics of Ireland? Shall they not say to us . . . Hath a Catholic the mark of the beast on his forehead that he should wander over his native soil like the accursed Cain against every man and every man's hand against him? God Almighty, in his just anger, visits the sins of the fathers upon the children, not beyond the third or fourth generation even of those that hate him; and will nothing short of our eternal slavery satisfy the unmitigable rage of Protestant oppression? How have we offended? The offense of our ancestors

was their property and their power; we have neither; they are long since sacrificed and you are in undisputed possession of the spoil. Do not then grudge us existence, or that for which man can alone exist -- liberty!¹

¹ Frank Macdermot, Theo ald Wolfe Tone, A Bibliographical Study (London: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1939), pp. 81-83.

APPENDIX B

Tone's memorandum to Jackson:

The situation of England and Ireland are fundamentally different in this: The Government of England is national; that of Ireland provincial. The interest of the first is the same with that of the people. Of the last directly opposite. The people of Ireland are divided into three sects, the established Church, the Dissenters and the Catholics. The first, infinitely the smallest portion, have engrossed, besides the whole Catholic patronage, all the profits and honours of that country, and a very great share of the landed property. They are, of course, all aristocrats, adverse to any change, and decidedly enemies of the French Revolution. The Dissenters, who are much more numerous, are the most enlightened body of the nation. They are devoted to liberty, and, through all its changes, enthusiastically attached to the French Revolution. The Catholics, the great body of the nation, are in the lowest degree of ignorance and want; ready for any change because no change can make them worse; they have, within these last two years, received a great degree of information, and manifested a proportional degree of discontent by various insurrections (they are known by the name of Defenders). There is nowhere a greater spirit of aristocracy than in all the privileged orders -- the clergy and the gentry of Ireland, down to the very lowest; to countervail which, there seems to be a spirit rising amongst the people which never appeared before, but which is spreading most rapidly, as will appear by the Defenders and other insurgents. If the people of Ireland be 4,500,000, as seems probable, the established Church may be reckoned at 450,000, the Dissenters at 900,000, the

Catholics at 3,150,000. In Ireland, a conquered and oppressed and insulted country, the name of England and her power is universally odious, save with those who have an interest in maintaining it such as the Government and its connexions, the Church and its dependencies, the great landed property, etc; but the power of these people, being founded on property, the first convulsion would level it with the dust. On the contrary, the great bulk of the people would probably throw off the yoke, if they saw any force in the country sufficiently strong to resort to for defence. It seems idle to suppose that the prejudices of England against France spring merely from the republicanism of the French; the Catholics, from hatred of the English name. In a word the prejudices of one country are directly favourable and those of the other directly adverse, to an invasion. The Government of Ireland is to be looked upon as a Government of force; the moment a superior force appears it would tumble at once as being neither founded in the interests nor in the affections of the people. . . . In a word, from reason, reflection, interest prejudice, the spirit of change, and, above all, the hatred of the English name resulting from a tyranny of nearly seven centuries, there seems little doubt that an invasion in sufficient force would be supported. Arms ammunition and money -- all are wanting. . . .²

²Frank Macdermot, Theobald Wolfe Tone, A Bibliographical Study (London: Macmillan and Company, 1939), pp. 137-139.

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